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(Un)Civilised Imaginations: The Brontës and Violence

Sophie Rose Franklin

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Department of English Studies

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ABSTRACT

Violence is often associated with Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing, yet there remains no in-depth, sustained analysis of its nature, form, and significance in and of itself within their work. This thesis addresses this gap by foregrounding the violences of the Brontës' writing and connecting their representations of violence to wider nineteenth-century conversations and attitudes. Far from being a straightforward or self-evident aspect of their poetry and prose, this thesis shows that violence is a prevalent, complex, and often transformational force within their writing, intersecting with historical and ongoing issues of language, gender, politics, religion, and the ethics of writing (about) violence.

Chapter One considers the language of violence in Emily Brontë's selected poetry and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and identifies the mediated, often unseen yet still pervasive nature of violence within her writing. Chapter Two situates Charlotte Brontë's selected juvenilia and *Shirley* (1849) in relation to nineteenth-century articulations of political violence, including terrorism and questions of legitimacy. Chapter Three explores the frequently overlooked moment in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) when Rochester threatens Jane with rape, while also seeking to uncover – and, in the process, problematising the desire to uncover – seemingly implicit references to sexual and gendered violence in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Chapter Four examines the use of biblical sources to sanctify acts of violence in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847), followed by an exploration of Charlotte Brontë's representations of extreme psychological pain through biblical imagery in *Villette* (1853). The Afterword considers the legacy of violence in the Brontës' cultural afterlives, identifying a shift in perceptions of the Brontës' literary violences: from an integral force in the development of their work, but one from which they should be distanced, to a seemingly surprising aspect of their writing which should be reinstated and, even, celebrated.

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INTRODUCTION

For all its sublimity, [...] which at times seems to render it beyond comprehension or articulation, violence, like everything else, is subject to words and to the imagination. It has its language.¹

In a recent biography of Charlotte Brontë, marking the bicentenary of the author's birth in 1816, Claire Harman asks of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847): 'Why was it so violent, so impious? Where had these brutish characters and coarse action come from?'² Harman places these questions in the puzzled mind of Charlotte Brontë, as well as those of contemporary critics, and directs them against Emily Brontë's writing in particular – but they could just as easily have been levelled at Anne Brontë's and, indeed, Charlotte's own fiction. The work of all three Brontë sisters is full of violence. Ranging from unwitnessed battle scenes in Emily's poetry to the deliberate yet apparently merciful killing of nestlings in Anne's *Agnes Grey* (1847), the literal and figurative burial and expression of extreme psychological pain in Charlotte's *Villette* (1853) to the veiled threat of sexual assault in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the instances of violence in the Brontës' writings are multifarious, almost innumerable.³ The question of why the Brontës are so violent and from where it came – and, indeed, why critics and readers continue to be so fascinated by such questions – has rarely been discussed in an in-depth, sustained manner and remains largely unanswered.

¹ Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

² Claire Harman, *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* (London: Viking, 2015), p. 215.

³ See Emily Brontë, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Janet Gezari (London: Penguin, 1992); Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*, ed. Angeline Goreau (London: Penguin, 2004); Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006). All subsequent in-text references are taken from these editions.

This thesis addresses the lack of extensive analysis surrounding Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's respective literary violences, by foregrounding the violent aspects of their work, and thereby positioning violence as an important means of interpreting and understanding both the sisters' writing within a nineteenth-century context and their ongoing popularity in the twenty-first century. In such a prolific field of study, it is necessary to clarify – if not justify – the need for “another” work on the Brontës. As Juliet Barker remarks in relation to Brontë family biographies, so much has been written about them ‘that there ought to be nothing left to say’.⁴ When it comes to violence, however, there remains much to discuss, particularly when the word “violent” is repeatedly used in Brontë studies as an epithet, almost a shorthand, which gestures to the apparently unconventional and transgressive elements of the Brontës' fiction without fully investigating its nature or purpose.⁵ Despite this gap in the literature, violence is a pervasive force within the sisters' respective works, one that intersects with issues of language, politics, gender, and religion, and one that – when considered more comprehensively – has the potential to shift our understanding of the Brontës' fiction and their legacy.

While Harman avoids tackling the questions she raises – an evasiveness shared, as we shall see, by many critics and reviewers who put forward the issue of violence in relation to the Brontës' fiction – her queries also assume a tone of disbelief at the apparent extent of the violence, as though the brutal parts of *Wuthering Heights* are or can be seen as a nineteenth-century anomaly. In this, there lies the overarching assumption that readers are in agreement about the novel's violence both then and now; that we all

⁴ Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p. xvii.

⁵ For example, in her 1975 biography of Charlotte Brontë, Margot Peters writes that the author had a ‘violent imagination’ as a schoolgirl. While this description has been influential in the early development of this thesis, it is also notable that Peters does not question or unpick her own choice of adjective. It neatly summarises the violence of Charlotte Brontë's imagination without examining that violence. See *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 27.

consider the text to be ‘so violent, so impious’, as Harman posits. The repetition of ‘so’ signals the apparent excessiveness of the novel’s immorality and cruelty. Harman’s questions leave no space in which to challenge this view. Moreover, there is no mention of the violent episodes in Charlotte or Anne Brontë’s writing, either within these questions or (on the whole) throughout the biography. In this omission, Harman implies – however unconsciously – that Emily Brontë is a violent author, while her sisters’ novels are far less brutish and coarse. Although the questions are situated in Charlotte Brontë’s head, Harman might have challenged her subject’s apparent horror at the violence of *Wuthering Heights* by providing even a handful of violent examples from Charlotte Brontë’s own work.⁶ As we shall see, Charlotte and Anne Brontë were also deemed to be violent writers by their contemporaries, and were accused of writing with the same coarseness and brutality with which Emily supposedly wrote. As one early reviewer of Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) remarked, there ‘is a coarseness of tone throughout the writing of all these Bells, that puts an offensive subject in its worst point of view, and which generally contrives to dash indifferent things’.⁷

The violent aspects of the Brontës’ writing were and are, then, both shocking and something ordinary – something so accepted and ingrained in our vision of their work that it does not necessitate more sustained exploration. Considering the outbreaks of violence in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, with the aftershocks of the French Revolution still reverberating through Britain, and with the rise of the newspaper as a popular disseminator of crime and police reports, it is appropriate to deem the Brontës’

⁶ Even the assumption that Charlotte Brontë was shocked by the ‘violence’ and ‘impiety’ of *Wuthering Heights* is debatable in relation to her 1850 preface to the novel. Her response to *Wuthering Heights* is complex. Not only is her preface an attempt to make sense of the novel and, in turn, to explain it to future readers as something ‘hewn in a wild workshop’, thereby excusing its ‘coarser’ elements. It also stems from her desire to shape her sister’s memory as an author, as well as her own legacy. Charlotte Brontë adopts an equivocal tone throughout much of the preface, thereby complicating any attempts to unpick her intentions as a critic of *Wuthering Heights*. See ‘Editor’s Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*’, in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin, 2003), l–liv, p. liv.

⁷ From an unsigned review, *Spectator*, 8 July 1848, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 249–50, p. 250.

era a violent one.⁸ Yet their novels, though commercially successful (*Jane Eyre* in particular) and broadly praised in some quarters, were all characterised as being peculiarly fascinated with the less “civilised” side of humanity, of which violence is a defining feature. In the nineteenth century, understandings of violence were undergoing a shift. As J. Carter Wood writes, the first few decades of the nineteenth century saw the transformation of attitudes towards violence, due to ‘increasing efforts to define the limits of legitimate violence, the linking of violence to social causes and effects and the elaboration of a new “mentality” of violence’.⁹ As a result, ‘violence as a social idea was “invented”, becoming a key cultural concern and increasingly urgent topic for discussion and analysis’.¹⁰ As we shall see, the Brontës were part of this wider discussion, even though their representations of cruelty and adoption of violent language were often criticised and singled out as culturally anomalous.

This thesis is underpinned by two apparent contradictions: the simultaneous presumption and disbelief of the violent nature of the Brontës’ writings; and the fact that they were working both within and outside of contemporary cultural understandings of violence. By engaging with these contradictions, this thesis addresses the following questions: To what extent were the Brontës influenced by and influences on cultural understandings of violence in the mid-nineteenth century? Are the Brontës unequivocally “violent writers” or should we rethink this categorisation and redefine the sisters’ violences as more aligned with contemporary discourses of violence than previously

⁸ Peter King writes that ‘crime and justice formed an important part of the diet of the average newspaper reader in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’. See ‘Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes to Crime and Justice in Late-Eighteenth- and Early-Nineteenth-Century London’, *Continuity and Change*, 22.1 (2007), 73–112, p. 103. Matthew Rubery notes that sensation fiction (a popular genre in the 1850s and 60s which the Brontës’ novels, particularly *Jane Eyre*, adumbrate) was known to have borrowed ‘thinly disguised plots from the crime pages or as *Punch*’s parody of the genre had done in promising readers “carefully selected Horrors of every kind, from the English and Foreign newspapers”’. See *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 47.

⁹ J. Carter Wood, ‘A Useful Savagery: The Invention of Violence in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9.1 (2004), 22–42, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

thought? And if the sisters' work is *not* indisputably "violent" by contemporary nineteenth-century standards, then what are the implications for Brontë studies? Moreover, what exactly do we mean by the term "violent writers"?

This Introduction provides the foundations on which these questions will be explored throughout the thesis. The following sections situate the thesis within previous and ongoing critical considerations of the Brontës and violence, as well as violence in the nineteenth century; consider the context in which the Brontës wrote and lived, and its bearing on their work; define the boundaries of violence from a nineteenth-century perspective; provide an overview of the structure and methodology of the thesis; and explore the significance of violence within the "Brontë myth" and its influence on the family's legacy.

Brontë Studies and the Absent Presence of Violence

Considering the prevalence of violence in the Brontës' fiction, as well as the repeated reference to violence in critical studies of their work and lives, the critical lacuna surrounding the subject is intriguing.¹¹ That is not to say that no researcher has ever addressed Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's collective, though distinct, representations of brutality. There have been several recent studies that focus on aspects of violence in the Brontës' fiction, particularly in relation to domestic abuse and animal cruelty. Judith E. Pike's 2009 article on the oblique nature of domestic violence in

¹¹ In recent years, there has been a discernible attempt to situate the Brontës in their historical context, with Juliet Barker's *The Brontës* (1994) acting as a watershed moment. Since then, there have been several prominent studies and collections which consider the Brontës within their historical moment. While many of these works reference violence, they do not focus on violence as a topic in and of itself. See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Patricia Ingham, *The Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Ian Ward, *Law and the Brontës* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Wuthering Heights has shaped the direction of the first and third chapters of this thesis, specifically her overview of nineteenth-century perceptions of domestic abuse and nuanced analysis of what is left unspoken in Isabella Heathcliff's narratives.¹² Andrew Doub also positions *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as 'an early definer of the crime of spousal sexual abuse, long before that term or its meaning were recognised by Victorian society'.¹³ Yet, while such sources have proven valuable in understanding various approaches to the Brontës' violences, it is not their primary focus. Although Pike's observations regarding violence in *Wuthering Heights* are perceptive, her article is mainly concerned with the legal side of domestic abuse, as well as the narrative role of Isabella (which is also crucial to Chapter One of this thesis). Similarly, Doub frames his discussion of marital rape in Anne Brontë's novel around Michel Foucault's theory of Victorian sexuality, emphasising the sexual nature of the crime and side-lining its violence.¹⁴

The violence of *Wuthering Heights* has – as the opening of this Introduction indicates – been subject to numerous considerations. In his 1963 article, Wade Thompson focuses specifically on the violences of Emily Brontë's novel, writing that: '*Wuthering Heights* is a world of sadism, violence, and wanton cruelty, wherein the children [...] have to fight for life [...] and] survival depends on one's ability to be tough, brutal, and rebellious'.¹⁵ He ends the article with the observation that 'generations of readers' have been 'deceived' by the 'uncanny poetic powers of Emily Brontë' into believing that *Wuthering Heights* – so full of 'pain, hate, and perversity' – was 'a beautiful, romantic, and

¹² Judith E. Pike, "My Name Was Isabella Linton": Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.3 (2009), 347–83.

¹³ Andrew Doub, "I Could Do with Less Caressing": Sexual Abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*, 8.2 (2015), 10–18, p. 11.

¹⁴ Doub writes: 'Foucault notes that rape was always on a cultural list of "grave sins," but as broadening discussions about sex provided new conceptual definitions, the idea of what constitutes sexual abuse and who could commit it evolved likewise.' Although Doub does attend to the abusive, violent nature of Huntingdon's behaviour in *Wildfell Hall*, his argument is supported by discourses of sexuality, not violence. Marital rape is viewed in relation to sex, not criminality. See "I Could Do with Less Caressing": Sexual Abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Wade Thompson, 'Infanticide and Sadism in *Wuthering Heights*', *PMLA*, 78.1 (1963), 69–74, p. 71.

indeed glorious love story'.¹⁶ While Thompson identifies the thematic significance of infanticide and sadism to *Wuthering Heights*, noting the novel's persistent emphasis on brutality, much of his article is concerned with descriptive retellings of the prolific instances of violence in the novel. Georges Bataille's chapter on Emily Brontë in *Literature and Evil* (1957) also identifies *Wuthering Heights* as 'the most violent and most poetic' of her work, a notable equivalence which underlines the link between violence and language explored throughout this thesis.¹⁷ Both Thompson's and Bataille's work, alongside that of critics referenced within this thesis, has positioned violence as worthy of study within Brontë studies, and as an important aspect of how the Brontës were and continue to be read and critiqued.

In a video for the British Library's *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians* series (2014), John Bowen discusses the 'cycles of violence' that emerge as the novel progresses, noting that '*Wuthering Heights* is an extraordinarily violent book'.¹⁸ Bowen goes on to contend that early readers responded to the 'wild, uninhibited [...], disgusting, horrible, violent' elements of the novel partly because these aspects are 'something new that Emily Brontë brings to the English novel'.¹⁹ For Bowen, it is 'hard to know why Emily was so fascinated by violence', but it is more evident that *Wuthering Heights*, in its explicit depiction of cruelty, 'seemed so different from the kind of genteel novels that [nineteenth-century readers] were often used to'.²⁰ Bowen gets to the heart of the aims and focus of this thesis: the question of "why" Emily Brontë wrote so violently; and the possibility that such representations of violence were, indeed, original and therefore all

¹⁶ Thompson, 'Infanticide and Sadism in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 74.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille also reads Emily Brontë's poems as expressing 'an infinitely profound, infinitely violent experience of sadness or of the joys of solitude'. See *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 19–20.

¹⁸ John Bowen, 'Wuthering Heights: Violence and Cruelty', *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*, 6 June 2014 <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/wuthering-heights-violence-and-cruelty>> [Accessed 12 July 2018].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

the more shocking to contemporary audiences. These questions remain largely unanswered within and beyond Brontë studies.

Animal cruelty has also emerged as a recent focal point of Brontë studies, with Maggie Berg and Lisa Surridge both considering the nexus between violence, animality, and humanity in Charlotte, Anne, and Emily Brontë's respective works. For Surridge, the abuse of animals in *Wuthering Heights* reveals 'the violence inherent in social discipline'.²¹ According to Surridge, there was a Victorian assumption 'that violence to animals correlates with human cruelty'.²² Berg echoes this point, writing that, in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 'violence against animals' is connected with 'violence against certain human beings regarded as less than fully human'.²³ These studies are valuable, particularly when thinking about the association between violence and the "civilising" process, which pits "savagery" against nineteenth-century understandings of civility and which will resurface throughout this thesis.²⁴ Yet Berg and Surridge are more concerned with the complex relationship between humans and animals than the actual violence represented in the novels. Although animal cruelty features heavily throughout the Brontës' work, this thesis will not directly address the subject, as its premise is not contingent on human or animal agency alone. While explicit interpersonal brutality will be discussed in the ensuing chapters, this thesis is primarily concerned with violence in

²¹ Lisa Surridge, 'Animals and Violence in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 24.2 (1999), 161–73, p. 168.

²² Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 87.

²³ Maggie Berg, "'Let me have its bowels then': Violence, Sacrificial Structure and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*", *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 21.1 (2010), 20–40, p. 20.

²⁴ Many early commentators on the Brontës' novels approach the sisters' work from a "civilised" perspective. One of the five reviews found in Emily Brontë's desk after her death makes a clear distinction between the brutal elements of *Wuthering Heights* and the behaviour of those in 'educated society': '[The novel's] manners are not only more rough but its passions are more violent. It knows nothing of those breakwaters to the fury of tempest which civilised training establishes to subdue the harsher workings of the soul [...] It is more subject to brutal instinct than to divine reason.' See from an unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights*, *Britannia*, 15 January 1848, in Allott, 223–6, p. 223. More recently, Donna K. Reed has written of the 'curious mixture of savagery and civility at *Wuthering Heights*'. Reed notes the 'undercurrent of cruel violence beneath the cultivated exterior' at Thrushcross Grange, suggested by the dogs being unleashed to attack Heathcliff and Cathy. See 'The Discontents of Civilization in *Wuthering Heights* and *Buddenbrooks*', *Comparative Literature*, 41.3 (1989), 209–29, pp. 210, 214.

and of itself, its relational effect on narration, structure, and form, and the recollection of violent acts within the Brontës' poetry and prose.

In another instance of violence forming a secondary role within Brontë studies, Christopher Lane conflates violence with hatred:

“In the peculiar centrifugal prose of [Crimsworth's] story,” writes Heather Glen in a valuable introduction to the novel [*The Professor*], “self itself appears to be held together by violence.” While this point is almost indisputable, it could also be applied to most of Brontë's works. In *Shirley*, for instance, violence governs – indeed, characterizes – the novel's interest in group bonds. Surpassing *The Professor*, *Shirley* does more than interrupt the reputed continuity between *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*; for significant reasons the novel fails to restrict hatred to the private realm.²⁵

Lane discusses the misanthropy at the heart of Charlotte Brontë's novels and writes persuasively of the violence within *Shirley* (1849) in relation to its depiction of the Luddite uprisings, which will be explored further in Chapter Two. Lane contends that the novel's ‘account of conflict is more complex and intelligent’ than critics who dismiss Brontë's representation of this political unrest as partisan and historically inaccurate suggest, in part because the text ‘insists that the rationale for violence always exceeds the discernible and ineffable conditions provoking it’.²⁶ For Lane, *Shirley* therefore ‘does more than condemn violence generically’; it views politically motivated force not in terms of a simple binary between right or wrong, but as something more multidimensional.²⁷ Lane does concede, however, that, although ‘violence exceeds rational causes in this novel, the narrator – pronouncing frequently on human cruelty – seems at a loss to explain its effects’.²⁸ To an extent, Lane also avoids explaining the broader effects of violence within Brontë's novel.

²⁵ Christopher Lane, ‘Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating’, *ELH*, 69.1 (2002), 199–222, p. 202.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

When he writes that *Shirley* does ‘more than condemn’ violent action, he claims that this ‘is worth considering’ but ultimately evades any further analysis or explication as to *why* this denunciation of violence might be valuable to an evaluation of the novel.²⁹ Despite his engagement with violent forces in Charlotte Brontë’s writing, Lane does not place violence at the centre of his argument; his subject is hatred, of which violence becomes a synonym and a secondary concern.

While *The Professor* (1857) is not discussed at length within this thesis, due in part to the following chapters focusing considerably on Charlotte Brontë’s work, Heather Glen’s introduction to *The Professor* offers insights into the novel’s violences which have a bearing on the issues discussed throughout this thesis. Glen writes that William Crimsworth’s story is ‘full of suggestions of a barely suppressed violence’,³⁰ and a ‘sense of something volcanic and subversive, which constantly threatens to disrupt the uneasy stasis achieved by “self-control”, something whose violence can be held in check only by an answering violence’.³¹ For Glen, this substratum of violence accounts for critics and readers generally judging the novel as an ‘unpleasant and oddly disquieting book’.³² Yet, Glen is concerned with the violence that ‘hold[s] [...] together’ a society ‘composed wholly of self-interested individuals’ (echoing Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present* [1843]), rather than the physical, emotional, and linguistic manifestations of violence that make up the text.³³

Sarah Cole reiterates Glen’s point regarding the nineteenth century overall, writing that, since ‘at least the nineteenth century, [...] [t]o seek the social and economic

²⁹ Lane, ‘Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating’, p. 207.

³⁰ Heather Glen, ‘Introduction’, in Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, ed. Heather Glen (London: Penguin, 2003), 7–31, p. 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³³ Glen quotes from Carlyle’s ‘Gospel of Mammon’ in *Past and Present*: “‘We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named “fair competition” and so forth, it is a mutual hostility’”. See ‘Introduction’, *The Professor*, p. 27.

underpinnings of capitalist culture is to find endemic violence, and vice versa'.³⁴ Though Cole is primarily concerned with violence in Modernist fiction, her considerations are pertinent to *The Professor* and other Brontë texts, particularly in relation to political violence. Glen is highlighting the importance of violence to Charlotte Brontë's literary imagination, as well as to the making and sustaining of hegemonic systems in the nineteenth century more broadly. Yet, as with other critics, violence remains an ancillary, explanatory force in Glen's articulation of Brontë's worldview. The nature and form of violence, and its physical and linguistic manifestations within the text, are not examined in detail. Figured as the cohesive glue keeping society together, violence is invariably considered as a means to an end, not as an issue in its own right in Charlotte Brontë's writing.

Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse's introduction to the edited collection, *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* (1989), delineates a 'definition of violence' using Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a case study, as Jane's 'descriptive power becomes a mode of violence in its own right'.³⁵ This form of violence is 'the violence of representation', which itself involves 'the suppression of difference' and which *Jane Eyre* is constantly exerting.³⁶ This is an intriguing and dynamic response to the forces of violence at play within the novel, particularly a violence of representation which often appears to be 'benign, defensive, and nearly invisible'.³⁷ Once again, however, violence becomes a means through which to articulate another aim, namely 'to show the unfolding of a paradigm: the development of sophisticated technologies of the individual and its Others'.³⁸ While Armstrong and Tennenhouse directly relate varying 'modalities of

³⁴ Cole, *At the Violet Hour*, p. 20.

³⁵ Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, 'Introduction: Representing Violence, or "How the West Was Won"', in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 1–28, p. 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

violence' to *Jane Eyre*, their emphasis is on power structures and representations of the self. Although issues of power and selfhood are raised throughout this thesis, it is primarily led by the Brontës' articulations of violence, its linguistic form and literary manifestations, and by critical responses to that violence.

Violence and the Nineteenth Century

The period in which the Brontës lived, from 1816 to 1855 (the years of Charlotte Brontë's birth and death), was itself underpinned by violence. Despite the Napoleonic wars ending in 1815, the repercussions of the French Revolution were still being felt, particularly by the four Brontë siblings who harboured a fascination with the figures of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington.³⁹ In the 1840s, when Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë were writing and publishing their novels, Europe 'still appeared as a revolutionary entity'.⁴⁰ The instability of the 1840s, as well as the preceding decades of the nineteenth century, was exacerbated by, what Kurt Weyland calls:

an accumulation of economic, social, and political problems. Harvests were poor in the mid-1840s, producing rampant inflation. Early industrialisation brutally exploited workers and destroyed artisans' livelihoods, creating widespread downward mobility and, in some regions, desperate poverty.⁴¹

³⁹ For a discussion of the Brontës' preoccupation with Wellington and Napoleon, see Emma Butcher, 'Napoleonic Periodicals and the Childhood Imagination: The Influence of War Commentary on Charlotte and Branwell Brontë's *Glass Town* and *Angria*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 48.5 (2015), 469–86, pp. 471–7.

⁴⁰ Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, '1848–1849: A European Revolution?', in *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction*, eds. R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–8, p. 2.

⁴¹ Kurt Weyland, 'The Diffusion of Revolution: "1848" in Europe and Latin America', *International Organization*, 63.3 (2009), 391–423, p. 393.

The tremors of insurrection were also felt in the Haworth Parsonage after the deposition of the French King Louis Philippe in February 1848.⁴² The proximity of such social and political uncertainty heightened the threat of a similar uprising in Britain, in line with Carter Wood’s point that ‘the threat of violence seemed to grow dramatically’ in England during this period, despite a statistical decline in the number of violent acts recorded.⁴³ On 31 March 1848, around the time she was beginning to write her second published novel *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë wrote to her friend, Margaret Wooler, of her own fears of revolutionary sentiments encroaching on the United Kingdom: ‘That England may be spared the spasms, cramps and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent and threatening Ireland, I earnestly pray!’⁴⁴ (Notably, Charlotte uses the phrase ‘frenzy-fits’ as a shorthand for violence here, a practice also adopted by Emily Brontë in some of her poetry and examined in more depth in Chapter One.) Charlotte Brontë’s sober hope to avoid the unravelling of relative peace contrasts with her childhood dream that her ‘lot had been cast in the troubled times of the late war’, a wish lived out in her early writing.⁴⁵

Yet, as Juliet Barker notes, radicalism – often of a violent variety – had already arrived in England in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, in the form of the Luddite protests from 1811 to 1813 and, more immediately related to the Brontës’ historical moment, the Chartist movement from 1838 to 1848, the violence of which was ‘taking place literally before [Charlotte Brontë’s] eyes’ (and, presumably, Anne and Emily Brontë’s, too).⁴⁶ Barker contends that Charlotte Brontë showed a ‘curious lack of involvement in the struggles of the Chartists’ and that she ‘did not allow the

⁴² Weyland writes that Louis Philippe’s fall was ‘decisive for triggering the revolutionary wave’, citing ‘demonstration and contagion effects’ as the underlying cause of the spread of rebellion across Europe. See ‘The Diffusion of Revolution’, p. 395.

⁴³ J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 139.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Wooler, 31 March 1848, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume II: 1848–1851*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 47–9, p. 48.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 555.

contemporary sufferings of the Chartists to inform her portrayal of the Luddites' in her second published novel, *Shirley*.⁴⁷ Here, Barker is critiquing Brontë's failure to represent 'the Luddites themselves'.⁴⁸ Yet, as Terry Eagleton and, more recently, Philip Rogers note, *Shirley* is in fact informed by Chartism and the political climate of the 1840s, as well as by the previous fifty years.⁴⁹ Brontë and her sisters were attuned to these changes, threatened or otherwise, and this thesis seeks to show the ways in which such political sensitivity fed into their fictional representations of violence, particularly in Chapter Two on political violence.

The Brontës gained an understanding of the world around them, globally as well as locally, through the newspapers and periodicals they read. The family members were, as Barker has proven, avid newspaper and periodical readers from an early age.⁵⁰ When the four Brontë siblings first started their 'Tales of the Islanders' in 1829, one of their characters, Mr Christopher North, was based on the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, John Wilson; and many of Charlotte and Branwell Brontë's early works as children were written in tiny books modelled on the design of *Blackwood's Magazine*.⁵¹ This not only indicates their engagement with contemporary publications, the violences of which were duly noted and imitated by the siblings, but also their self-conscious attempts in adolescence to present themselves as published authors.⁵²

⁴⁷ Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 555.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Eagleton writes that 'Chartism is the unspoken subtext of *Shirley*'. See *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Anniversary Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 45. Philip Rogers ties Charlotte Brontë's hero-worship of the Duke of Wellington, and his opposition to Chartism, with her representation of the Luddites. Like the Duke, Brontë 'associated democratic movements with mob violence', which explains her reticence to portray 'the Luddites themselves'. See 'Tory Brontë: *Shirley* and the "MAN"', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58.2 (2003), 141–75, p. 157.

⁵⁰ See Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 112.

⁵¹ See, for example, Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 36–9.

⁵² In 'The History of the Year', Charlotte Brontë shows her sensitivity to newspaper partisanship and brutality when she deems the *John Bull* newspapers 'High Tory, very violent'. See 'The History of the Year', in *The Brontës, Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, ed. Christine Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–4, p. 3.

The influence of various periodicals of the time, which were often infused with crime and terror, on the Brontës' writing was also noted by their contemporary readers.⁵³ In 1848, George Eliot – not yet a published novelist – remarked of *Jane Eyre* that it 'is interesting – only I wish the characters would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports'.⁵⁴ Almost forty years later, in 1883, Algernon Charles Swinburne made a similar comment, this time about *Wuthering Heights*: "Twice or thrice especially the details of deliberate or passionate brutality in Heathcliff's treatment of his victims make the reader feel for a moment as though he were reading a police report".⁵⁵

Eliot and Swinburne are no doubt referring to the sensationalised descriptions of crime in certain newspapers derived from official police reports, which were mass-market disseminators of violent narratives from the mid-eighteenth century well into the Victorian period. The *John Bull*, a London newspaper often to be found in the Brontë household, frequently published reports of murders from the Old Bailey. On 4 January 1829, in the year that Charlotte Brontë described the paper as 'very violent', a report from Surrey of a murdered woman whose face was 'completely shattered, evidently from the close discharge of [a] gun' is given in gruesome detail.⁵⁶ As Carter Wood writes, the print industry was a 'crucial institution for creating and disseminating narratives of violence and for debating and defining the civilised mentality'.⁵⁷ Indeed, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844), Friedrich Engels remarked: 'Society is already in a state

⁵³ Mark Schoenfield writes that features published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, such as 'Noctes Ambrosianae, the long-running series of fabricated dialogues among the Blackwood elites, provide[d] compelling instances of a preoccupation with violence as a mode of critical, literary, and social engagement'. See 'The Taste for Violence in *Blackwood's Magazine*', in *Romanticism and 'Blackwood's Magazine': An Unprecedented Phenomenon*, eds. Robert Morrison and Daniel S. Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 187–200, p. 187.

⁵⁴ George Eliot to Charles Bray, 11 June 1848, in Allott, p. 92 [emphasis in original].

⁵⁵ Algernon Charles Swinburne on Emily Brontë, *Athenaeum*, 16 June 1883, in Allott, 438–44, p. 443.

⁵⁶ 'Surrey Assizes', *John Bull*, 5 January 1829, 421 (London), p. 2.

⁵⁷ Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 22.

of visible dissolution; it is impossible to pick up a newspaper without seeing the most striking evidence of the giving away of all social ties.⁵⁸

It was perhaps the national and international instability, or the reporting of it, which made mid-nineteenth-century reviewers so sensitive to the violences depicted by the Brontës. An anonymous reviewer of *Wuthering Heights* for the *Athenaeum* remarked in December 1847 that '[n]ever was there a period in our history of Society when we English could so ill afford to dispense with sunshine'.⁵⁹ Many of their contemporary critics were quick to identify, denounce, and engage with the apparent coarseness and brutality of the sisters' novels, often placing it at the centre of their critiques.⁶⁰ In October 1848, E. P. Whipple mistakenly ascribes *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* to Acton Bell (while correctly attributing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to "him"), claiming that the author, 'when left together to his own imaginations, seems to take a morose satisfaction in developing a full and complete science of human brutality'.⁶¹ This rather extreme interpretation of the Brontës' depiction of violence is in fact in keeping with other contemporary reviewers.

Yet, far from the Brontës being singular authors for their time, Kathleen Tillotson maintains that *Jane Eyre*, in particular, 'belongs to the eighteen-forties'.⁶² Tillotson says: 'Twenty or thirty years later, *Jane Eyre* and *Mary Barton* would have met with far more opposition; in the eighteen-forties they startled, but did not disgust.'⁶³ Tillotson does not refer to the violence of *Jane Eyre* directly, but the allusion to readers being shocked as opposed to disgusted by sections of the text gestures to what contemporary critics deemed the "coarser" elements of the Brontës' novels. This perspective suggests that,

⁵⁸ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 142.

⁵⁹ From an unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 25 December 1847, in Allott, 218–9, p. 219.

⁶⁰ The reviewer for the *Athenaeum* also stated that the Bells 'do not turn away from dwelling on those physical acts of cruelty which we know to have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering – but the contemplation of which taste rejects'. See *Athenaeum*, in Allott, p. 218.

⁶¹ E. P. Whipple, 'Novels of the Season', *North American Review*, October 1848, in Allott, 247–8, p. 247.

⁶² Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 257.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

though certain passages caused a stir, there remained a market for these novels and this included their violences. Tom Winnifrith counters Tillotson's view, however, stating that had 'the Brontës been typical representatives of their generation their story would have seemed less remarkable and their stories would have seemed less shocking'.⁶⁴ In line with Winnifrith's position, it is possible that the potential singularity of the Brontës' violences lies partly in their anomalous position within society. As a family of literary geniuses, living in a reasonably remote and now romanticised part of England, they are, as Winnifrith writes, surely unique. The opposing nature of Tillotson and Winnifrith's arguments encapsulates one of this thesis's central questions: whether the Brontës should be categorised as "violent writers" in relation to their contemporary moment and, indeed, contemporary authors.

Defining Violence, Then and Now

William Ian Miller accounts for the apparent scholarly gap surrounding the study of violence in disciplines such as history and literary studies by suggesting that we 'are used to thinking of violence as a problem, yet we only rarely think of it as a problematic analytical category. We all think we know it when we see it'.⁶⁵ As the subsequent chapters in this thesis demonstrate, this assumption that 'we' all *think* we know violence when we 'see' it is complicated by the Brontës' writing, in which the actual moment of violence in the text often goes unseen. Miller deliberately chooses the word 'think' here, to emphasise the gap between witnessed and represented violence, and violence which remains

⁶⁴ Tom Winnifrith, *The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 83.

⁶⁵ William Ian Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', in *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honour, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 53–92, p. 54. It should be noted that Miller's essay is not directly discussing the Brontës. His article does, however, raise issues that are pertinent to the sisters' literary violences.

unwitnessed and unrepresented. Do we only ‘know’ violence when we see it or when it is visibly, and indeed linguistically, represented? What about the violences which go unseen, unknown, and unacknowledged – by being unwitnessed and unrecognised? Do these “count” as violence? Miller’s evaluation also raises questions about the apparent critical silence surrounding violence: why is it such a difficult topic to analyse? Why do ‘we think we know it when we see it’?

It should be noted that Miller’s essay was written in 1993, giving the lacuna of the critical analysis of violence time to be filled. In the years since, violence has been the subject of several major studies, not least Steven Pinker’s commercially successful *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (2011), as well as recent books such as Slavoj Žižek’s *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2009), Maggie Nelson’s *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2012), Richard Bessel’s *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (2015), and James Sharpe’s *A Fiery and Furious People: A History of Violence in England* (2016).⁶⁶ The number of studies on violence, as well as criminality, in recent years indicates the timeliness of this thesis and its premise to explore the complexities of the Brontës’ literary violences with more sustained consideration.

Nineteenth-century studies has also seen a proliferation of works responding to the various perceptions, definitions, and discussions of violence and criminality generated throughout the 1800s.⁶⁷ Work by researchers such as Suzanne Rintoul, Shani D’Cruze, Anna Clark, and Lisa Surridge on marital and intimate abuse in the nineteenth century has influenced this thesis’s exploration of sexual and gendered violence in Anne, Charlotte,

⁶⁶ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2012); Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2009); Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2012); Richard Bessel, *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015); and James Sharpe, *A Fiery and Furious People: A History of Violence in England* (London: Random House, 2016).

⁶⁷ See, for example, R. D. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet: Murders and Manners in the Age of Victoria* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970); Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2012).

and Emily Brontë's work.⁶⁸ In particular, Carter Wood's work has been foundational to the development of this thesis and its articulation of nineteenth-century understandings of violence, particularly through his observation that 'violence was addressed in new ways, being, so to speak, "put into words" in the nineteenth century'.⁶⁹ This thesis joins these conversations around nineteenth-century literary and non-literary violence, while also expanding upon them by focusing on the Brontës and revealing the multifarious ways in which violence is embedded in their writing.

Viewing the Brontës' violences in light of Miller's phrase – 'we all think we know it when we see it' – is particularly important when considering the prevalence of sub-textual violence in their work. There are telling instances when, in Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing, abusive behaviour and language are kept off the page. Instead, the actual moment of physical violence is often removed from the text, either through the insertion of a grammatical dash (—) or a diversion away from the act. In these moments, violence is still encoded in the sisters' language, as the first chapter of this thesis shows, but often remains shadowy and unseen. Miller's comment – and its insinuation that we are mistaken in believing we 'know it when we see it' – raises troubling realities about the ways in which people perceive and understand violence. If we do not see it or only assume its presence in an inchoate, inexpressible way, then how can we ever have a full discussion of its role in society and, more specifically regarding this thesis, in the Brontës' fiction? This uncertainty – and an acceptance of that uncertainty – surrounding what violence is, whether seen or unseen, known or unknown, is crucial in the attempt to understand its significance in the sisters' work and its nineteenth-century contexts. By recognising that

⁶⁸ See Suzanne Rintoul, *Intimate Violence and Victorian Print Culture: Representational Tensions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Working Women in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (London; New York: Pandora, 1987); and Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005).

⁶⁹ Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 29.

violence in literature can be, and often is, elusive and to some extent impenetrable, we can come closer to a better comprehension of its role and implications.

As Christopher Yates writes, ‘the fact remains that violence is not a subject matter reducible to a single medium of interpretation or a single academic discipline. It goes by many names, ghosts manifold discourses, and is manifest in numerous phenomena.’⁷⁰ The multifarious meanings and manifestations of violence, as a general scholarly topic and within literature, serves to reinforce the slipperiness of the Brontës’ own violences. As the first chapter of this thesis shows in relation to language, the violences represented (or not represented) by the Brontës are often difficult to locate and therefore analyse. This is also true of the definition and etymology of violence itself.

As noted above, the mid-nineteenth century was a period of political instability and this was reflected in the changing definitions and understandings of violence. Carter Wood delineates the emergence of two clashing ‘dominant mentalities of violence’ in nineteenth-century England, which are of significance to this thesis: first, the “‘civilised’”, ‘representing an emergent culture of middle- and upper-class refinement that idealised rationality and self-restraint’; and, second, the “‘customary’”, ‘originating in an older social context, legitimating direct physical confrontation, appealing to less restrained notions of propriety and becoming associated with the poor and working-classes’.⁷¹ The boundaries of – particularly legitimate and illegitimate – violence underwent a fundamental change in the nineteenth century, ‘at a time when self-identified civilising forces undertook a

⁷⁰ Christopher Yates, ‘Introduction’, in *Philosophy and the Return of Violence: Studies from this Widening Gyre*, eds. Nathan Eckstrand and Christopher Yates (London: Continuum, 2011), 1–13, p. 4.

⁷¹ Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 3–4. Daniel Cottom has also written of the distinction between ‘the modern world and the world of the past’ in Sir Walter Scott’s novels as defined ‘by the difference between the rule of law and the rule of violence’. Cottom continues: ‘At every period of history described in these works the progressive elements of civilisation are distinguished from the anachronistic on the basis of their commitment to the increasing sublimation of violent conflict within formal regulations, especially the written regulations of law.’ While this thesis does not engage with Scott’s novels in-depth, future studies on violence and the Brontës could consider the overlaps and divergences between Scott’s literary violences and those of the Brontës. See *The Civilised Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 171.

determined offensive against alternative, customary attitudes toward violence'.⁷² Customary attitudes 'accepted a greater amount of physical violence' than its civilising counterpart; over time, this customary mentality was exchanged for a less tolerant view of violence.⁷³ This was perhaps due to the proliferation of war and revolution around the world at the turn of the century, including the American Revolution (ending in 1783), the French Revolution (ending in 1799), and the Industrial Revolution (ongoing throughout the early- to mid-nineteenth century). Such political and national upheaval may have revealed the inadequacy of how violence was described, discussed, and defined, necessitating the formulation of new languages of violence.

Furthermore, Carter Wood has 'identified a distinctive configuration in violence mentalities between approximately 1820 and 1870', overlapping with the Brontës' lifespans.⁷⁴ '[V]iolence mentalities' refer to '[c]ollections of narratives about violence – along with the often incomplete and contradictory patterns that they constitute'; these 'mentalities of violence [...] develop out of processes of dispute and agreement over the boundaries of legitimate physical force'.⁷⁵ Such violence mentalities are 'continuously reformed and adapted to new social situations'; and, because 'there is no single, stable and essentialised structure of attitudes toward violence, various mentalities will coexist in any given society at a particular stage of historical development'.⁷⁶ The instability of early- to mid-nineteenth-century society in England, as shown above, created an environment in which narratives of violence could be reconfigured. Indeed, as this thesis shows, the Brontës' texts and their violences are part of the changing mentalities and narratives of violence in the nineteenth century, situating the writers within a wider discussion of and engagement with violence as a topic of social concern and literary interest.

⁷² Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The porous boundaries of what constitutes violence and what we recognise as violence means that its definition has historically been broad by necessity, with Samuel Johnson’s entry in his 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language* providing a reasonably inclusive overview of how violence was being understood in the mid-eighteenth century. Under ‘violence’, he gives the following meanings: ‘1. Force; strength applied to any purpose [...] 2. An attack; an assault; a murder [...] 3. Outrage; unjust force [...] 4. Eagerness; vehemence [...] 5. Injury; infringement [...] 6. Forcible defloration’.⁷⁷ Johnson’s *Dictionary* provides one of the few working definitions of violence available in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Notably, the Brontës – specifically Charlotte – were familiar with his writing.⁷⁸ The Brontë Parsonage Library also lists Thomas Browne’s edited *The Union Dictionary* (1806) – an amalgamation of Johnson’s *Dictionary*, John Walker’s dictionary of pronunciation (1774), and Thomas Sheridan’s *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) – amongst the Brontë family’s personal library collection with Charlotte Brontë signing her name on its title-page. Part of Johnson’s definition of violence appears in Browne’s *Union Dictionary*: ‘violence: force, an attack, an assault, eagerness. [...] – Outrage, unjust force. [...] – Injury [...] – Forcible defloration’.⁷⁹ This suggests, if not the Brontë sisters’ familiarity with his definition, then the possibility of their awareness of this “official” meaning. While Johnson acknowledges the importance of emotional violence through his inclusion of ‘vehemence’, however, his definition is primarily physical in focus, particularly the adapted one which features in the Brontë family’s household dictionary. Considering, as we shall see particularly in Chapters Three

⁷⁷ Samuel Johnson, ‘violence’, in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Times Books, 1979).

⁷⁸ In a letter to her publisher, William Smith Williams, Charlotte Brontë writes: ‘Johnson – I think – makes mournful mention somewhere of the pleasure that accrues ... when we are “solitary, and cannot impart it.”’ See Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 3 July 1849, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II*, 226–8, p. 227.

⁷⁹ ‘violence’, in *The Union Dictionary: Containing All that is Truly Useful in the Dictionaries of Johnson, Sheridan, and Walker*, ed. Thomas Browne (London: Printed for Wilkie and Robinson, 1806), p. 478.

and Four, the significance of emotional violence throughout the Brontës' novels, Johnson's definition is limited and limiting.

Therefore, in opposition to Raymond Williams, who believes the word violence 'needs early specific definition, if it is not [...] to be done *violence* to – to be wrenched from its meaning or significance', and in light of the level of fluidity evident in the various definitions of violence since the mid-eighteenth century, this thesis will not define violence in absolute terms, whether through contemporary or more current classifications.⁸⁰ In fact, it maintains that upholding the word's ambiguity helps to illuminate its multifarious meanings and significances in relation to the Brontës' fiction and aspects of their afterlives.

Structure and Approach

This thesis will be divided into chapters dealing with a specific form or manifestation of violence pertinent to the Brontës' fiction and the nineteenth-century context in which they lived, namely language, politics, sexuality and gender, religion, and cultural afterlives. Each chapter broadly adopts a historicist methodology, in which connections between Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's literary violences and the context in which they wrote are drawn out. Chapter One considers the violence in and of language, primarily in Emily Brontë's poetry and *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë's poems and her novel repeatedly look away from the moment of violence, replacing the instance of violence with a grammatical elision in the form of a dash or a word that stands in for the act of violence. The unspoken yet hinted at domestic violence committed by Heathcliff against Isabella in

⁸⁰ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 331 [emphasis in original]. Elizabeth A. Stanko also writes that, '[t]hrough an approach that does not assume a standard definition, violence [...] can no longer be conceptualised as fixed, understood and inevitable.' See 'Introduction: Conceptualising the Meanings of Violence', in *The Meanings of Violence*, ed. Elizabeth A. Stanko (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 1–13, p. 3.

Wuthering Heights, as well as Lockwood's two dreams which act as a gateway into the novel's cruelty and his narrative control, are also explored. Through the close reading of Emily Brontë's writing, this chapter identifies the significance of unseen violence as an absent presence, traceable in the literary representations of violence of all three Brontës.

The violence of language and, in turn, the language of violence are also central to Chapter Two, which explores the political nature of violence in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and selected juvenilia, namely 'The Bridal' (1832), 'Something About Arthur' (1833), and 'Stancliffe's Hotel' (1838). The chapter situates these works in relation to wider articulations of political violence in the nineteenth century, including terrorism, legitimacy, and the crowd, while also raising the notion of violence as both a transformational and contagious force, which forms one of the central considerations of literary violence within this thesis. Building on Chapter One's exploration of Heathcliff's abusive treatment of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*, Chapter Three turns to gendered and sexual violence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, further developing and extending the absent presence of violence in the language of the Brontës' writing. This chapter also considers early reviewers' responses to Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's literary violences, particularly the repeated delineation of their work as violent, coarse, and "unfeminine". Chapter Four explores the appropriation of religious language to justify and legitimise violence in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, and to express and complicate intense psychological pain in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Through both novels' use of biblical sources to underpin acts of figurative and literal brutality, violence is transformed from something destructive and irrational into a generative force. This concept of the transformational properties of literary violence is central to each chapter of this thesis, as the Brontës complicate and problematise the boundaries of violence, its purpose, and its meaning.

The Afterword takes more current re-imaginings of the Brontës' work as its focus, to address the legacy of the sisters' represented violences and the "coarseness" often associated with their own lives. Several of these more recent responses to the Brontës' novels and lives – including Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* (2011), Mike Barker's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1996), Sally Wainwright's *To Walk Invisible* (2016), and the short story collection, *I Am Heathcliff: Stories Inspired by 'Wuthering Heights'* (2018) – re-instate their literary violences as a prominent aspect of their work, in a bid to de-mythologise the books and their authors. As we shall see in the final section of this Introduction, this contrasts with the initial use of violence in the "Brontë myth", sparked first by Charlotte Brontë herself and ingrained by Elizabeth Gaskell, which positioned violent forces around the sisters as central yet also harmful to their development and reputation as authors.

Violence and the "Brontë Myth"

Any study on the Brontës and violence has to contend with the influence of Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), a literary biography that shaped – perhaps irrevocably – what has been coined the "Brontë myth".⁸¹ As Deirdre D'Albertis writes, Gaskell's *Life* 'did more than any other single text to create a myth of martyred feminine creativity that continues to dominate our vision of the lonely woman artist as a heroic genius set apart by aesthetic integrity, intellectual detachment, and physical dis-ease'.⁸²

⁸¹ Juliet Barker notes the significance of Gaskell's biography to the formation of the so-called "Brontë myth": "That the myth has survived is a tribute to the emotive power of Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*". See *The Brontës*, p. 829. Lucasta Miller's *The Brontë Myth* directly addresses and unpicks the development and fixity of the myths surrounding the Brontës' writing and their lives. In relation to Gaskell, Miller writes that the author's biography 'laid the foundations of a legend which would be propagated far and wide'. See *The Brontë Myth* (London: Virago, 2002), p. 36.

⁸² Deirdre D'Albertis, "'Bookmaking out of the Remains of the Dead": Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*", *Victorian Studies*, 39.1 (1995), 1–31, p. 1. Linda H. Peterson also summarises the "myth" as 'a myth of genius and martyrdom, of solitude and loneliness, of domesticity and inspiration, of fame and death'. See 'Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59–74, p. 72.

While it is not this thesis's intention to explore the "Brontë myth" in depth, it is necessary to examine the influence which the mythologising of the Brontës has had on the ways in which their literary violences are understood and represented, particularly in regard to their cultural afterlives. In fact, violence has played a key role in the creation and sustenance of the "Brontë myth", a role which has undergone a transformation in recent years, as several film adaptations and artworks inspired by the Brontës have arguably emphasised the authors' literary violences. Through the ongoing re-imagining of the Brontë family's lives and novels, violence emerges as both central to the formation of the Brontë legend and, more recently, as a means of de-romanticising – and, in some ways, de-mythologising – the sisters' writing, which will be explored more fully in the Afterword.

Barker writes that Gaskell's biography 'single-handedly revolutionised Charlotte's image', by removing 'the brutal, coarse and vulgar "Currer Bell" of contemporary myth for ever' and replacing this persona with the apparently 'enduring portrayal of Charlotte Brontë as dutiful daughter, loving sister and happy wife'.⁸³ Lucasta Miller points out that Gaskell was not the sole architect of the "Brontë myth"; Charlotte Brontë's 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', which appeared in the 1850 reprint of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, alongside her 'Preface' to Emily Brontë's novel, has had a profound effect on the perception of the writers and their various violences. Like Gaskell, Charlotte's 'defence of her sisters' involved the insistence that 'the novels' passion, violence, and bad language were not the product of their creators' imaginations, but were naïve copies from reality'.⁸⁴ This process, as the proceeding section will show, involves a kind of domestication of violence, in that Gaskell (and, to an extent, Charlotte Brontë herself) explains the Brontës' literary violences by placing them within the framework of Haworth

⁸³ Juliet Barker, 'Saintliness, Treason and Plot: The Writing of Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 21.4 (1994), 101–15, pp. 100–1.

⁸⁴ Miller, *Brontë Myth*, p. 71.

folklore, which often centres on ‘tales of positive violence and crime’.⁸⁵ Aligning the “coarser” aspects of the sisters’ work with local stories of brutality distances the authors’ violences from the wider implications for “civilised” (mostly southern English) society and, indeed, from the sisters’ own creativity.

In *The Brontës*, Barker is open about her biography’s agenda: to rid the Brontë family history of lingering stereotypes and apparent untruths. In laying out her aims, she links the violences and the language of the Brontës’ various characters to the myth surrounding the family, while also distinguishing between the responses of contemporary and modern readers to the cruelties depicted in the sisters’ novels:

I sincerely hope that this biography will sweep away the many myths which have clung to the Brontës for so long. They are no longer necessary. Unlike their contemporaries, we can value their work without being outraged or even surprised by the directness of the language and the brutality of the characters. It is surely time to take a fresh look at the Brontës’ lives and recognise them for who and what they really were.⁸⁶

Here, Barker insinuates that the myth was formed to protect contemporary readers from the apparent candour with which the Brontës represented violent scenes and used “coarse” words. For Barker, such cushioning is no longer required because modern readers are also enlightened readers. Her comments imply that current audiences are more inured to such explicit violences, that the ‘directness of the language and the brutality of the characters’ are no longer shocking, and that this lack of outrage somehow enables late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century readers to appreciate the Brontës’ writing more than their contemporaries.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 68. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁸⁶ Barker, *The Brontës*, p. xx.

In Barker's statement, the reception of the Brontës' literary 'directness' and 'brutality' is bound up with the myth initiated by Charlotte Brontë's 'Preface' and 'Biographical Notice', and entrenched by Gaskell's biography. The opening of the *Life* places the reader firmly within Haworth, emphasising its significance in the development and realisation of Charlotte Brontë's, and her sisters', literary powers, as well as their literary violences. For Gaskell, it is:

more necessary in [Charlotte Brontë's] case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received. (*Life*, 60)

As the biography unfolds, it becomes clear that these 'peculiar forms' of Haworth life predominantly revolve around unruliness and brutality. According to Gaskell, Haworth society was influenced by '[f]orest customs' until the middle of the seventeenth century; as a result, public executions by beheading became a regular feature of life there, which generated 'a dogged, yet in some cases fine, indifference to human life' (*Life*, 65). It is insinuated that this insouciance lingers in nineteenth-century Yorkshire and is reflected in the day-to-day behaviour of the population.

Gaskell goes on to note that, during the period in which the Brontë family lived in Haworth, bull baiting was a popular form of entertainment in the surrounding areas, giving 'workpeople the opportunity of savage delight' (*Life*, 68–9). Those 'careless enough' to stand too close to the bull would be thrown into the river, and the spectators thus 'had the excitement of seeing one or two of their neighbours drowned, as well as of witnessing the bull baited, and the dogs torn and tossed' (*Life*, 69). Furthermore, chiming with Anne Brontë's representations of alcoholism and violent debauchery in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Gaskell contends that, twenty-five years before the *Life* was conceived:

the code of morals [in and around Haworth] seemed to be formed upon that of their Norse ancestors. Revenge was handed down from father to son as an hereditary duty; and a great capability for drinking, without the head being affected, was considered as one of the manly virtues (*Life*, 71–2)

In Gaskell's narrative, the society beyond their front-door was not the only influence on the Brontës' represented violences. The importance of their father, Patrick Brontë's, reputedly bizarre and, at times, erratic behaviour is stressed throughout the *Life*. Tales of Patrick's violence punctuate the biography: his 'firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession' in order to work off 'his volcanic wrath' (*Life*, 89); his 'carrying a loaded pistol about with him' while walking, after living amongst and distrusting the Luddites (*Life*, 90); and the Brontë sisters listening out 'for the report of a pistol in the dead of the night' when Patrick and Branwell Brontë shared a bedroom during the latter's descent into opium and alcohol addiction (*Life*, 284). Gaskell does not vocalise an opinion on these incidents, writing that she cannot 'harmonise points of character', 'account for them', 'measure them', or, indeed, 'judge them' (*Life*, 90). It is left for the reader to do this – or, at least, to interpret what Gaskell is reticent to spell out.

In fact, Gaskell's claims against Patrick Brontë were, at the time, criticised by Patrick himself and by Charlotte Brontë's husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls. Patrick wrote to George Smith, co-owner of the publisher of Charlotte Brontë's novels and of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life*, that he 'never was subject to those explosions of passion ascribed to [him], and never perpetrated those eccentric and ridiculous movements, which [he was] ashamed to mention'.⁸⁷ More recently, several critics and biographers have challenged this negative portrayal of Patrick Brontë as a violent, tyrannical patriarch, an image which nevertheless has proved difficult to shake. As Patrick Brontë's own, more recent biographer, Dudley

⁸⁷ Patrick Brontë to George Smith, 9 June 1857, quoted in Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 803.

Green, acknowledges, Gaskell's purpose in representing him as 'a remote father given to eccentric behaviour and strange fits of passion' was all part of her intention to 'clear Charlotte and her sisters of the charges of coarseness and insensitivity in their novels'.⁸⁸ Her representation of Patrick's apparent violences is bound up, then, with the perception of his daughters. As Gaskell herself writes, 'these instances of eccentricity in the father' are 'necessary for a right understanding of the life of the daughter' (*Life*, 90). By placing emphasis on the necessity to understand the peculiarity and eccentricity of the often (reportedly) violent situation within and just outside of the parsonage, Gaskell highlights the anomalous nature of the Brontës and, by extension, their literary violences. The family stands outside contemporary, "civilised" city norms; and this non-conformity is proven by examples of violent behaviour.

Not only did Haworth society and life at the parsonage have a major impact on the sisters' depiction of violence (if we accept Gaskell's narrative), but Gaskell herself may also have been affected by the Yorkshire tales she was told. Irene Wiltshire argues that the 'writing of the *Life* introduced Elizabeth Gaskell to completely new and, in many cases, disturbing experiences'.⁸⁹ Many of these experiences, according to Wiltshire, brought Gaskell 'into contact with a darker side of life than the one to which she was accustomed'.⁹⁰ This proximity to an apparently harsher, more bleak existence to the one with which Gaskell was apparently familiar altered her subsequent writing, namely her short stories, *The Poor Clare* (1856) and *The Crooked Branch* (1859). For Wiltshire, there is a 'noticeable movement away from the optimism that informed her earlier tales to a darker view of life' in her later work, which includes 'human malevolence', 'downright ill-will and a deliberate intention to inflict suffering'.⁹¹ There is little discussion as to whether

⁸⁸ Dudley Green, *Patrick Brontë: Father of Genius* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2008), p. 9.

⁸⁹ Irene Wiltshire, 'The *Life* of Charlotte Brontë: A Watershed in Gaskell's Writing', *Brontë Studies*, 28.2 (2003), 93–102, p. 94.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Gaskell's later novels, such as *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) and *Wives and Daughters* (1864–66), fit this pattern. Wiltshire's essay underlines the singularity of the Brontës' environment and its impact on the four writers. Even for Gaskell, who had seen 'urban misery' in industrial Manchester, the "backwardness" and bleakness of Haworth society was unlike anything she could imagine.⁹²

This – the idea that Haworth life was almost unthinkable to those unaccustomed to it – is perhaps crucial to how the Brontës, and indeed other women writers, were and continue to be perceived in relation to represented violence. Even if Gaskell had been changed or traumatised by what she witnessed (or did not witness) at Haworth, Wiltshire's thesis negates Gaskell's imaginative agency, especially when it comes to representing the "darker", more violent sides of existence. As an author, Gaskell, like the Brontës, can only be shaped by what she experiences. This approach deems it to be too disturbing for women writers to be capable of imagining such cruelty as the superstitious boiling or roasting of a living cat, as described by Gaskell in her novel, *North and South*, which was serialised between 1854 and 1855 – two years before her seemingly transformative experiences at Haworth.⁹³ As noted earlier in this Introduction, *Wuthering Heights* is replete with casual brutality levelled at animals, such as the hanging of a litter of puppies by the young Hareton and Heathcliff's hanging of Isabella's dog until it was 'nearly at its last gasp'.⁹⁴ Similarly, Gaskell wrote horror stories prior to 1855, one of which, 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852), echoes *Wuthering Heights*, as it involves the ghost of a little girl 'crying and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in'.⁹⁵ While this

⁹² Wiltshire, 'The Life of Charlotte Brontë: A Watershed in Gaskell's Writing', p. 96.

⁹³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 380–1. Notably, despite Gaskell's representations of violence in novels such as *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South*, she is rarely referred to as a "violent writer".

⁹⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 183, 129. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, 'The Old Nurse's Story', in *Mrs Gaskell's Tales of Mystery and Horror*, ed. Michael Ashley (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 19–38, p. 31.

thesis acknowledges the significance of the immediate environmental context in regard to the Brontës' violences, it is more concerned with the *literary* overlaps between the Brontës' representations of violence and those depicted by authors such as Gaskell, as well as Anthony Trollope, Lord Byron, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. These intersections, as well as divergences, suggest a network of violent imagery and influence which brings us closer to understanding whether the Brontës were working within or outside of contemporary representations and perceptions of violence.

The sisters' literary violences have also become like myths themselves, as they have been reworked and reconsidered in recent adaptations and stories inspired by the Brontës' fiction. In opposition to Gaskell's domestication of the three authors' textual violences, foundational to the conception of the "Brontë myth", the violences in the Brontës' literature have been emphasised in recent years in various adaptations influenced by the sisters' fiction. Elisaveta Abrahall, the director of a film of *Wuthering Heights*, scheduled for release during Emily Brontë's bicentenary in 2018, has spoken of her determination to "re-introduce" the "shock factor" into the novel for a twenty-first-century audience.⁹⁶

Similarly, Joolz Denby, a Bradford-based writer and the artistic director of the Radical Brontës Festival held in Bradford in 2006, contends that the "Brontës were genuine social revolutionaries; their true story deserves to be re-examined and given back to the people".⁹⁷ Within the BBC article in which Denby's comments feature, we are told that a new graphic novel of *Wuthering Heights*, with words by Huddersfield poet Adam

⁹⁶ Elisaveta Abrahall, quoted in 'New Film Adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* Aims to Stay Faithful to Original Story', *Keighley News*, 5 May 2016 <<https://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/14473248.makers-of-new-film-version-of-emily-brontes-wuthering-heights-want-to-bring-back-shock-factor/>> [Accessed 17 November 2018].

⁹⁷ Joolz Denby, quoted in "A Rude and Strange" Production?, *BBC Bradford and West Yorkshire*, 4 September 2006 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bradford/content/articles/2006/09/04/wuthering_heights_graphic_novel_feature.shtml> [Accessed 17 November 2018].

Strickson and images by graphic artist Siku, ‘has been commissioned to do just this’.⁹⁸ Part of this process of “re-examining” the novel and “giving it back to the people” involves, perhaps predictably, violence, with Strickson stating there are “a few splats and whacks in [the graphic novel] as there are in the original novel. There’s quite an undercurrent of sex and overcurrent of violence. I guess Emily Brontë’s world in Haworth was mean and violent in many ways.”⁹⁹ Notably, both Abrahall and Denby wish to reacquaint readers with and to “give back” to them the novel’s “shock factor” and revolutionary content, as opposed to Barker, who is relieved by and indeed praises the fact that modern-day readers are no longer outraged or surprised by the supposed unconventionality of the text(s).

According to these competing approaches to the Brontës and their literary violences, some readers and critics seem to want it both ways: to observe the Brontës from a knowing, even “rational” perspective, one which enables them, ‘unlike their contemporaries’, to appreciate and understand the sisters’ writing; while, at the same time, to revel in the Brontës’ nonconformity and to be scandalised by their ‘directness’ and ‘brutality’, just like their contemporaries supposedly were. Neither perspective feels fully satisfactory, particularly in regard to the authors’ represented violences.

As previously shown, the violent cruelty of *Wuthering Heights* was integral to the shock felt by its initial readers and reviewers when they first encountered the novel, so Abrahall’s comments signal a possible “re-introduction” of the book’s violent aspects into the film. Abrahall also wishes to ‘stick very closely to what Emily intended’ – though what she thinks Brontë’s apparent intention was is not explained.¹⁰⁰ This “revival” of violence in Brontë re-workings points to an apparent de-romanticisation of the Brontës’ image, a counter-narrative to Gaskell’s – and the ensuing – myth that the sisters were

⁹⁸ Denby, quoted in “A Rude and Strange” Production?.

⁹⁹ Adam Strickson, quoted in “A Rude and Strange” Production?.

¹⁰⁰ Abrahall, quoted in ‘New Film Adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* Aims to Stay Faithful to Original Story’.

secluded writers. And yet, as noted above, Gaskell's version of the Brontës does not isolate them from their immediate surroundings; more so from metropolitan hubs, such as Manchester or London, which were seen as more progressive and "civilised".¹⁰¹ It is curious, then, that the perception of violence in the Brontës' writing has shifted, as though its meaning and significance has been inverted: as an integral force in the creation of the Brontës' fiction, but one from which they should be distanced; to an apparently surprising, often overlooked, element of the sisters' work which must be resurrected in order for modern audiences to fully appreciate their novels. This apparent shift raises several pertinent questions which will be investigated in this thesis: why and in what ways was violence central to the creation of the "Brontë myth" and is now used as a means of dismantling that very same myth? And what precipitated such a change in the perception of violence in the Brontës' writing and in its use within their legacy?

Written amidst the ongoing bicentenaries of the Brontë family, starting with Charlotte Brontë's in 2016 and ending with Anne Brontë's in 2020, this thesis is a timely contribution to Brontë studies and nineteenth-century studies of violence, as well as critical discussions surrounding violence in language and the violence of language. By exploring the nature, form, and significance of the literary violences of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë, this thesis reveals the complex centrality of violence within their work and legacy, and its place as an important area of future study in Brontë studies and nineteenth-century studies.

¹⁰¹ Robert Muchembled writes that, between 1650 and 1960, 'violence was truly tamed in Europe' and that the 'urban metropolis was the principal motor of change'. See *A History of Violence: From the End of the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Jean Birrell (Malden, MA.; Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 199.

CHAPTER ONE

‘Generally represented by a dash’: The Language of Violence in Emily Brontë’s Poetry and Prose

In Emily Brontë’s poetry, a violent linguistic pattern is detectable, one based on battles, blood, and heat, both literal and emotional. The poem, ‘There was a time when my cheek burned’ (dated October 1839), is full of the language of defiance, madness, wild natures, contemptuous fiends, and burning, all of which feature throughout Brontë’s poetic oeuvre: ‘There was a time when my cheek burned / To give such scornful fiends the lie / Ungoverned nature madly spurned / The law that bade it not defy’.¹ The unruly emotions that her narrators attempt to suppress – their ‘[u]ngoverned’ natures – are always just beneath the surface of the poems, an undercurrent of rage ready to erupt:

My soul still chafes at every tone
Of selfish and self-blinded error
My breast still braves the world alone
Steeled as it ever was to terror
Only I know however I frown
The same world will go rolling on

ll. 13–8

Here, the world continues to turn, ignorant of the narrator’s turmoil. This unstoppable movement – emphasised by the lack of a full stop which suggests the unending ‘rolling on’ motion – adumbrates the cyclical and uncaring nature of time and the outside world in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), written approximately seven years after this poem. The narrator’s soul is ‘chafed’ by the external world which impinges on the self, causing

¹ Emily Jane Brontë, ‘There was a time when my cheek burned’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Janet Gezari (London: Penguin, 1992), 116–7, p. 116, ll. 1–4. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

spiritual damage that manifests itself as a physical pain. In Emily Brontë's poems, violence is not only a physical act; it is also a perpetual, implicit state embedded in language itself. Whether it is the violent forcefulness of imprisonment in 'The Prisoner' and 'Written in the Gaaldine Prison Caves to A. G. A.', or the political conflicts of Gondal in 'The Death of A. G. A.' and 'D. G. C. to J. A.', Emily Brontë's language is infused with a fury that feels alive.² As Janet Gezari writes, Brontë has an 'intimate knowledge of despair' and an 'unflinching recognition of our human capacity for cruelty and ingratitude'.³ This understanding of human brutality feeds into her representations of violence, and her continual – almost inevitable – focus on violation, death, and pain adds to the overall violent character of her writing.

The last sentence requires some explication: what is 'the overall violent character' of Emily's writing? To discuss the violent character of language, or more specifically a language of violence, feels oxymoronic: how can something so physical be understood and described through something textual? More pointedly, can language represent violence realistically; and – even if it can – should it?

This chapter seeks to address these questions in relation to a selection of Emily Brontë's poems and her novel. It identifies the gaps and silences surrounding violence in Brontë's poetry and prose, considering in turn: the omission of violence in her selected poems and *Wuthering Heights*, with an emphasis on her use of the dash and grammatical elision; graphic yet mediated recollections of brutality in *Wuthering Heights*, and their associations with narrative structure and hermeneutics; and the representation of unseen,

² Gondal is the imaginary kingdom created by Anne and Emily Brontë, which acts as the location of many of Emily's (and some of Anne's) surviving poems, including 'The Death of A. G. A.'. Christine Alexander writes of Gondal: 'Savage passion, imprisonment, murder, and rebellion were to be the hallmarks of the new saga.' See 'Introduction', in *The Brontës, Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings*, ed. Christine Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xiii–xliii, p. xxxvi. Emma Butcher has written on war and its cultural resonances in Charlotte and Branwell Brontë's juvenilia, highlighting the significance and prominence of war in the Brontës' early writings. See, for example, 'War Trauma and Alcoholism in the Early Writings of Charlotte and Branwell Brontë', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22.4 (2017), 465–81.

³ Janet Gezari, *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.

unspoken violence and the literary strategies adopted, specifically when depicting (or, indeed, not depicting) domestic abuse. These sections reveal the prevalence of violence in Emily Brontë's work, the way it functions as an absent presence, something pervasive but – even in the form of seemingly explicit representations of violence – difficult to pin down.

When it comes to critically responding to Brontë's representations of violence, there is a conspicuous gap. John Bowen echoes Gezari's comments, identifying all three Brontës' literary acuity when representing violence and remarking that '[f]ew novelists of the period were as fascinated as Charlotte Brontë and her sisters Emily and Anne by emotional and physical violence and extremity, nor as aware of their complicated relationship to everyday life'.⁴ Like so many critics, however, Bowen and Gezari do not delve deeper into the nature or significance of this fascination. Indeed, the singularity of the Brontës' apparent captivation with violence in the early nineteenth century is, as already noted, undetermined. As a result, the assumptions surrounding their violences will be examined, challenged, and problematised throughout this thesis. Yet the fact that Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë are repeatedly labelled as "violent writers" does suggest that popular culture remembers the respective violences of their writing without truly considering why or how the three authors understand and write violence. This automatic response to their writing needs to be explored in more depth before considering whether or not these three nineteenth-century authors are unusually violent. The apparently visceral intensities of Emily Brontë's poems and her novel *Wuthering Heights* are apt starting points.

⁴ John Bowen, 'The Brontës and the Transformations of Romanticism', in *The Oxford History of the Novel: Volume III: The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, eds. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203–19, p. 203.

Omission and Elision in Emily Brontë's Poetry

Despite her apparently 'unflinching' gaze over human cruelty and fascination with violence (as Gezari and Bowen rightly identify), Brontë's poems repeatedly look away from the corporeal act of violence. By averting her poetic eye, and instead fixing it on the aftermath, she is perhaps yielding to the possible restrictions of language when representing such physicality, as well as gesturing to her own experiential limitations as a woman who has not been involved in war. The blood, the discarded weapons, the sound of canon fire, the bodies of wounded men and animals – these are the results of warfare and Brontë provides vivid details of these side effects of violence, as in her poem 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light' (dated 14 October 1837):

'Twas over – all the Battle's madness
The bursting fires the cannons' roar
The yells, the groans the frenzied gladness
The death the danger warmed no more

In plundered churches piled with dead
The heavy charged neighed for food
The wounded soldier laid his head
'Neath roofless chambers splashed with blood

ll. 9–16⁵

Such images stand in as symbols replacing the physical enactment of violence.

Other poems by Brontë also begin with the fallout of conflict, rarely depicting the actual occurrences of war. In 'The battle had passed from the height' (August 1834), the poem, only eight lines long, begins: 'The battle had passed from the height / And still did evening fall' (ll. 1–2); and continues the 'dead around were sleeping / On heath and granite grey / And the dying their last watch were keeping / In the closing of the day' (ll.

⁵ Brontë, 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light', 51–3, p. 51.

4–8).⁶ In ‘Roderic Lesley. 1830’ (18 December 1843), the poem chronicles the slow death of Roderic after a Gondalian battle, opening: ‘Lie down and rest, the fight is done’ (l. 1).⁷ The reader is left to imagine the violent acts that the poems proceed: ‘Thou canst not go – unnumbered wounds / Exhaust thy life and hold thee here –’ (ll. 7–8). This leaves lacunae in the poetry that must be filled by readers’ own personal and cultural understandings and images of violence. These gaps depend on an unspoken agreement between author and reader, a shared knowledge of what violence is and how it works in society. It presupposes that there is an agreed cultural code of violence that is quickly decipherable through the inferences of language, that the linguistic signs and shorthand of representing violence are translatable. As Laura E. Tanner writes: ‘Suspended between material and semiotic worlds, the reader in the scene of violence must negotiate a position relative not only to victim and violator but to the attitudes about violation encoded in representation and experience through reading.’⁸

A twenty-first-century reader may well approach literary violence in different ways to those of a nineteenth-century audience. And it is worth noting that Brontë’s poems were initially composed in private and therefore not necessarily with a conscious reader in mind. Yet both past and present readers would understand the implications of ‘roofless chambers splashed with blood’. For a nineteenth-century reader, at least, this image would have been suggestive of the French Revolution, a bloody period in France’s history that had a profound effect on the British political and cultural imagination. William Blake’s poem ‘London’, published in 1794 as part of *Songs of Experience* (but unlikely to have been read by Brontë), includes the following lines, with which Brontë’s ‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light’ resonates: ‘And the hapless Soldiers sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls’

⁶ Brontë, ‘The battle had passed from the height’, 45–6, p. 45.

⁷ Brontë, ‘Roderic Lesley. 1830’, 152–3, p. 152.

⁸ Laura E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c.1994), p. 3.

(ll. 11–2).⁹ Here we see real-world politics encroaching on the Gondal-based wars of Emily's work and providing the reader with another means of imagining the poem's 'before'.

Although a more modern reader may not discern the literary echoes in Brontë's poem and their connection to the French Revolution, the violence that caused the red splatters must have been brutal and decisive. In this instance, our imaginations, whether cultivated in the nineteenth or twenty-first century, are already primed to interpret this language of violence. That the deciphering of literary violence comes down to the reader's response aligns with what Jacqueline Labbe recognises about violence in literature: it 'depends on the susceptibility of its readers for its effect, and especially when the genre is Romantic poetry, it must contend with decades of criticism divorcing subjectivity from corporeality'.¹⁰ While Brontë's poetry is not strictly Romantic in terms of its designated literary period, Labbe's remarks still apply, particularly when we consider the fact that Emily Brontë is so clearly a Romantic heir, as well as the popular myth that continues to hover over her life and writing, that of a solitary, moor-wandering woman detached from reality.¹¹ This is the image with which her poems must 'contend'.

Like Labbe, Tanner also uses the word 'divorce' when discussing the relationship between subjectivity and the physical reality of violence in language:

As the victim's body disappears beneath the force of narrative abstraction or is rendered purely material through a focus on its mechanistic functions, narrative may implicitly endorse a vision

⁹ William Blake, 'London', in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 150.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Labbe, *The Romantic Paradox: Love, Violence, and the Uses of Romance, 1760–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 10.

¹¹ Michael O'Neill writes that, in Emily Brontë's poetry, 'Wordsworth and Shelley frequently appear as vitalizing presences'. See 'Emily Brontë, Arnold, Clough', in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, ed. Michael O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 635–48, p. 636. See also Michael O'Neill, "'Visions Rise, and Change": Emily Brontë's Poetry and Male Romantic Poetry', *Brontë Studies*, 36.1 (2011), 57–63.

of violence that *divorces* an act of violation from its human consequences.¹²

Both Tanner and Labbe identify the danger of writing (about) violence: its language can divorce – a stronger, more violent word than the passive alternative, ‘detach’ – the physicality of violence from its emotional and personal impacts. It becomes a voyeuristic pleasure for readers, a textual image of pain kept at a safe distance yet still vivid enough to incite and excite the imagination. Colin Davis writes about this sensation in relation to Albert Camus’s *L’Étranger* (1942): fiction ‘may be complicit with the murders it describes’, as it ‘draws some of its energy from our hostility to others and from our capacity to kill, but it allows us to dissociate ourselves from the desires to which it gives utterance’.¹³ This concurrent ability to connect with and dissociate from violence through language is at the core of its power in poetry and prose. It chimes with a sadistic impulse within the reader that gains pleasure from reading about or imagining the pain of others. Emily Brontë’s poems are sensitive to this instinct, as the corporeality of violent acts appears to be divorced from the subjectivity of her narrators and characters.

‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light’ is a prime example of this disconnection, as its narrator is experiencing the aftermath of war from the relative safety of a ruined Hall. She is physically divorced from the violent action, although the windows are smashed, leaving her exposed to the elements and to the dying sounds of battle. Her lack of physical knowledge of conflict leaves her no other option but to envisage the carnage for herself. The battle frenzy is pieced together through sound and light: ‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light / Yawned in the city’s reeling wall / And a long thundering through the night / Proclaimed our triumph – Tyrdarum’s fall –’ (ll. 1–4). She uses her senses to decipher the violence she has heard, yet her inability to be present at and bear witness to the battle

¹² Tanner, *Intimate Violence*, p. 8 [emphasis added].

¹³ Colin Davis, ‘The Cost of Being Ethical: Fiction, Violence, and Altericide’, *Common Knowledge*, 9.2 (2003), 241–53, p. 242.

causes the site of the conflict's aftermath to be displaced from the battlefield to her bedroom, where her 'couch' lies (l. 25). In Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), discussed in Chapter Two, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar watch from the safety of a small wood as the Luddites attack Robert Moore's mill. As with Emily Brontë's narrator, an understanding of the violence is pieced together through the senses: 'A yell followed this demonstration – a rioters' yell [...] You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears [...] It is difficult to be tolerant – difficult to be just – in such moments.'¹⁴ The narrator in 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light' feels a similar reaction to the sounds of violence and its aftermath. She tells us that, while the siege continued, the 'outward tumult seemed to assuage / The inward tempest it surrounded' (ll. 19–20); despite keeping her awake, and making her heart burn 'fiercely', the external battle cries drown out and replace her internal struggle for a time. Once the sounds of war have ceased, however, silence falls and 'whets the tang of pain', returning the narrator to a previous state of anguish and despair (ll. 22–3). The end of one war leads to the resuming of the narrator's own inner battle.

By diverting her gaze from the battle, Brontë is drawing attention to a less explicit mode of violence, an emotional intensity felt by an individual that often goes unseen and unheard. Despite the physical absence of the battlefield, other than the narrator's visions, the poem is comprised of combative language. The narrator's turbulent inner world, as well as the tumult of war, can be read in the 'thundering' and 'shrieking' of the sky (ll. 3, 5), the approaching 'wail' of trees (l. 34), and the 'smothering snow-clouds' (l. 6). The 'black ruins' of the Hall evoke extinguished fire, a previous violence rendered on the structure (l. 8). Instead of the scene conjuring images of renewal following the end of war, an apocalyptic aura pervades the poem. Brontë borrows the language of war,

¹⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley: A Tale*, ed. Jessica Cox (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 325.

tempests, and ruin to intensify and materialise her narrator's inner personal frenzy, a word repeated in the poem: first to define the strange ecstasies of battle, 'the frenzied gladness' of combat (l. 11); and second to describe the narrator's sudden 'frightful feeling frenzy' following the war's end (l. 45). Unlike the 'frenzied gladness' of physically killing opponents, however, the narrator's is crucially a frenzy of *'feeling'*. Once the calm silence of peace falls, an uncontrollable, 'ungoverned' impulse takes hold of her, resembling the thrilling danger of violent battle; the narrator internally re-enacts and extends the war in its aftermath.

External and internal battle become interchangeable forces here. Every location in the poem – the site of the fighting, the ruined Hall, the 'plundered churches', and the narrator's own fractured mind – show signs of trauma wrought by physical and emotional violence. In this poem, then, Brontë suggests that conflict is a natural and inescapable state of human nature, one that exists both outside of ourselves and within our minds. This alignment of inner and outer conflict complicates the separation of subjectivity from violence. Although the poem's narrator is physically removed from the violent events that catalyse her frenzy, the act of emotionally imagining/re-imagining those scenes is just as traumatic. Far from being divorced from 'actual' violence, the narrator's subjectivity and its 'frightful feeling frenzy' are in fact connected with the outside world and its own frenzied war.

In 'The Death of A. G. A' (1841/1844), once again, Brontë looks away from the moment of violence when Douglas and Augusta kill each other.¹⁵ As in 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light', she shows the aftermath instead, the bloody decline into death:

She turns – she meets the Murderer's gaze:
Her own is scorched with a sudden blaze –
The blood streams down her brow;

¹⁵ Gezari writes: 'this poem is in the *Gondal Poems* notebook, where it has two widely spaced dates of composition, January 1841 and May 1844'. See *The Complete Poems*, no. 148, p. 274.

The blood streams through her coal-black hair –
She strikes it off with little care;
She scarcely feels it flow,
For she has marked and known him too
And his own heart's ensanguined dew
Must slake her vengeance now!

ll. 240–8¹⁶

Instead of detailing the cause of the blood, or that of the reciprocated blow by Augusta, Brontë gives a limited representation of the outcome of violence. As a mediator between the reader and the characters, Brontë's narrator offers an artistic impression of the attack, one based on colour and movement, as though she is painting the scene. There is no mention of the pain of assault, how it feels, nor even the method of the attack. Only a restricted external account is given. The poem does switch to Augusta's perspective when she is struck by whatever spectral weapon Douglas uses. We are told that she barely feels her blood flowing down her face and through her hair, and that she strikes Douglas in 'vengeance'. Yet the description of the moment is detached from the subjectivity of Augusta. The narrator does not give the reader access to her inner thoughts or even her actions. Everything is described in outline, including Douglas's subjectivity; we never gain an understanding of his reaction to Augusta's blood or his own demise. The reader cannot gain admittance into their minds and this is heightened by the fact that the 'hungry hawk' will be the 'Sole watcher of the dead' (ll. 260–1). Even this allusion to the bird consuming their corpses keeps the reader away from the gory details; the reference circles the violence at its core.

The lack of engagement, almost a disengagement, with the actualities of violence here could be interpreted as a deliberate avoidance of representing violent acts. Brontë's work may reflect the potential semiotic challenges involved when detailing the instance

¹⁶ Brontë, 'The Death of A. G. A.', 158–68, p. 165.

of physical violence. Yet this continual evasion in fact heightens the reader's experience of the crime. We are left in a state of uncertainty with the only known facts being the blood obscuring Augusta's vision and her and Douglas's deaths. Even through spoken language, violence sits on the periphery of Brontë's poetry, while simultaneously remaining ever-present. When Angelica, who dispatches Douglas to kill her enemy Augusta, informs him of their rivalry, she tells him of the exile she endured because of Augusta, a period of her life which now feels like a "wilderling dream of frenzied crime —"; yet, she "will not now those days recall" (ll. 100–1). Once more, Brontë uses the word 'frenzied' to denote ungoverned violence; and, once again, it is this unruly violence that the reader does not directly witness. It is both omitted and included, an absent presence.

In both 'The Death of A. G. A.' and 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light', the term 'frenzy' becomes a byword for the chaos of violence.¹⁷ One word succinctly encapsulates and contains the disorder that violent feelings and actions embody without having to represent the details. In this way, the poems capitalise on the shared knowledge between author and readers, their mutual 'susceptibility' (as Labbe calls it) to certain translatable forms of violence. The form of language keeps in check the frenzied forces at work in Emily's poems without losing any of their intensity. This suggests that violence resides in specific words, that 'frenzy' is infused with a violent characteristic that allows Emily Brontë to use it instead of providing explicit representation. Burkhard Liebsch, in an essay on the inherent connection between violence and language, writes that 'violence has found a home in language, or has always had a home there. This would mean that language and violence are possibly not only externally, but also *internally* connected.'¹⁸ He

¹⁷ As noted in Chapters Three and Four, the word 'frenzy' is also used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* (1853), as well as by Anne Brontë in *Agnes Grey* (1847), to denote states of intensity that often lead to or threaten violence.

¹⁸ Burkhard Liebsch, 'What Does (Not) Count as Violence: On the State of Recent Debates About the Inner Connection Between Language and Violence', *Human Studies*, 36.1 (2013), 7–24, p. 8.

goes on to account for why violence is so difficult to define and theorise: ‘the proof that violence has found a home virtually everywhere, that it rooted itself in us and in ordinary and normal language, makes it difficult to expose the essence of violence, its *violating* nature, as the aspect that has to count under any circumstance’.¹⁹ If violence inhabits everyday language, as the repetition and metonymic use of the term ‘frenzy’/‘frenzied’ suggests, then Emily Brontë is not necessarily evading the intricacies of representing violence in fiction when her poems look elsewhere. She is in fact engaging with its contradictions directly by developing her own vocabulary of violence, one that is in dialogue with other writers and is ‘divorced’ from empirical violence.

Omission and Elision in *Wuthering Heights*

Violence in *Wuthering Heights* is also often represented through a form of elision. The blasphemies uttered throughout the book, predominantly by those who live at Wuthering Heights, are either denoted by a long dash (—) or omitted from the text entirely as an absent presence.²⁰ When Lockwood, who is recording the events and narrations of the story in his journal, is ready to leave the Heights after his nightmarish dream-encounter with the ghost of Cathy Earnshaw in her old bedroom, he finds Heathcliff verbally abusing Catherine, the daughter of Cathy: ““And you, you worthless—” he broke out as I entered, turning to his daughter-in-law, and employing an epithet as harmless as duck, or sheep, but generally represented by a dash’ (*WH*, 30). Lockwood brings the reader’s attention to the omitted word and embellishes the lack of description with his own

¹⁹ Liebsch, ‘What Does (Not) *Count* as Violence’, p. 21.

²⁰ For example, when the young Hareton uses swear words, the blasphemies are removed: ““No, I was told the curate should have his — teeth dashed down his — throat, if he stepped over the threshold — Heathcliff had promised that!”” See Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 110. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

opinion: that the ‘epithet’, whatever it may be, is ‘as harmless as duck, or sheep’ in his mind, but that, presumably in polite society, it is usually expressed ‘by a dash’.

Even in the private containment of his diary, Lockwood adheres to the strictures of civility through a strange form of censorship – strange because he is at the same time subverting those social boundaries by claiming that certain curse words are in fact inoffensive. There is something mocking and even provocative in his tone, as he is ridiculing those who believe such a word to be distasteful: the words ‘duck’ and ‘sheep’ are unequivocally benign. Yet he is also aligning himself with those whom he mocks. Through the dash and the proceeding explanation, Lockwood positions himself both within and outside of the realm of propriety, attempting to dismiss the perceived potency of the omitted word while simultaneously admitting its power. This process mirrors his peripheral position within the story he records and relates, as a narrator both inside and outside of the narrative.

In this diary entry, the dash becomes another byword for a more explicit, and indeed more violent, term. The exclusion of the actual word here echoes the repeated avoidance of the moment of violence in Emily Brontë’s poetry, as well as in other poets’ work. Dashes (—) are used in Brontë’s poems in a variety of ways: to signify a break or a pause; to make the pace faster and more frenzied; and, most notably, to disrupt a violent scene, as in ‘The Death of A. G. A.’. The moment when Douglas attacks Augusta, as quoted above, is punctuated with dashes. These displace the violent act and the assault itself occurs somewhere in between the dashes: ‘She turns – she meets the Murderer’s gaze: / Her own is scorched with a sudden blaze –’ (ll. 240–1). Similarly, in the penultimate poem in Brontë’s Gondal notebook, ‘Why ask to know the date – the clime?’ (14 September 1846), the dash contains the violence implied by the ‘days of gore’: ‘I know

that Justice holds in store, / Reprisals for those days of gore — / Not for the blood, but
for the sin / Of stifling mercy's voice within' (ll. 161–4).²¹

In his 1813 Oriental Tale, 'The Giaour', with which Brontë was most likely familiar, Lord Byron also adopts the dash as a means of simultaneously removing and including violence in his poem.²² The exact moment when Hassan is struck and subsequently killed by the giaour is elided by a grammatical dash: 'But ne'er shall Hassan's Age repose / Along the brink at Twilight's close: / The stream that fill'd that font is fled — / The blood that warm'd his heart is shed!' (ll. 316–9).²³ For Andrew Nicholson, Byron's dashes 'reflect a passionate desire to gather the scattered impression and to communicate its immediacy; the race to get down in fixed form what is fleeting' – including the immediacy of violence.²⁴ Both Brontë and Byron's poems show only the blood caused by the fatal blow; the actual instance of violence, the blow itself, is relegated to a liminal, unseen space embodied by the dash.

In her poem 'The Romaunt of the Page' (1844), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (another devotee of Byron's work) also adopts the dash when representing its two inclusions of physical violence. First, when Earl Walter is slain, the dash captures the moment of impact: 'The slanderer, [...] / Struck up the dagger in appeal / From stealthy lie to brutal force — / And out upon the traitor's corse / Was yielded the true spirit' (ll.

²¹ Brontë, 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?', 183–90, p. 187. The final poem of the *Gondal Poems* notebook is a reworking of this, entitled 'Why ask to know what date what clime', dated 13 May 1848.

²² Helen Brown writes that, though Emily Brontë 'does not quote directly either Byron or any other writer, [...] there are resemblances between her poems and some passages of Byron so startling that they can only be accounted for by supposing her to have read him with such passionate interest and delight that when she wrote poetry herself she insensibly used his cadences and images'. Brown goes on to compare the similarities between Byron's 'The Giaour' and Brontë's 'The Death of A. G. A.', asking: 'Was it from Byron that Emily got this taste for dark deeds of fatal passion and overweening ambition?' See Helen Brown, 'The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë', *The Modern Language Review*, 34.3 (1939), 374–81, pp. 375–7. More recently, F. B. Pinion has written of the influencing power of Byron's 'The Giaour' on Emily Brontë's depiction of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. See 'Byron and *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 21.5 (1995), 195–201, p. 198.

²³ Lord Byron, 'The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale', in *Selected Poems*, eds. Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (London: Penguin, 2005), 167–208, p. 177.

²⁴ Andrew Nicholson, 'Byron's Prose', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186–205, pp. 192–3.

136–40).²⁵ And, second, it appears when the page is herself killed by the Saracens: ‘She felt the scimitar gleam down / And met it from beneath / With smile more bright in victory / Than any sword from sheath, — / Which flashed across her lip serene’ (ll. 323–8).²⁶ While the moment of force comes earlier in the lines, the dash is still present (as in Brontë’s ‘Why ask to know the date – the clime?’), enlivening the image and gesturing to what cannot be represented. This common use of the dash when depicting violence in poetry gestures once again to a shared literary and cultural code of violence, suggesting that Emily Brontë was working within contemporary articulations of violence.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood’s use of the dash produces a similar effect to that of Brontë’s ‘The Death of A.G.A.’, Byron’s ‘The Giaour’, and Barrett Browning’s ‘The Romaunt of the Page’. In an act of elision, Lockwood is substituting the overt for the ambiguous, thereby creating a gap in the text that must be filled by the reader. Brontë allows her readers to insert the worst and, regardless of what Lockwood says, the least ‘harmless’ word they can imagine into the blank, just as she leaves the reader to envisage violence through descriptions of its aftermath. She provokes the reader’s complicity in the novel’s transgressive nature, by giving us the freedom either to think of crude language for ourselves or to elide its presence.²⁷ In this ability to determine the extremity of unseen acts and words, the reader has a certain power.

J. Hillis Miller, however, states that the novel ‘exerts great power over its reader in its own violence’, as though the book itself wields a tyranny over us in the same way that Heathcliff terrorises the other characters.²⁸ Contemporary reviewers noted a similarly violent phenomenon, that the book ‘seizes upon us with an iron grasp’ and that we ‘are

²⁵ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ‘The Romaunt of the Page’, in *The Collected Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sally Minogue (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2015), 17–27, p. 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁷ Raymond Chapman also notes the ‘tacit collusion between author and reader’ when oaths and swear words are omitted or replaced by a dash. See *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (London; New York: Longman, 1994), p. 119.

²⁸ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 42.

made subject to [its] immense power'.²⁹ Despite 'the disgusting coarseness of much of the dialogue, [...] we cannot chuse but read'.³⁰ The various omissions of violence and its "coarseness" produce, then, a struggle between the reader and the text. Confronted with instances of unseen violent acts and utterances, the reader obtains a level of power, one based on their ability to envisage (or not) the violence that they are encouraged to bring to the text themselves. Yet, at the same time, we are at the mercy of the book as it drags us, at times unwillingly, through its narrative. As noted in relation to Brontë's poetry, this simultaneous connection with and dissociation from violence in fiction is at the heart of its power. It is this similarly strange tussle between unseen and witnessed violence, and between the reader's influence over the text and the text's influence over the reader, that reappears in *Wuthering Heights*.

Although the violent word or phrase is censored in Lockwood's diary, there is still violence in his omission and it exists in the dash itself. Read aloud, or in Lockwood's case written phonetically as 'dash', and taken alongside Heathcliff's 'breaking out' against Cathy, the symbol takes on one of the word's alternative definitions: 'to strike or fling (something) somewhere with great force, especially so as to have a destructive effect; hurl'.³¹ The dash becomes indicative of Heathcliff's explosive verbal abuse and suggestive of a physical assault. Throughout the novel, the word 'dash' is used in a similar way.³² When Edgar Linton calls upon Cathy at the Heights and then insults Heathcliff's

²⁹ From an unsigned notice of *Wuthering Heights*, *Literary World*, April 1848, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 233–4, pp. 233–4.

³⁰ Ibid. In 1848, George Washington Peck also likened the act of reading *Wuthering Heights* to a violent assault: 'We have had many sad bruises and tumbles in our journey, yet it was interesting, and at length we are safely arrived at a happy conclusion.' See G. W. Peck, from an unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights*, *American Review*, 1848, in Allott, 235–42, pp. 235–6. More recently, Stevie Davies has written: '*Wuthering Heights* assaults rather than craves indulgence of its reader.' See *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p. 90.

³¹ 'dash', *Oxford Dictionaries Online* <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dash>> [Accessed 11 September 2018].

³² Stevie Davies notes the recurrence of '[v]erbs denoting violent acts of throwing' and 'verbs of violent motion' in the novel, particularly the word 'flung'. See *Emily Brontë* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 133.

appearance, the latter's 'violent nature' gets the better of him and he 'dashe[s]' a 'tureen of hot apple-sauce [...] full against [Edgar's] face and neck' (*WH*, 59). Similarly, Hindley's drunken episodes leave his son, Hareton, vulnerable to being 'dashed against the wall' if Nelly is not quick enough to hide him in a cupboard (*WH*, 74). And, in masochistic frenzies, both Cathy and Heathcliff are seen 'dashing' their heads respectively against the arm of a sofa and a tree trunk (*WH*, 118, 169). The 'dash'/'—' has a double form and a double meaning in the narrative.³³ It represents Lockwood's (and Brontë's) deliberate omission of a curse word; therefore, as a conscious absence, the dash extends the process of looking away from violent acts and vocalisations. Yet the symbol also signifies the violence that exists in language, both written and spoken. It is both removing and representing violent moments. Through the dash, Brontë's writing once again evades and confronts violence, so that it becomes a pervasive yet almost imperceptible presence in the novel.

In her 1850 'Preface' to the republication of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë notes her sister's initial decision to use dashes instead of full lettered words, one with which she disagrees and apparently rectified in her edition of the novel, believing it 'a rational plan to write words at full length': 'The practice of hinting by single letters those expletives with which profane and violent people are wont to garnish their discourse, strikes me as a proceeding which, however well meant, is weak and futile. I cannot tell what good it does – what feeling it spares – what horror it conceals.'³⁴ Charlotte Brontë is being somewhat disingenuous here, particularly when she claims ignorance as to 'what horror it conceals'. Yet, in doing so, she is also gesturing to the idea that omission can act

³³ Notably, in the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* edited by Charlotte Brontë, there is a '—' inserted after the word 'dash': 'employing an epithet as duck, or sheep, but generally represented by a dash —.' It is a peculiar inclusion, one that feels redundant. Yet, by placing 'dash' next to '—', Charlotte Brontë is drawing attention to the dual modes of the dash in this scene. See Ellis and Acton Bell, *'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey'*, ed. Curren Bell (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1850), p. 25.

³⁴ See Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*', in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), l–liv, pp. l–li.

as a form of inclusion. Simply by addressing this aspect of Emily Brontë's writing, she is acknowledging the power involved in concealing certain words. Her ambivalence in this regard is part of her *apologia* agenda; by feigning innocence, she is by extension insinuating Emily's own naivety, a point she emphasises when she writes that, in creating characters like Heathcliff, Cathy, and Mr Earnshaw, 'she did not know what she had done'.³⁵

One contemporary review of the novel, by G. W. Peck, noted the self-awareness involved in replacing a word with a dash and the shared knowledge it suggests:

Had the writer been simply, unconsciously coarse, he would, in this instance, have said 'slut' or 'bitch', without advertising to the harmlessness of the word. But by alluding to its harmlessness, he at once uses it, and offers a defence of it. This as plainly evinces a conscious determination to write coarsely [...] He knew the word to be a low word, though not an immodest one, and he determined to show his bold independence by using and defending it [...]³⁶

Contrary to Charlotte Brontë's rather coy protestations, Peck identifies some 'conscious determination' to make Lockwood use the dash. Emily was not a naïve writer; she did not create *Wuthering Heights* 'passively under dictates [she] neither delivered nor could question'.³⁷ Her rigorous knowledge of the law, particularly in relation to the rights of wives, and the complexity of her narrative structure prove she was sensitive to the world around her and to the linguistic effects she wished her novel to convey.³⁸ In replacing the word 'slut' or 'bitch' with a dash, and by making Lockwood both justify and apologise for its absent presence, Emily Brontë shows she has full control over her text, far more than Charlotte Brontë insinuated.

³⁵ Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface', p. lii.

³⁶ Peck, from an unsigned review, p. 238.

³⁷ Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface', p. liv.

³⁸ Ian Ward writes that 'Emily Brontë, it is clear, was just as well versed in both the weakness of humanity, and the weakness of the laws that were devised to refine it.' See *Law and the Brontës* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 58.

This is not to overstate the deliberateness of Emily Brontë's punctuation choice, particularly considering that the manuscript and copies other than the first edition of *Wuthering Heights* are lost. As Inga-Stina Ewbank and Ian Jack note: '[o]nce one begins to brood on the matter, [...] almost any oddity of punctuation can seem a conceivable foible of the author's, particularly in the case of an author of whom so little is known'.³⁹ For this reason, Ewbank and Jack 'have assumed that [Brontë] did not have strong and idiosyncratic views on punctuation; if she had, Charlotte would probably have mentioned the fact, in her "Editor's Preface"'.⁴⁰ These comments are important to bear in mind, especially when considering the significance of violence in Brontë's writing through her use of the dash. Yet, as Ewbank and Jack go on to write, the first edition of *Wuthering Heights* 'contains a considerable number of dashes where we might expect a more formal mode of punctuation – and where more formal punctuation was in fact substituted in 1850' under Charlotte Brontë's editorship.⁴¹ Crucially, Ewbank and Jack continue that, '[i]n general, the dashes in Newby's edition seem likely to derive from the manuscript, as there would have been no reason for Newby or his compositor to substitute a dash for a comma or any other more formal mode of punctuation'.⁴² This is further affirmed by Charlotte Brontë's letter to W. S. Williams on 21 December 1847, in which she wrote that the 'orthography and punctuation of [*Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*] are mortifying to a degree—almost all the errors that were corrected in the proof-sheets appear intact in what should have been the fair copies'.⁴³ Brontë's comments suggest that Newby and his

³⁹ Inga-Stina Ewbank and Ian Jack, 'Introduction', in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, eds. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), xiii–xxxii, p. xxxii.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. xxviii.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 21 December 1847, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume I: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 580–1, p. 580.

team did not undertake the corrections suggested by Emily Brontë, pointing to the likelihood that they took the original manuscript as their fair copy.

G. D. Hargreaves notes that some ‘novels printed by Newby seem to be particularly rich in the use of the dash’, including *Wuthering Heights*.⁴⁴ The publisher’s apparent penchant for the dash is borne out further in Anthony Trollope’s first novel, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, also published by Newby in 1847, in which the dash is again used instead of more formal punctuation: “The ladies began to unpack the treasures with which the wells of their cars had been loaded—cold hams—shoulders of mutton—pigeon pies—bottles of sherry—and dozens of porter soon made their appearance.”⁴⁵ More noteworthy within a discussion of violence in Emily Brontë’s writing, however, is the fact that the violence in *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* is often graphic, particularly when Keegan’s foot is amputated against his will: ‘the first blow only cut his trowsers and his boot [...] the second cut the flesh, and grated against the bone; [...] a third, and a fourth, and a fifth descended, crushing the bone, dividing the marrow, and ultimately severing the foot from the leg’.⁴⁶ In another scene, when trying to elope with his lover, Feemy, the English police officer, Ussher, is killed by Thady, Feemy’s brother: ‘[Thady] struck [Ussher] violently upon the head [...] again Thady struck him with all his power [...] the great weight of the stick falling on his uncovered head [...] had shattered his brains’.⁴⁷ In both scenes, Trollope does not resort to the dash; he describes the violence vividly so that the reader “witnesses” the attacks blow-by-blow. This contrasts with Brontë’s own representation of brutality and accompanying use of the dash, suggesting that this form of punctuation is more characteristic of her literary violences and not simply a stylistic quirk of her publisher.

⁴⁴ G. D. Hargreaves, ‘Signatures and Dashes in Novels Printed by T. C. Newby in the Eighteen-Forties’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 34 (1981), 253–8, p. 257.

⁴⁵ Anthony Trollope, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran: Volume II* (London: T. C. Newby, 1847), p. 228.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, *Volume III*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, *Volume II*, pp. 261–3.

The manuscript for *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* is, like *Wuthering Heights*, lost, thereby hindering a more thorough consideration of whether the dashes – and lack thereof – are Newby’s, Trollope’s, or Brontë’s respective preferences. Yet Trollope’s representation of violence does differ from Brontë’s own depictions in this instance. While Brontë may not, as Ewbank and Jack advise, have had a preference regarding punctuation, the dashes in the printed editions of *Wuthering Heights* do not appear to stem solely from the editorship of Newby. When consulting the manuscripts of Brontë’s poetry, which still survive, the dashes included in ‘The Death of A. G. A.’ exist in the original and, throughout the MS. of her Gondal poems, dashes appear more frequently than any other form of punctuation.⁴⁸ Indeed, many of Brontë’s poems appear without any punctuation, particularly in their earlier stages, save for the occasional dash. The comparative recurrence of the dash in Brontë’s handwritten work suggests a predilection, conscious or otherwise. At the very least, her adoption of the dash can be deemed a linguistic idiosyncrasy, one that positions Emily Brontë alongside the likes of Byron and Barrett Browning, as a writer embedding literary violences in her work while simultaneously avoiding more explicit representations of brutality through punctuation practices.

‘Troubling and yet Baffling’: Writing (about) Violence

Researchers and readers still grapple with the violent language and events seen and unseen throughout the text, but most considerations of its presence rarely consider violence in its own right and instead view it through other issues, such as sadomasochism and

⁴⁸ See ‘Manuscript of Emily Brontë’s Gondal Poetry’, *The British Library Collection*, MS 43483 <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-emily-bronts-gondal-poetry>> [Accessed 11 September 2018].

illness.⁴⁹ Despite both contemporary and modern reviewers and critics perceptively noting the violent drive of the text, there remains no sustained analysis of its place in Emily Brontë's – or Charlotte's or Anne's – writing. As Camille Paglia noted in the early 1990s, few critics 'manage to integrate' the violence, brutality, and cruelty into 'a balanced view of the novel'.⁵⁰ Twenty years later, and little seems to have changed. In October 2015, Paula Byrne reviewed Claire Harman's new biography of Charlotte Brontë, and identified a myopia in Brontë criticism:

The novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë reveal an interest in sadism and violence that few biographers have fully explored. Emily repeatedly punched her huge mastiff dog in the face when it was naughty. *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's underrated masterpiece *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are all filled with brutal violence, but there still seems to be a reluctance among biographers to explore fully the sado-masochism of the sisters.⁵¹

Byrne is right to take biographers to task. Yet critics of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë's fiction are also curiously reticent when it comes to the violence in their works. The introduction to this thesis set out the ways in which researchers have avoided the matter by analysing its presence in relation to other issues, making assumptions regarding its role and nature, or by taking it for granted.

Considering the prevalence of violence in *Wuthering Heights*, and the fact that so many critics continue to identify its predominance, this critical omission is at first

⁴⁹ For example, Robin DeRosa considers violence through the depiction of sadomasochistic relationships. See "'To Save the Life of the Novel": Sadomasochism and Representation in *Wuthering Heights*", *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 52.1 (1998), 27–43. Susan Rubinow Gorsky sees violence as a symptom of ill health, with love as a healing force that eventually overcomes Heathcliff's cruelty. See "'I'll Cry Myself Sick": Illness in *Wuthering Heights*", *Literature and Medicine*, 18.2 (1999), 173–91.

⁵⁰ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Yale University Press, c.1990), p. 445.

⁵¹ Paula Byrne, 'Charlotte Brontë: A Life by Claire Harman', *The Times*, 24 October 2015 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/charlotte-bronte-a-life-by-claire-harman-ms2kp0dcbfm>> [Accessed 1 December 2018].

surprising.⁵² Yet, when you consider the *nature* of that violence, its shadowiness and its multiplicity, it is understandable that researchers have so far avoided fully interpreting its presence and purpose in the text. When the book's violence is located by critics, it is almost always positioned in relation to something else. Maggie Berg 'can think of no other nineteenth-century novel which talks so much about sex, and which disturbingly links sex to violence. This implicit sexual dimension is, I believe, what David Musselwhite calls the "unacceptable text" in *Wuthering Heights*.'⁵³ In this formulation, violence is bound up with the 'implicit sexual dimension' of the text. Violence again becomes secondary to another issue – this time sex.

Yet Berg does attend to the novel's violence with more sustained interest than most. Having viewed violence through the paradigm of sexuality, she goes on to emphasise her belief that, '[w]hat makes Brontë's novel so troubling and yet baffling is, perhaps, this spectre of violence'.⁵⁴ She admits that it is the violence underpinning the sex that is the truly strange aspect of the text. Her word choice is telling: a 'spectre' is both a ghost, something haunting and often indefinite, and it is the menacing threat of something unpleasant though often unrealised.⁵⁵ This phrasing neatly identifies the pervasive yet often indistinct atmosphere of violence in the novel, as well as indicating a reason for the lack of in-depth research on the subject: it is 'troubling and yet *baffling*', and therefore resists interpretation.⁵⁶ Berg's comment goes further, however, by suggesting

⁵² For example, Claire Jarvis writes that 'Brontë aligns much of the novel's explicit violence with a sadistic model of legal marriage'. While Jarvis's argument does consider the text's violences, her focus is on what she refers to as 'exquisite masochism': 'Passages of deep erotic description, when plot stops and the narrative eye tracks the minute gradations of embodied life'. Once again, the violence becomes secondary to another focus. See *Exquisite Masochism: Marriage, Sex, and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), pp. 2, 25.

⁵³ Maggie Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin* (London: Prentice Hall, c.1996), p. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Ian Ward also refers to the novel's 'spectre of textual violence', characterising the 'spectre' as a form of terrorism. See 'Emily Brontë and the Terrorist Imagination', *English Studies*, 89.5 (2008), 524–41, p. 533.

⁵⁶ The unsigned review published in January 1848 in *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* uses similar phrasing to Berg: '*Wuthering Heights* is a strange sort of book, – baffling all regular criticism; yet, it is impossible to begin and not finish it'. See from an unsigned review, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 January 1848, in Allott, 227–8, p. 228.

that the novel is unsettling and perplexing not only because of its violence, but because of the spectral nature of that violence. In effect, it is the ambiguity surrounding violent incidents and of the very nature of violence itself in Brontë's writing that makes the novel so hard to pin down and decipher.

As with Emily Brontë's poetry, and as witnessed through the dash discussed earlier, the reader regularly sees the remnants of violence instead of the main event. The narrative structure and the internal structure of the novel's space itself, with all its thresholds and barriers, help to keep the explicit violent incidents just out of eyeshot. As will be explored, the reader can only witness what Lockwood and Nelly see and what they are told by others. This mediation means that the violence is always depicted second- or even third-hand. It is always a representation and a recollection. The fact that violence is always a memory in the text does not mean, however, that it feels any less immediate. There are numerous instances of violent outbursts in which we witness, through Nelly's, Lockwood's, and Isabella's embedded narratives, the remembered moment of physical and verbal assault. It is this alternation between out-of-sight violence and its more graphic, immediate depictions that the following sections will seek to disentangle with an awareness that each instance of violence is always, at the very least, a recalled event.

Graphic Recollections in *Wuthering Heights*

Despite being recollected a day or so after the event in his journal, Lockwood's two dreams at the Heights remain vivid and unflinching in their representation of violence. The content of both dreams stays within the vicinity of Wuthering Heights. The first begins with Lockwood leaving the house with Joseph in the belief that he is returning to Thrushcross Grange, only to end up in Gimmerton kirk, where the novel also ends. The second dream stays within the box-bed where Lockwood sleeps. This sense of

entrapment mirrors the claustrophobic atmosphere not only of the Heights with its strange hold over its inhabitants, but also of the book overall. Much like the box-bed at the Heights, the novel's tightly packed, boxed-in structure leaves the reader with little room to manoeuvre through the different narrative accounts, meaning we often forget who is speaking. Paradoxically, this constricting effect can also open out, narratively, into numerous interpretable spaces, leaving the reader suspended between multiple interpretations – the multiplicity of which reflects that of the novel's unseen yet pervasive violence.

This section considers Lockwood's role as the gatekeeper of the text and, by extension, its violences, as the main mediating narrator who controls what goes in and what is kept out of the narrative. As this section shows, far from being a passive observer, violence is central to Lockwood's narrative strategy and control. His continuous misreading of events and other texts (such as Cathy's names on the window sill) has implications for how readers receive the violence in the novel. Similarly, his two dreams, which both revolve around moments of brutality, act as gateways into the representation, justification, and containment of violence throughout *Wuthering Heights*.

While the content of dreams and the act of dreaming may be unwilling, Lockwood's writing up of his nightmares is deliberate and therefore paradigmatic of his (interpretative) control over the narrative. His two dreams in the opening chapters give an insight into his narrative style, and the ways in which he handles and controls the representation of violence in the novel. While Nelly narrates the central story, it is ultimately Lockwood who transcribes and mediates her words. It is only in the second part of the novel that the full extent of Lockwood's role as the self-appointed editor of Nelly's tale becomes apparent.⁵⁷ He tells the reader that he will 'continue [the story] in

⁵⁷ For Nicholas Frangipane, Lockwood is not merely the editor of Nelly's narrative; he is the 'novelist': 'There are numerous hints that he must be fictionalising a large portion of the story he is telling, especially his implausibly detailed memory of events in which he did not participate.' See 'Lockwood the Liar: A Call

[Nelly's] own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator and I don't think I could improve her style' (*WH*, 157). His wording suggests he had previously been 'condensing' her narrative; and his qualification that Nelly is 'on the whole' a proficient storyteller suggests he has tampered with certain elements of her tale.⁵⁸ Considering the ambiguities of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood's condensing and apparent clarification of Nelly's narrative is ironic. He is, as Nicholas Frangipane notes, 'telling us that he is giving us a recreation, [...] a simulacrum'.⁵⁹ But, because there is no explication of which sections have been altered, the acknowledgement that this part of the story is a 'recreation' opens another gap. Having cut out what he deems to be unnecessary, in the name of clarity, Lockwood, as the primary narrator, determines what is let in and what is shut out of the narrative.

In comparison to his second dream, critics have tended to side-line Lockwood's first nightmare. Even those who have written on its uncanniness often fail to identify the connection between Lockwood's representation of violence in the dreams and his role as narrator. Instead, they focus on either the biblical interpretations of the dream, or on whether Lockwood is truly capable of such dreamt violence. For Ruth M. Adams, Emily Brontë uses the initial dream as a way of introducing the reader to the world of *Wuthering Heights*, a place which she likens to the land East of Eden in Genesis 4: 24 where 'values are reversed, familiar morality has no place, right is equated with power and passion, and regret is unknown'.⁶⁰ It is true that the dreams can be seen as a gateway into the underlying

to Reconsider *Wuthering Heights* as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative', *Brontë Studies*, 41.1 (2016), 29–38, pp. 30, 36.

⁵⁸ Such control over the narrative and its implications in relation to violence will also be explored in Chapter Three's discussion of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Before his narrative shifts to Helen's diary, Gilbert Markham tells Jack Halford (the recipient of the narrative) that he 'shall have the whole [of Helen's journal], 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'. Just before writing this, Gilbert also recalls the moment Helen gave him the diary, as she 'hastily tore away a few leaves from the end', thereby revealing her own control over the narrative. See Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 126.

⁵⁹ Frangipane, 'Lockwood the Liar', p. 33 [emphasis in original].

⁶⁰ Ruth M. Adams, 'Wuthering Heights: The Land East of Eden', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 13.1 (1958), 58–

violence of the novel; but they also give insight into Lockwood's narrative control over that violence. Yet, Adams positions '[v]iolence and cruelty' as 'contagious' forces that are idiosyncratic to the Heights itself.⁶¹ So much so that Lockwood, an otherwise 'weak and petty' individual, is 'contaminated' by the first dream's brutality and therefore goes on to commit the cruel attack against Cathy in the second.⁶² As well as failing to account for the violence in the first dream, as Cates Baldrige later noted, this vision of Lockwood appears to absolve him of any guilt.⁶³ It positions him as a mere 'milksop', an image which, as Edgar F. Shannon contends, is inaccurate.⁶⁴ As the following section will show, Lockwood is indeed a more manipulative narrator than certain critics suggest.

Shannon goes on to simplify the issue by stating that Lockwood's dreamt violence proves that 'all men – sophisticate as well as boor' – are capable of barbarity.⁶⁵ Notably, this idea has been popularised by critics of *Wuthering Heights*. Writing in 1983, Tony Tanner contended that it 'is surely significant that the apparently "civilised" Lockwood dreams of doing just about the cruellest and most sadistic act in a book full of cruelty'.⁶⁶ To Tanner, this 'suggests that Emily Brontë knew very well that in the most civilised effete mind there may well lurk a distorted and perverse proclivity to violence'.⁶⁷ More recently, and echoing Tanner's words, Pauline Nestor wrote that Lockwood's violence 'confronts us with the potential brutality that lurks in the unconscious of even the most innocuous character'.⁶⁸ Such statements, however accurate, bring us no closer to

62, p. 59.

⁶¹ Adams, 'Wuthering Heights: The Land East of Eden', p. 60.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cates Baldrige, 'Voyeuristic Rebellion: Lockwood's Dream and the Reader of *Wuthering Heights*', *Studies in the Novel*, 20.3 (1988), 274–87, p. 275.

⁶⁴ Edgar F. Shannon, 'Lockwood's Dreams and the Exegesis of *Wuthering Heights*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 14.2 (1959), 95–109, p. 98.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 99.

⁶⁶ Tony Tanner, 'Passion, Narrative and Identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*', in *Teaching the Text*, eds. Susanne Kappeler and Norman Bryson (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 109–25, p. 112.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Pauline Nestor, 'Introduction', *Wuthering Heights*, xv–xxxv, p. xxix.

understanding the significance of the violence in the dream, nor its connection to Lockwood's narration.

Similarly, several critics, including Vereen M. Bell, Shannon, and Adams, have focused on identifying the biblical text at the centre of the dream, as well as the sin.⁶⁹ In his 'recreation' of the dream, Lockwood tells us that Reverend Jabes Branderham discussed numerous sins during his lecture, all of which Lockwood fails to understand: 'Where he searched for them, I cannot tell; he had his private manner of interpreting the phrase [...] They were of the most curious character – odd transgressions that I never imagined previously' (*WH*, 23). While pinpointing the sermon's content can be illuminating, its ambiguity in fact intensifies the chaotic nature of the violence, as well as subtly revealing Lockwood's subpar interpretative skills. His failure to comprehend or even to imagine Branderham's identified sins or sources mirrors his earlier confusion when reading Cathy's three names on the windowsill. He dismisses them as 'nothing but a name' (*WH*, 19). As a result, he underestimates their power and significance.

The violence in the first dream – and, less directly, the second – can be figured, then, as an effect of Lockwood's misreading of events. Stevie Davies writes that the dream becomes an attempt to represent 'a narrative interpretation of the foreign gibberish of inexplicable signs which Lockwood has encountered on penetrating Wuthering Heights'.⁷⁰ Yet there is no attempt at interpretation here, and even his attempts at

⁶⁹ See Vereen M. Bell, 'Wuthering Heights and the Unforgivable Sin', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 17.2 (1962), 188–91. Several critics have suggested possible sources of the sermon. Ruth M. Adams contends that it stems from Gen. 4: 24: 'If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold'. See 'Wuthering Heights: The Land East of Eden', p. 59. Shannon, however, queried Adams' identification, instead believing that the sermon's title and content derive from Matthew 18: 21–2: 'Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."' See 'Lockwood's Dreams and the Exegesis of *Wuthering Heights*', p. 96. Simon Marsden more recently notes Brontë's deliberate decision to maintain hermeneutical ambiguity regarding the biblical origins of the sermon, as a means of encouraging exegesis: 'By refusing to identify either the unforgiven sin or the identity of the sinner, the narrative implicates its reader in the interpretative process.' See *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 83.

⁷⁰ Davies, *Emily Brontë*, p. 131.

penetration are focused on the house and its apertures instead of trying to look beneath the exterior of the place and people.⁷¹ Instead of probing his incomprehension, Lockwood refuses to engage with the sermon, thereby accepting his ignorance and growing ‘weary’ (*WH*, 23). When it comes to reading situations and texts themselves, Lockwood – as Tanner notes – ‘gets it all wrong’, but remains oblivious to his interpretative ineptitude.⁷² As indicated by his moulding of Nelly’s narrative, Lockwood is in effect one of the first, and yet least qualified, to interpret the story. Due to his layered mediation of the narrative, this narrative control has repercussions for the ways in which readers witness and approach the violence of the novel.

Although the second dream – in which Lockwood drags the wrist of Cathy’s ghost along broken glass – is the one most often recalled by readers and critics, his first dream also centres on a moment of violence. It is not triggered by the ‘effects of bad tea and bad temper’, as Lockwood flippantly claims (*WH*, 22), but by his reading of Cathy’s diary in the margins of a religious text. The violent scenes recollected in Cathy’s marginal notes – as well as her repeated rewriting of the names ‘*Catherine Earnshaw*’, ‘*Catherine Heathcliff*’, and ‘*Catherine Linton*’ (*WH*, 19) – seep into Lockwood’s dreams, just as Catherine’s own dreams went through her “‘like wine through water, and altered the colour of [her] mind’” (*WH*, 80). Cathy’s writing gives an insight into the everyday violence she and Heathcliff experience at the Heights. She writes that Hindley’s wife Frances pulls Heathcliff’s hair ‘heartily’, while Joseph destroys Cathy’s handmade den, ‘boxes [her] ears’, and tells her that her father would have “‘laced ‘em properly – bud he’s goan!’” (*WH*, 21). She and Heathcliff are seized by the collar and ‘hurled’ into the kitchen,

⁷¹ Even the certainty of Lockwood’s ‘penetration’ in this instance is questionable. Several other critics have also used the word ‘penetrate’ to describe Lockwood’s interaction with *Wuthering Heights*. Berg writes that his ‘violation of the privacy of Catherine’s diary is presented in sexual terms, as a substitute for penetrating Cathy. But Lockwood is impotent as a reader and a lover: his famous nightmares combine fear of sex with fear of the text’. See *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, p. 26.

⁷² Tanner, ‘Passion, Narrative and Identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*’, p. 111.

where Joseph ‘asseverated, “owd Nick” would fetch’ them (*WH*, 22). Her annotations end with the image of Hindley reducing Heathcliff ‘to his right place’ – the reader is left to imagine Hindley’s methods of degradation (*WH*, 22).

Cathy’s own record of violence then mingles in Lockwood’s mind with the sermon of Jabes. When Lockwood begins to dream, he believes it is morning and therefore time to return to Thrushcross Grange. Guided by Joseph, who is armed with a pilgrim’s staff that resembles ‘a heavy-headed cudgel’, he remembers that ‘a new idea flashed across me. I was not going [home]’ (*WH*, 23). Instead, he and Joseph walk to Gimmerton kirk to hear Branderham’s ‘Pious Discourse’, a sermon titled ‘Seventy Times Seven, and the First of the Seventy First’ (*WH*, 23). As Branderham goes through the four hundred and ninety sins, Lockwood becomes increasingly restless until he finally breaks out, accusing Branderham himself of ‘the sin that no Christian need pardon’ (*WH*, 24). He tells the unusually full congregation to “[d]rag him down, and crush him to atoms, that the place which knows him may know him no more!” (*WH*, 24). This leads to a retaliation on Branderham’s part, who denounces Lockwood: “*Thou art the Man!*” (*WH*, 24). These words precipitate a frenzy in the church, as Lockwood recalls:

the whole assembly, exalting their pilgrim’s staves, rushed round me in a body, and I, having no weapon to raise in self-defence, commenced grappling with Joseph, my nearest and most ferocious assailant, for his. In the confluence of the multitude, several clubs crossed; blows, aimed at me, fell on other sconces [...] Every man’s hand was against his neighbour; and Branderham, unwilling to remain idle, poured forth his zeal in a shower of loud taps on the boards of the pulpit, which responded so smartly that, at last, to my unspeakable relief, they woke me. (*WH*, 24)

In fact, it is the tapping of the fir-tree’s branch on the window that wakes Lockwood, the same tapping that later triggers his second dream.

As well as underlining the prevalence of religious violence, both in the novel and in the divergent interpretations of the Bible (which will be explored further in Chapter Four), Lockwood's encounter with Jabes and the churchgoers sees him attempt to gain control over the sermon by imposing his own moral verdict on the congregation. As mentioned above, Lockwood's outburst stems from his boredom which, in turn, comes from his lack of understanding. Instead of seeking meaning, he lashes out against what he fails to comprehend. His efforts backfire, however; Lockwood swiftly loses any upper-hand he previously possessed, and his interjection causes him to be attacked by the angry mob. There is no explicit description of the blows cast, particularly in relation to Lockwood himself. He emerges from the multitude seemingly unscathed to become an observer of, instead of a participant in, the ensuing riot. When he writes that every man's hand was against his neighbour, he does not include himself in the tumult.

At first, it seems as though the only violence he commits is 'in self-defence'; his own wrestling with Joseph becomes a justifiable act, one provoked by the ferocity and pointedness of the attack.⁷³ Once he has lost control of the situation in the dream, and now that he is in the process of writing up his recollections, Lockwood seeks to position himself outside of the chaos, both morally ('I, having no weapon to raise in self-defence') and physically. He is accentuating the distance between himself and the world of the Heights. Retrospectively, he can justify his participation in the violence, while also removing himself from the uprising as a mere spectator.

Yet he was the instigator of the unrest. He called the congregation to arms by telling them to "have at" Branderham (*WH*, 24). Once again, Lockwood shirks responsibility for inciting violence by co-opting others to attack Branderham on his behalf. In this sense,

⁷³ William A. Madden figures Joseph as 'the spiritual centre of a world of moral violence, of endless charges and countercharges, in which everyone's hand is against his neighbour'. This, according to Madden, accounts for his otherwise anomalous presence in Lockwood's initial dream. See 'Wuthering Heights: The Binding of Passion', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.2 (1972), 127–54, p. 137.

Lockwood resembles Isabella Linton. She is, as Heathcliff tells Nelly, happy to accept violence and even to revel in it, so long as she remains unharmed: “But no brutality disgusted her – I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury!” (*WH*, 150). Similarly, Lockwood does not include himself in the act of dragging Branderham down. He prefers to watch from a safe vantage-point, again positioning himself as detached from the locals’ violent ways, while manipulatively and vicariously indulging in the violence around him. As with his use of the dash, Lockwood is both upholding and transgressing his “civilised” persona.

Rather than being displaced to the chapel again, Lockwood’s second nightmare occurs where he sleeps. This obscures the line between his waking reality and the events of his dream, so that he enters a liminal space between consciousness and unconsciousness, a position intensified by the presence of the window. Lockwood’s liminality in this instance makes his violence all the more shocking. Its proximity to waking life means the dream acquires a realism that, in turn, renders its brutality incredibly graphic. As the main perpetrator of violence in this instance, Lockwood does not shy away when it comes to depicting its horrors, nor does he miss an opportunity to justify his actions.

In the second dream, the tapping branch (which acted as Branderham’s zealous tapping in the first dream) becomes the knocking hand of Cathy’s ghost. Lockwood becomes so enraged by the rapping at the window that, in order to stop the sound, he smashes the glass. Instead of taking hold of the tree, however, he grabs hold of ‘a little ice-cold hand’ and the dream takes on the ‘intense horror of nightmare’ (*WH*, 25). He tells us:

Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it

wailed, “Let me in!” and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear. (*WH*, 25)

Lockwood is unapologetic in his treatment of the dream-ghost Cathy. He does question the fact that his sleeping self thought of the name Catherine ‘*Linton*’ instead of Catherine ‘*Earnshaw*’ (but never ‘Heathcliff’), which he read in one of Cathy’s books ‘twenty times for Linton’ (*WH*, 25). Yet, once again, there is no retrospective interrogation of his attack; he accepts his cruelty as a direct result of his fear. Terror and his ‘frenzy of fright’ – another instance of ‘frenzy’ becoming synonymous with violence – become justifications for brutality (*WH*, 26). The violence of the dream can be excused due to its psychological distance from Lockwood’s waking reality. Only in the grip of intense fear would he commit such cruelty. Yet it is also excusable not only because he felt terror, but because it did not happen.

This is the position Lockwood takes: one of nonchalant detachment from the meaning of his own dream. Dorothy Van Ghent pinpoints the cruelty of Lockwood’s treatment of Cathy’s ghost ‘in the gratuitousness of the dreamed act’.⁷⁴ Yet, as in his first dream, Lockwood’s violence (or, at least, his interpretation of it) is neither pointless nor unreasonable; in fact, he justifies his cruelty by citing self-defence and terror respectively. His actions become, if not a necessity, then something instinctive and therefore almost natural (or, something he can naturalise to the reader). Van Ghent is right, however, to identify Lockwood’s successful propensity to ‘shut out the powers of darkness’.⁷⁵ Tanner echoes this evaluation when he writes that ‘Lockwood, as a civilised man, likes to secure himself, to shut out possibilities of darkness and violence’.⁷⁶ Although he initiated the violence of the encounter, it is Lockwood who ultimately wishes to break free from

⁷⁴ Dorothy Van Ghent, ‘The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 7.3 (1952), 189–97, p. 190.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Tanner, ‘Passion, Narrative and Identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*’, p. 111.

Cathy's hold. When he is finally free, he piles 'the books up in a pyramid against [the open window], and stopped [his] ears to exclude the lamentable prayer' (*WH*, 25). Lockwood deliberately seeks to keep the ghost outside, and chooses the misread yet affecting books as his form of protection.

Yet, although Lockwood does ultimately 'shut out' external forces beyond his ken, he initially breaks out in order to avoid further contamination. The smashed window is a breaking through, not from the outside, but from within the house. It is Lockwood who shatters the seal between himself and Cathy, and he is the (dreaming) perpetrator of extreme cruelty. Tanner notes that 'much of the power of the book stems exactly from this "breaking of the window": things that are normally "kept out" clamour for admission or come flowing in'.⁷⁷ This is true in terms of things trying to find a way in – but 'the things that are normally "kept out"', despite their clamouring, are ultimately kept out. Cathy is never let in. Through both of their narratives, Lockwood and Nelly guard against these forces and ultimately succeed in keeping an unmediated "reality" hidden.

It is then perhaps the act of removal, a process of cleansing, and not the 'clamour for admission' that defines the narrative. Davies is right to identify 'the language of eviction, rejection and casting-out' as a central force in the novel, embodied in both of Lockwood's dreams.⁷⁸ He breaks the window to remove the ghostly presence of Cathy. In other words, to contain the house's spectre and its violent power, Lockwood had to use violence. Physical assault becomes the only means for him to not only protect his own self and psyche, but also his version of the narrative. This process is also indicative of his role as homo-diegetic narrator, as someone both involved in the story and controlling the story. Yet both dreams suggest his strategic capacity for ruthlessness: he is willing to incite

⁷⁷ Tanner, 'Passion, Narrative and Identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*', p. 113.

⁷⁸ Davies, *Emily Brontë*, p. 132.

violence for his own ends, and to use it to ‘shut out’ other forces. In this sense, his breaking out in both dreams is paradoxically a form of containment.

Unseen Violence in *Wuthering Heights*

Meanwhile, Isabella’s accounts of living at the Heights as Heathcliff’s wife offer an example of the unseen, mediated violence in the novel. Her narratives both conceal and reveal the ‘spectre of violence’ lurking throughout the novel. Six weeks after her elopement with Heathcliff, Isabella returns to live at Wuthering Heights and writes to Nelly at Thrushcross Grange. The letter – which Nelly reads to Lockwood – provides a glimpse into the cruel, chaotic world Isabella has entered. She tells Nelly of her rude welcome at the Heights, one that echoes Lockwood’s own first encounter with the house. Like Lockwood, Isabella is also initiated into the everyday violence at the Heights, specifically through Hareton’s threat ‘to set Throtter’ on her and Joseph’s disparagement of her “[m]inching un’ munching [mincing and affected]” ways (*WH*, 137). The most explicitly unsettling episode recounted in Isabella’s letter, however, occurs between herself and Hindley. He shows her his ‘curiously constructed pistol’ with its ‘double-edged spring knife’, and tells her of his hopes to one day use the weapon against Heathcliff (*WH*, 139). Isabella suddenly takes hold of the instrument and touches its blade with an expression not of ‘horror’ but ‘covetousness’ (*WH*, 140). She writes: ‘a hideous notion struck me. How powerful I should be possessing such an instrument!’ (*WH*, 140). It is the promise of power, not necessarily violence, which thrills Isabella. In this moment, she recognises her powerlessness at the Heights, and Hindley’s gun-knife embodies one possible way of surmounting her subordination. Yet her desire for the weapon also highlights her need to protect herself without divulging why.

The following section seeks to identify the significance of such silences around violence, by first exploring Isabella's language and the contradictions of her characterisation within her first epistolary narrative. This will then enable an in-depth analysis of her role as a frequently overlooked narrator and as a mediator of the novel's violences. The social implications of representing domestic violence in nineteenth-century fiction will then be examined in order to account for Brontë's decision to reveal certain forms of violence over others. This will lead into a discussion of the discrepancies between the violence which Brontë chooses to represent and conceal in her novel, viewed primarily through Isabella's second verbal narrative.

Although Isabella is forthcoming in describing the gruff inhabitants at the Heights, as well as her own strange attraction to instruments of violence, she is more reticent in revealing the details of Heathcliff's treatment of her in her letter. Her explicit refusal to disclose further information opens up a gap – reminiscent of the gaps in Lockwood's narrative – in the letter's contents, one centred on unseen yet adumbrated violence. Having given Nelly a message to relay to Edgar, Isabella quickly shifts tone and topic, addressing only Nelly when she asks: 'Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I shan't tell my reasons for making this inquiry' (*WH*, 136). This outright withholding of information is defiant, even provoking. As Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky write, in relation to unseen literary domestic violence, it acts as 'a kind of tear in the fabric of the narrative, momentarily rendering the invisible visible, reminding us of what is *not* represented'.⁷⁹

Isabella adopts this very tactic in her letter by appealing to Nelly's sympathy while simultaneously denying her full knowledge. Yet she still 'beseech[es]' Nelly to 'explain, if [she] can, what [she has] married'; and then tells Nelly that she '*must* call [...] very soon.

⁷⁹ Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 1.

Don't write, but *come*' (*WH*, 136, emphasis added). Instead of responding through language, Nelly must physically *see* Isabella and interpret the changes evident on her body. In order to avoid verbalising the abuse committed against her, Isabella is encouraging Nelly to read her body like a text, to decode her physical appearance as a sign of unwitnessed violence.⁸⁰ Such demands, coupled with the omission of information, pique Nelly's curiosity, but they also point to Isabella's desire to control her former housekeeper and current confidante. By using a commanding tone, she places herself in opposition to Nelly as a lady, someone with superiority and authority both over her addressee and her own story. The letter, as we shall see, becomes Isabella's means of asserting her identity within a space that cannot be (and, presumably, has not been) invaded by Heathcliff or the Heights.⁸¹ Contrary to Gideon Shunami's view, the letter is not a "dead space".⁸² In fact, as with Lockwood's dreams and the marginalia in Cathy's diary, Isabella's epistle (as well as her second verbal narrative) act as 'tears' in the text through which the reader has liminal access to unspoken and unseen events that intensify the novel's atmosphere of spectral violence.

Isabella's pointed use of the contraction 'shan't' in her letter underlines its paradoxical nature as an upper-class colloquialism. By using slang, she is adopting an air of flippancy in an attempt to dilute the severity of her questions' subtext. There is also a childish petulance to her wording. Henry Watson Fowler notes that the word 'shan't' is 'the nursery abbreviation for I shall not do it'.⁸³ In a sense, Isabella is here behaving according to type; earlier in the novel, she is described as 'infantile in manners', even as a

⁸⁰ Maggie Berg writes that women in *Wuthering Heights* are often envisioned as texts to be both marked and translated. For Heathcliff especially, 'women are texts, visible signs of his ownership and victories over other men'. See *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, pp. 62–3.

⁸¹ When Nelly does visit *Wuthering Heights*, Isabella reveals that Heathcliff has in fact seen a 'note' written to her brother telling him of her marriage; however, she then tells him she has not written since. He also asks Isabella "you have written, have you?", suggesting that he does not intercept all her epistles (*WH*, 149).

⁸² Gideon Shunami, 'The Unreliable Narrator in *Wuthering Heights*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.4 (1973), 449–68, p. 466.

⁸³ Henry Watson Fowler, *The King's English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 138.

young woman (*WH*, 101). The first time we see her, she is a child, fighting over a puppy with her brother, and ‘shrieking as if witches were running red hot needles into her’ (*WH*, 48). Such a petulant image is never really tempered by Brontë (or, perhaps more accurately, by Nelly). When Isabella falls for Heathcliff at the age of eighteen, she does so without any knowledge of his character. She believes him to be ‘honourable’ and ‘true’ (*WH*, 103), just like the heroes in the books in which she is often ‘absorbed’ (*WH*, 105). As Heathcliff himself says of his wife, she abandoned her family “‘under a delusion [...] picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion’” (*WH*, 149). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have written that Isabella is ‘victimised by the genre of romance’, as it is her romantic delusions that lead to and are shattered by her abuse.⁸⁴ Although this view partially blames Isabella for believing Heathcliff to be a chivalric hero, it does highlight her underlying naivety, as well as providing yet another example of misreading within the text. In this sense, her use of ‘shan’t’ perpetuates her own infantile image.

Yet, as her use of the contraction occurs during her mistreatment, it can also be seen as a means of returning her to a point of innocence within her own narrative, whether consciously or otherwise. On a more conscious level, however, Isabella may wish to project and uphold her past persona, particularly to her former housemaid, Nelly. She is perhaps playing up and withdrawing into the childish side of her nature in a bid to cleanse herself (on the page) of the unspoken acts committed against her, to appear to Nelly as she has always been considered: a flighty young woman. Subconsciously, however, Isabella’s infantilism in relation to divulging violence points to her role as a wife at the Heights more broadly. Laura C. Berry writes that, having crossed the threshold into *Wuthering Heights*, Isabella comes under Heathcliff’s ‘custody’ (a term he himself uses

⁸⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT.; London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 288.

in relation to their marriage; *WH*, 151), thereby rendering her ‘an infant’.⁸⁵ At this time, marriage infantilised women, placing them under the protection and subsuming them within the identity of their husbands, as well as stripping them of property and power.⁸⁶ In her polemic work, ‘Cassandra’ (1850–1852), Florence Nightingale notes that the family ‘system’ doomed some women ‘to incurable infancy, others to silent misery’.⁸⁷ In Isabella’s case, she suffers both fates (although, she does not remain entirely silent regarding her misery, as her two narratives show). Her infantilism, then, is self-perpetuated, while also being imposed on her by Heathcliff and, more generally and less overtly, her role as a wife and as a woman in late eighteenth-century society, when this part of the novel is set. ‘Shan’t’ becomes a locus of tension within her letter and the text itself, a conscious and subconscious linguistic decision that covertly divulges the epistle’s undisclosed violence.

Judith E. Pike contends that Isabella in fact undergoes a ‘transformation’ of characterisation from a silly romantic girl to a brutalised runaway wife,⁸⁸ and writes that critics ‘misrepresent Isabella again and again as a limited and static character, frozen in girlhood’.⁸⁹ Such a misrepresentation persisted until recently, largely thanks to Pike’s 2009 article which repositions Isabella as an important narrator within the novel, alongside Lockwood and Nelly. The previous generally held view endured even though Nelly also

⁸⁵ Laura C. Berry, ‘Acts of Custody and Incarceration in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 30.1 (1996), 32–55, p. 39.

⁸⁶ Maeve E. Doggett’s definition of coverture is pertinent here: ‘Coverture embodied the patriarchal assumptions that women should be subordinate to men and that men were entitled to use their power coercively [...] Far from being a *consequence* of coverture, the husband’s right of control was its very *essence*.’ See *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England: ‘Sub Virga Viri’* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, c.1992), p. 35.

⁸⁷ Florence Nightingale, ‘Cassandra’, in *Cassandra and Other Selections from ‘Suggestions for Thought’*, ed. Mary Poovey (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1991), 205–32, p. 216.

⁸⁸ Judith E. Pike, “‘My Name Was Isabella Linton’: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff’s Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.3 (2009), 347–83, p. 349.

⁸⁹ Pike’s article gives an in-depth overview of Isabella’s critical heritage, while also arguing persuasively for Isabella to be repositioned as a central narrator of the text. See ‘Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff’s Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*’, p. 352. Graeme Tytler has also written recently of Isabella’s role, emphasising her ‘resilience’ and arguing against the critical view of her as a ‘fundamentally foolish creature’. See ‘The Presentation of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Brontë Studies*, 39.3 (2014), 191–201, pp. 196, 199.

characterises Isabella as being ‘possessed of keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated’ (*WH*, 101). Such a description is perhaps more telling in relation to her use of ‘shan’t’ than her apparent infantilism, particularly when considered alongside the doctor, Mr Kenneth’s, description of her: “‘she’s a sly one [...] She keeps her own counsel! But she’s a real little fool’” (*WH*, 130). While this portrayal highlights Isabella’s foolishness, it also reveals her propensity to keep secrets. When Nelly visits Isabella at the Heights after having received her letter, Heathcliff declares: “[Isabella] would rather [he] had seemed all tenderness before [Nelly]; it wounds her vanity to have the truth exposed” (*WH*, 150). Silence, then, is part of Isabella’s identity; or, at least, part of how others perceive her. The defiance of her ‘shan’t’, and the omitted violence it stands in for, is a projection of her innate desire to remain silent, perhaps as a means of self-preservation from external judgment. As with Lockwood, the manipulative milksop, Isabella’s identity is split between the innocently foolish and knowingly cunning, a possible reason for her being viewed as an ‘unsympathetic figure’ who has been largely ignored by critics: neither side of Isabella is particularly appealing.⁹⁰ This split in her characterisation is compounded by her own preference to remain silent about ‘the truth’. Isabella withholds part of her narrative and therefore refuses to ingratiate herself with the reader; it is this act of wilful denial that maintains Isabella as a partially unsympathetic character.

When Isabella’s use of ‘shan’t’ is considered in the context of her other demands, it further becomes a less innocent and more pointed attempt to conceal and control the far from childish abuse inflicted on her by Heathcliff. Fowler also writes that ‘shall’ is a command, and Isabella’s inclusion of ‘not’ only intensifies her refusal to reveal details.⁹¹ It also becomes a demand levelled at herself, as though in an attempt to convince herself

⁹⁰ Tytler, ‘The Presentation of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*’, p. 192.

⁹¹ Fowler, *The King’s English*, p. 134.

to remain silent; in this, it can be viewed as a form of self-censorship. Anna Clark writes that, in the early nineteenth century, ‘women began to use even vaguer terminology which invariably obscured the seriousness of sexual assault’.⁹² Instead of vocalising incidents of abuse, women were left with no vocabulary, no means with which to ‘make clear to others exactly what had happened to them’.⁹³ Yet, due to the restrictions of respectability placed on women by society, survivors of violence were compelled to remain silent, regardless of whether they wished to speak out. In this regard, Isabella’s silence is less a deliberate choice, and more a product of her social conditioning as a woman.

Armed with nothing other than her own words, her letter becomes a form of self-fashioning. As Stephen Greenblatt has defined the phrase in relation to the Renaissance, self-fashioning is ‘linked to manners or demeanour, particularly that of the elite; it may suggest hypocrisy or deception, an adherence to mere outward ceremony’.⁹⁴ When Isabella tries to find the parlour, Joseph is amused by the suggestion: “‘*Parlour!*’” he echoed, sneeringly, “‘*parlour!* Nay, we’ve noa *parlours*”” (*WH*, 141). Isabella is putting on airs as part of an ‘outward ceremony’. Greenblatt goes on to write that ‘self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self’.⁹⁵ The verbal and (presumably) physical abuse levelled at Isabella impinges on her identity. During Nelly’s visit at the Heights, she notes that Isabella looks like a ‘thorough little slattern’, in contrast to Heathcliff who appears to embody the image of ‘a born and bred gentleman’ (*WH*, 146). It becomes clear that, amidst the everyday brutality of the Heights, Isabella has lost her physical resemblance to a lady and, therefore, the semblance of that part of her identity. In this sense, Isabella’s use of ‘shan’t’ in her letter becomes

⁹² Anna Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (London; New York: Pandora, 1987), p. 64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

even more significant. Since self-fashioning is ‘always [...] in language’, Isabella’s word choice becomes her only means of maintaining her previously superior role. ‘Shan’t’ reminds the reader of her status as a lady, giving her the authority to omit unsavoury details about her marriage; and it also becomes a form of self-protection through self-fashioning. In lieu of a gun or a knife, language – its omission and the ability to shape one’s own narrative – becomes her only (non-violent) weapon of refusal and therefore one of her few means of acquiring power.⁹⁶

Yet it remains unclear what exactly Isabella’s letter deliberately seeks to conceal.

Pike writes of the oblique references to Heathcliff’s violence in the letter:

Isabella’s letter becomes invaluable in terms of Brontë’s inquiry into the forbidden topic of domestic abuse [...] Isabella leaves her husband’s behaviour so undefined as to leave open the possibility that this behaviour is too abject even to be named. Yet Isabella is not loath to transgress the norms of decorous language or behaviour, as both Nelly and Heathcliff so readily point out. She willingly divulges her desire for her husband’s destruction and her coveting of an instrument of death, but she refuses to divulge what Heathcliff has done. It could be argued that such an omission leaves the reader to think the worst, but what could the worst be?⁹⁷

As Pike notes, Brontë specifies Heathcliff’s other forms of cruelty, thereby suggesting a deliberateness in her decision to omit details of Isabella’s abuse. The reader recalls Heathcliff telling Cathy that she would “‘hear of odd things’” if he married Isabella – the “‘most ordinary’” being his “‘painting on [her] white [face] the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two’” (*WH*, 106). Cathy already knew of

⁹⁶ Catherine R. Hancock has made a similar point, writing that ‘[a]s a woman living at a time when middle-class female behaviour was rigidly circumscribed, Isabella cannot fight back physically against her husband; instead, she uses her tart tongue, her verbal missiles, to injure her enemy’. Yet Hancock is incorrect in suggesting Isabella’s inability to ‘fight back’; Isabella does, eventually, gain a form of physical revenge by throwing the dinner knife back at Heathcliff before fleeing the Heights. See ‘Teaching the Language of Domestic Violence in *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Approaches to Teaching Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights**, eds. Sue Lonoff and Terri A. Hasseler (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006), 60–6, p. 64.

⁹⁷ Pike, ‘Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff’s Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*’, p. 374.

Heathcliff's violent capabilities, as she tells Isabella that "he'd crush [her], like a sparrow's egg" (*WH*, 103). For Pike, this comparative vocalisation of violence 'leaves the possibility that Heathcliff's abuse towards Isabella transgresses even the Victorian notions of marital misconduct'.⁹⁸ Pike goes on to write that we 'can only speculate the range of sexual violence that could have transpired',⁹⁹ echoing Juliet McMaster's belief that, at the very least, 'Linton was figuratively conceived in violence'.¹⁰⁰ The fact that Heathcliff giving Isabella black eyes would be 'ordinary' certainly suggests much worse.¹⁰¹ And the worst, it seems, is marital rape. Startlingly, Joanna Bourke notes that 'forced sexual intercourse was legal' within marriages in England until the early 1990s.¹⁰²

The definition of Isabella's experience at the hands of Heathcliff remains a contested and divergent issue amongst critics. Heathcliff commits what Patricia Ingham calls 'physical bullying' against Isabella.¹⁰³ Notably, she does not refer to violence specifically, although the inclusion of 'physical' hints at violent abuse. Ingham's ambivalent phrase registers the difficulty in naming exactly what happens to Isabella. Other critics have been less equivocal in defining Heathcliff's behaviour as domestic violence. Patrick Morris writes that Isabella's treatment at the Heights 'is the depiction of the severest form of domestic violence'.¹⁰⁴ For Morris, the 'horror and helplessness of Isabella's position are graphically described', although he fails to provide examples of

⁹⁸ Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 374.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 375–6.

¹⁰⁰ Juliet McMaster, 'The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff: Emily Brontë's Sexual Imagery', *Victorian Review*, 18.1 (1992), 1–12, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Notably, J. Carter Wood writes that nineteenth-century England saw a 'growing visibility of violence towards women [...] that is, a tendency towards seeing hitherto acceptable "disciplinary" acts *as violence*'. The apparent ordinariness of wife-beating became something abnormal and abhorrent as the century went on. See 'Conceptualizing Cultures of Violence and Cultural Change', in *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Stuart Carroll (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 79–96, p. 86.

¹⁰² Joanna Bourke, 'Sexual Violence, Marital Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology', *Victorian Studies*, 50.3 (2008), 419–36, pp. 421–2. Doggett writes that a husband 'could force sexual intercourse upon [his wife] without being guilty of rape, a situation which persisted until the House of Lords decision in *R. v R.* in 1991'. See *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England*, p. 46.

¹⁰³ Patricia Ingham, *The Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 139.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Morris, 'The Depiction of Trauma and its Effects on Character Development in the Brontë Fiction', *Brontë Studies*, 38.2 (2013), 157–68, pp. 163–4.

such graphic recollections, primarily because, as discussed, Isabella is vigilant in avoiding such explicit depictions.¹⁰⁵ Morris is perhaps reading his own twenty-first-century understanding of severe domestic abuse onto Isabella's position without returning to the text for evidence. Graeme Tytler echoes Morris's view, writing that 'there can be few acts of a husband's physical and mental cruelty to his bride to match those perpetrated by Heathcliff'.¹⁰⁶ He also contends that '[a]ll such evidence' of abuse is 'overshadowed by the force of [Heathcliff's] diatribes against Isabella as an utterly stupid, and even brutal, woman in both word and deed'.¹⁰⁷ Like Morris, Tytler fails to provide the elusive 'evidence' of Isabella's maltreatment. Ian Ward is similarly convinced that Isabella is 'assaulted by her husband'.¹⁰⁸ Considering the certainty with which critics define Heathcliff and Isabella's abusive relationship, it becomes clear that the reader is encouraged through Brontë's language to imagine, as Pike says, the worst possible form of physical assault. From a modern perspective, at least, it seems critics agree that Isabella's role as the survivor of domestic abuse is evident; yet, from a nineteenth-century position, there is no such guarantee that readers would have identified Isabella as a victim of violence, particularly in relation to her class.

Controlling Violence, Controlling Narrative

By once again placing the onus on her reader to envision violence, Emily Brontë is proving her sensitivity to contemporary social mores. When Brontë was composing *Wuthering Heights* in the mid-1840s, the issue of domestic violence was 'being addressed

¹⁰⁵ Morris, 'The Depiction of Trauma and its Effects on Character Development in the Brontë Fiction', pp. 163–4.

¹⁰⁶ Tytler, 'The Presentation of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ward, *Law and the Brontës*, p. 57.

behind the closed doors of Parliament during debates over divorce and what constituted cruelty as a just rationale for divorce'.¹⁰⁹ At this time, wife-beating – alongside other forms of violence – was consistently and stereotypically defined as a working-class issue; and this view persisted well into the 1870s.¹¹⁰ Not only does Isabella's reticence to speak of her abuse come from her desire for power, then, it also stems from her class, as shown by her reticence to renounce her role as a lady.

In this regard, as Pike notes, Brontë takes the 'radical step' of representing – however obliquely – a genteel woman as a victim of domestic violence.¹¹¹ Lawson and Shakinovsky write that 'domestic violence with an origin *inside* the bourgeois home verges on the edge of the non-narratable, and is thus replete with manifest evasions, silences, and distortions in its representations of both the woman's body and the domestic sphere it inhabits'.¹¹² While *Wuthering Heights* is not a typically 'bourgeois' space, as its lack of a parlour and 'maid-servant' proves (*WH*, 139), Heathcliff has reinvented himself – outwardly, at least – as a gentleman, and Isabella is herself the daughter of a gentleman. She is 'accustomed to be looked after, and waited on' (*WH*, 149). The Heights itself, in its crossing of class boundaries, exists somewhere between two classes. Within this unstable space and its indefinite class distinction, the violence inflicted upon Isabella remains shadowy and implicit; it lacks expression. It therefore resides in the gaps of her two narratives; she chooses to omit details of the violence in a bid to uphold the façade of gentility. As noted, Heathcliff tells Nelly that "'it wounds [Isabella's] vanity to have the truth exposed'" (*WH*, 150). This fear of exposure, of wounding her pride and social

¹⁰⁹ Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 357.

¹¹⁰ Frances Power Cobbe's seminal work, 'Wife-Torture in England' (1878), focused specifically on working-class domestic violence, perpetuating beliefs that it was a working-class problem and not a wider societal one. See 'Wife-Torture in England', *Contemporary Review*, 32 (1878), 55–87. For a full discussion of Cobbe's limited view of domestic abuse in society, see Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 373. Doggett has also written about the assumption that 'wife-beating was monopolised by the working classes'. See *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England*, pp. 119–20.

¹¹¹ Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 373.

¹¹² Lawson and Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body*, p. 6.

position, plays a part in pushing violence to the margins of Isabella's letter and verbal account of her time at the Heights.

Isabella's desire to take control over her own story also influences what violence she reveals and conceals, particularly within her second narrative. Having finally fled the Heights, Isabella reappears at Thrushcross Grange in a wild state of dress and with a wound beneath her ear. Like Helen Huntingdon in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Isabella's escape from Heathcliff renders her an 'outlaw', a position emphasised by her unkempt appearance.¹¹³ Pike explains further that, far from being infantile and passive, Isabella is a 'very brazen woman when she actively deserts her husband at a time when laws would not protect her from the consequences of her desertion'.¹¹⁴ Her decision to adopt a precarious position in society as the estranged wife of a "gentleman" testifies to the severity of her treatment at Wuthering Heights, the content of which the reader gleans only partially.

While waiting for the carriage that will remove her from Heathcliff's immediate – though ultimately not legal – grasp, Isabella provides Nelly with a verbal account of the graphic violence leading up to her flight. It is a means of justifying her self-willed estrangement from and hatred of Heathcliff, as she contends with Nelly's own disapproving and silencing response: "Hush, hush!" (*WH*, 174). Isabella obeys the housekeeper's instructions, in that she maintains a veil of silence over the abusive details of her marriage. She is aware, however, of her decision to exclude certain facts. As she tells Nelly, "you don't know all, so don't judge!" (*WH*, 178). In taking control of her

¹¹³ Isabella's flight from the Heights is a precedent to Helen Huntingdon's exile in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In her introduction to *Wildfell Hall*, Stevie Davies writes: '[Helen] has no legal right to the pen in her hand, the diary in which she writes, her paints and canvases, her pictures, or the earnings from those pictures; nor can she call her son her own, but must steal him from the house in which they belong. It is important to recognise that the tenant of Wildfell Hall lives outside the law; is an outlaw.' See 'Introduction', in Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 1996), vii–xxx, p. xviii. Under law, Isabella and Helen are the property of their husbands. As Joan Perkin states, 'in theory a married woman's body belonged to her husband'. See *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 24.

¹¹⁴ Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 354.

version of events, Isabella is distinguishing between certain kinds of violence. She chooses to conceal abuse, both physical and sexual, perpetrated against her by Heathcliff; yet she is more forthcoming when it comes to representing violence committed against others. This raises the question of *why* Isabella chooses to depict certain episodes of brutality over others. The remainder of this chapter will therefore examine the differences between the violence that is disclosed and hidden within Isabella's second verbal narrative, querying whether there is, as Pike contends, a 'clear progression of thoughts of violence' from her letter to the verbal chronicle.¹¹⁵ By returning to Hindley's gun-knife, which features in both Isabella's accounts, as well as exploring the act of interpretation through the visible cuts and bruises on Isabella's body, the following section will identify the potential power that lies not only in committing, but also in representing and remaining silent about, violent acts, particularly for women.

When Isabella returns to the Grange unannounced, Nelly (and therefore the reader) is again encouraged to read her body as a means of deciphering the brutality perpetrated against her. Berg identifies the fact that 'Heathcliff's violence is presented as an act of inscription by which he turns women into texts', citing his verbalised desire to 'paint' Isabella's face with 'the colours of the rainbow' (*WH*, 106).¹¹⁶ Nelly is the witness, and ultimately the disseminator, of such readable effects of (apparent) domestic violence, observing Isabella's dishevelled appearance when she arrives at the Grange having fled the Heights: 'her hair streamed on her shoulders [...] she was dressed in the girlish dress she commonly wore [...] and nothing on either head or neck' (*WH*, 172). The 'deep cut under one ear', as well as the 'scratched and bruised' face, provide a more explicit shorthand of the violence committed within the bounds of *Wuthering Heights* (*WH*, 172). The reader, like Nelly, must wait for Isabella to explain the wound, leaving it as an

¹¹⁵ Pike, 'Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*', p. 179.

¹¹⁶ Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, p. 26.

undefined, lingering presence for most of her second narrative, a mystery waiting to be solved. Lawson and Shakinovsky, quoting William A. Cohen, note that ‘silence itself “composes a strategic form, not an absence, of representation”’; thus, concealed or invisible marks and bruises, serve to arouse “conjecture” as to the scene of violence and cruelty, and to the experiences of the suffering and marked body’.¹¹⁷ Although Isabella is not ultimately silent about the wound, and though it is not necessarily ‘strategic’, the injury nevertheless becomes a site (and, indeed, sight) of ‘conjecture’. Before its cause is revealed, the cut is indicative of the silence surrounding domestic abuse within Isabella’s two testimonies, acting as a visible bodily dash that the reader is left to decode. The bruises and scratches on her face, however, remain unexplained. In their inexplicable presence, they stand in as a physical embodiment both of the abuse experienced by Isabella and her subsequent refusal to reveal their cause. This opens up a perceptible division between the knife wound and the bruises, one which emblematises the narratorial demarcation between seen and unseen violence.

The visible, explained injury beneath Isabella’s ear occurs after a bloody encounter between Hindley and Heathcliff, and is a result of her own success in “rousing [Heathcliff’s] rage a pitch above his malignity” (*WH*, 174). Having spent several nights away from the Heights after learning of Cathy’s death, Heathcliff returns only to be barred entry by Hindley and Isabella. As he paces outside, the two victims of Heathcliff contemplate revenge (*WH*, 176). Hindley asks Isabella whether she is willing to “combine [with him] to discharge” a “great debt [...] with the man out yonder” (*WH*, 176). Her response is equivocal and comes close to a theory of violence that underpins her own relationship with brutality: “I’d be glad of a retaliation that wouldn’t recoil on myself; but

¹¹⁷ Lawson and Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body*, p. 7. William A. Cohen writes that ‘[e]ven without Foucault, we might have suspected from the Victorians that silence about sexuality composes a strategic form, not an absence, of representation’. See *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, NC.; London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 2.

treachery, and violence, are spears pointed at both ends – they wound those who resort to them, worse than their enemies” (*WH*, 176). Notably, like treachery and violence, Hindley’s gun-knife is a weapon ‘pointed at both ends’. While part of Isabella is drawn to the violent – “I’d be glad” – another part of her, the one focused on self-preservation rather than gratification, recognises the cyclical nature of violence: that cruelty only perpetuates cruelty. Later in her narrative, she confesses to Nelly that she could only forgive Heathcliff by taking “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, for every wrench of agony, return a wrench, reduce him to [her] level” (*WH*, 181).

Evidently, Isabella’s nuanced understanding of violence and its consequences is unstable, in that she is still gripped by the overwhelming desire to see her husband suffer. But she recognises that violent retaliation is only an appealing option when she is not the perpetrator. As Tytler notes, this understanding of violence and treachery, based on the selfish need to survive and avoid (presumably legal) repercussions, is not a particularly moral one; it is more a ‘manifestation of her respectable fear of the law [...] rather than an innate quality’.¹¹⁸ Yet, it is also a ‘manifestation’ of the unspoken abuse committed against her. Her shifting morality, and our own inability to judge her fully, largely stems from what we “don’t know”. It is the absent presence of violence that engenders this ambiguity, as well as complicating her own comprehension of her desire to commit – or, at least, witness – acts of brutality. In her silence, Isabella is left torn between desiring Heathcliff’s demise – “Wish that he were dead, I must” – and acknowledging how “wicked” such a wish makes her sound (*WH*, 178).

Isabella’s oscillating philosophy of violence – in that it moves between a sadistic longing for Heathcliff’s death, a recognition that vengeful violence would in fact harm the self, and an overarching sense of terror when faced with the threat of cruelty – is

¹¹⁸ Tytler, ‘The Presentation of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*’, p. 199.

important when considering her later enactment of brutality and subsequent narration of the event. She is willing to express vividly Hindley and Heathcliff's altercation, as the latter grabs hold of the former's gun-knife:

“The charge exploded, and the knife, in springing back, closed into its owner's wrist. Heathcliff pulled it away by main force, slitting up the flesh as it passed on, and thrust it dripping into his pocket. He then took a stone, struck down the division between two windows and sprung in. His adversary had fallen senseless with excessive pain, and the flow of blood that gushed from an artery, or a large vein.

The ruffian kicked and trampled on him, and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags; holding me with one hand, meantime, to prevent me summoning Joseph.

He exerted preter-human self-denial in abstaining from finishing him, completely; but getting out of breath, he finally desisted, and dragged the apparently inanimate body onto the settle.” (*WH*, 178–9)

The gun-knife, which Isabella admitted to coveting in her letter to Nelly, reappears here in her second narrative.¹¹⁹ She has not been given the opportunity to wield the weapon as yet; instead, she acts as the voyeur of violence in the scene. In this instance, she is powerless, held back by Heathcliff while he pummels Hindley. Crucially, however, the abuse is not directed at her specifically. She may have incited Heathcliff's rage and therefore exacerbated the situation, but she remains physically unharmed in this moment – although, she is shaken by her husband ‘till [her] teeth rattled’ (*WH*, 179). Unlike the unspoken abuse committed against her by Heathcliff, the fight between the two men does not directly involve Isabella. She remains a spectator, whose distance from the violent acts enables her to express them. Without such physical and indeed personal distance, it seems Isabella is unable to divulge violence.

¹¹⁹ Ronald E. Fine persuasively writes that Hindley's ‘combination weapon recalls the staff-cudgel condensation of [Lockwood's] first dream’. For Fine, the weapons in the narrative also figure as a “key”: ‘you cannot “get into the house” without one’. See ‘Lockwood's Dreams and the Key to *Wuthering Heights*’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.1 (1969), 16–30, pp. 21–3.

Part of the significance of Isabella's attitude towards violence and her desire to see Heathcliff suffer lies, then, in the act of seeing. As she repeatedly contends, she would never actively commit brutality against another person (although, as we shall see, she does); moreover, she accepts the illegality of violent behaviour, one that would rebound upon her own person. In this way, she is unable to enact the violence she craves; witnessing violence becomes her only other means of revenge and empowerment. She takes on the role of sadistic voyeur, someone who documents and even gains pleasure from watching the pain of others.¹²⁰ When Isabella recounts the moment Heathcliff hits her with the gun-knife, she remembers experiencing “‘pleasure in being able to exasperate him’” (*WH*, 174), which Juliet McMaster reads as the ‘first sexual arousal of her marriage’.¹²¹ For Lisa Surridge, *Wuthering Heights* ‘codes Heathcliff’s violence as darkly erotic’, a disturbing inference on which, frustratingly, Surridge does not elaborate.¹²² In relation to Isabella, as Heathcliff’s wife and the mother of his son, and taken alongside McMaster’s comments, the insinuation is troubling and potentially problematic. Although Isabella is the possible victim of marital rape and abuse, none of which is ‘darkly erotic’, she does experience pleasure from seeing others suffer and there is, as we shall see, an unsettling alignment of violence and sex within critics’ responses to Isabella’s narratives.

The morning after Heathcliff and Hindley’s bloody encounter, Isabella provokes her husband so that he forgets “‘the fiendish prudence he boasted of’” and attempts to commit “‘murderous violence’” (*WH*, 174). She taunts him about Cathy’s death, telling Hindley that “‘every one knows your sister would have been living now, had it not been for Mr Heathcliff’” (*WH*, 182). When she alludes to the “‘degrading title of Mrs

¹²⁰ Joyce Carol Oates refers to Isabella as both ‘masochistic’ and someone who ‘has enjoyed, and even provoked, her husband’s experimental sadism’. See ‘The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*’, *Critical Inquiry*, 9.2 (1982), 435–49, pp. 443–4.

¹²¹ McMaster, ‘The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff’, p. 3.

¹²² Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 82.

Heathcliff” (*WH*, 182), an echo of Cathy’s own words that it would “degrade” her to marry Heathcliff (*WH*, 81), he loses all self-control:

“The back of the settle and Earnshaw’s person interposed between me and him; so instead of endeavouring to reach me, he snatched a dinner knife from the table, and flung it at my head. It struck beneath my ear, and stopped the sentence I was uttering; but pulling it out, I sprang to the door, and delivered another which I hope went a little deeper than his missile.” (*WH*, 182–3)

Ten pages after its initial mention, the cause of Isabella’s wound is finally revealed. Crucially, there is no physical interaction between the pair. Hindley and the chair obstruct any physical contact. Once again, a distance emerges between Isabella and the violence she narrates. While this particular instance involves the violation of her own body, there remains a corporeal disconnect between the pair, one that, in turn, keeps the reader at a remove. The gap between them is surmounted by the dinner knife, a mundane and pointedly domestic alternative to the elaborate design of the gun-knife. Although this violent act is vividly described, there is the sense that this outburst is exceptional, that it exceeds Heathcliff’s usual restraint when it comes to brutality. It is graphic and shocking, but it gives little insight into the calculated beatings (or otherwise) to which Heathcliff submits Isabella.

Despite the physical distance separating Isabella and Heathcliff during their clash, McMaster deems the couple’s mutual throwing of the weapon as a kind of unification. ‘[U]nited in their hatred as they were never united in love’, McMaster contends, the pair’s shared act of flinging the knife at one another ‘is surely the true consummation of their marriage’.¹²³ Having thrown the knife back at Heathcliff, Isabella flees the house in a state of ecstasy, as she “bound[s]”, “leap[s]”, and flies towards “the beacon light of the Grange”; there is no trace of regret or guilt at having lashed out violently, only this

¹²³ McMaster, “The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff”, p. 3.

euphoric sense of release (*WH*, 183). In keeping with Isabella's shifting understanding of violence (what Pike calls her 'clear progression of thoughts of violence'), it is a fitting form of retaliation: an expression of hatred that leaves no mark and which frees her from the Heights. She arrives at the Grange in an exultant state, 'out of breath and laughing' (*WH*, 171). Her freedom, and the violent means with which she acquired it, fills her with a frenzied joy.

This returns us to McMaster's view that, in provoking Heathcliff's anger, Isabella feels the first sexual excitement of her marriage, as well as resonating with Surridge's figuration of Heathcliff's violence as 'darkly erotic'. It also takes us back to Berg's remark that no other nineteenth-century novel so 'disturbingly links sex to violence'.¹²⁴ Although Chapter Three will address sexual violence more extensively, sex – or, more specifically here, sadism – does appear to be bound up with the violence represented by Isabella. While it is contentious and potentially damaging to suggest that Isabella takes pleasure in Heathcliff's violence, it is also difficult to ignore her evident desire for violent means, especially when it is tied up with her longing for power. This unsettling combination of sex and power with violence in relation to Isabella's narrative of abuse may also account for the critical myopia surrounding her two embedded chronicles.

Yet it feels dismissive and unsavoury to write Isabella off as a sadist, as though her complex relationship with violence can be explained through her pleasure in seeing the man she despises in pain. If anything, this is a natural response to the abuse she has clearly (in that it is written on her body) suffered. Considering the powerlessness of her position, Isabella's fascination with violence is unsurprising. If, as Berg writes, Heathcliff sees 'Isabella's face as a white canvas on which he literally will make his mark', then the bruises and scratches on her skin can be read as 'visible signs of his ownership and

¹²⁴ Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, p. 10.

victories over other men', namely her brother, Edgar Linton.¹²⁵ By translating these signs of abuse for Nelly and the reader, Isabella would therefore be verbalising and confirming Heathcliff's ownership of her body and self. This leaves her in a double bind: to retain control and power over her own narrative and identity, she must paradoxically remain silent about the violence she has experienced. She must leave the bruises and scratches unexplained, untranslated. Read in this way, her silence surrounding her marked face is a reclamation of the self, consciously or unconsciously. There is also the defiance with which she laughingly bursts back into the Grange, wearing very little and offering no attempt to conceal her discoloured face. The suspicious "suggestiveness" of Isabella's marked face and its ultimate indecipherability – did she receive the bruises while running from the Heights? Or did Heathcliff use her as a "canvas"? – underline the ambiguous character of violence in the text, as well as Isabella's own ambivalent, at times invisible, place within critical interpretations of the novel.¹²⁶

And what about power? There is the inescapable sense that, in presenting certain violent episodes over others, Isabella seeks something beyond freedom. Writing about the sadism evinced by Lockwood in his second dream, Patricia Yaeger sees such violence as a product of 'the fear of the intrusive, interrogatory power of female texts' and, by extension, female voices.¹²⁷ For Yaeger, it is this fear which catalyses Lockwood's dreamt violence against Cathy's ghost; he is seized by the terror of her voice, both written and verbal, and its power over the house and himself. Isabella's letter and verbal narrative also hold an 'intrusive, interrogatory power', one situated in their silences. It is also located in

¹²⁵ Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, pp. 62–3. Lisa Surridge also notes the ways in which domestic abuse renders 'the body of the woman as a text to be deciphered'. See *Bleak Houses*, p. 3. Frances Ferguson also writes, in relation to the legal system, of the transformation of the victim's body into a text in order to be read for evidence of violence. See 'Rape and the Rise of the Novel', *Representations*, 20 (1987), 88–112, p. 91.

¹²⁶ Lawson and Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Patricia Yaeger, 'Violence in the Sitting Room: *Wuthering Heights* and the Woman's Novel', *Genre*, 21.1 (1988), 203–29, p. 220.

the disruptive and interfering role of Isabella's narratives within Nelly's story, which not only makes them powerful, but has also side-lined Isabella's voice within criticism for so long. Nelly, as the domestic but ultimately regulatory force of the text, is less threatening than the 'brazen outlaw' and potential victim of domestic violence. Isabella's distress, and her decision to both reveal and conceal that distress, disrupts the version(s) of the narrative which Lockwood tries to control and contain.¹²⁸ Despite her attempts to contain the violence perpetrated against her, Isabella remains an unruly force within the novel because interpretations of her predicament cannot be controlled or limited. By remaining within the margins of her two narratives, (domestic) violence leaves its trace everywhere. And yet, paradoxically, this is precisely why so few critics have sought to analyse Isabella's relationship with violence and her role within the novel. Through the very absence of language, whether in a dash or in the pointed omission of an act of brutality, Emily Brontë places violence at the centre of her text, as a spectral presence that can no longer be overlooked.

¹²⁸ Frangipane contends that Isabella's letter is a 'forgery' written by Lockwood. Frangipane writes that we 'do not know if Nelly read it to Lockwood or if she related it from memory, or if Lockwood saw the original document himself. See 'Lockwood the Liar', p. 32. In fact, we do know: Nelly tells Lockwood she will "read it, for [she] keep[s] it yet. Any relic of the dead is precious, if they were valued living" (*WH*, 136).

CHAPTER TWO

‘It is difficult to be tolerant – difficult to be just – in such moments’: Political Violence in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* and Selected Early Writings

In early December 1838, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School at the time, wrote a letter to the *Hertford Reformer*, in response to the first rumblings of Chartism:

Has the world ever yet seen a population so dangerous in every respect to the society in which it existed as the manufacturing population of Great Britain? Not slaves, not utterly ignorant [...]; but free men, with much intelligence, – *crowded* together in most formidable *masses*, well aware of the force of organisation, – ambitious of power and longing for the comfort which they have not, and which others have; – but not aware of the *unreasonableness* of their first desire, and the impracticability of their second. If they were slaves, they might be kept down by force: if they were what citizens ought to be, they would be peaceable alike from interest and from duty; but as they are neither the one nor the other, what is to be done?¹

Arnold’s hyperbolic description of the British manufacturing ‘masses’ as the most ‘dangerous’ portion of any society in the world underlines middle- and upper-class fears of political violence during this period. Yet his letter also neatly crystallises the strange power of the working classes, partly through their liminal position as somewhere between ‘slaves’ and ‘what citizens ought to be’, and the threat of their combined ‘intelligence’ and ‘unreasonableness’ to political stability.

¹ Thomas Arnold, ‘The State of the Manufacturing Population’, *Hertford Reformer*, 1 December 1838, quoted in Thomas Arnold, *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (New York: D. Appleton & Co.; Philadelphia, PA.: G. S. Appleton, 1845), 452–7, p. 453 [emphasis added].

An assembled crowd united by a social or political grievance was considered deeply provocative in early to mid-nineteenth century England, especially in 1848, which saw revolution erupt in Germany, France, Italy, and the Habsburg empire.² This fear of insurrection was partly a hangover from the French Revolution, but it also stemmed from an awareness of England's own fractious class relations – the very real possibility of revolutionary spirit emerging (and, crucially, prospering) in Great Britain, as Arnold's letter demonstrates. For the Victorians, as Francesco Marroni writes, Chartist crowds were 'a totally incomprehensible phenomenon embodying a monstrous violence whose immediate effects meant a fall into savagery'.³ This nineteenth-century preoccupation with containing the apparently animalistic, unfathomable working classes – 'what is to be done?' – is directly pertinent to Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849). Although the novel takes Luddism as its framework, its representations of political violence hinge on questions of legitimacy and "reasonableness", reflecting the political and social turmoil of the 1840s.

This chapter seeks to situate Charlotte Brontë's literary violences in relation to contemporary politics and political thought in response to two of this thesis's central questions: to what extent was Charlotte Brontë working within or outside of contemporary understandings of political violence? Was she in a complex dialogue with authors and newspapers of the period – or did she break with literary convention to formulate her own language of political violence? To come closer to answering these questions, this chapter considers political violence from several perspectives that reflect and intersect with early to mid-nineteenth-century perceptions of class-based politically-charged violent acts: terrorism; crowds; questions of legitimacy and "reasonableness"; contamination; and, once again, the relationship between language and violence.

² Kurt Weyland refers to this period as 'the 1848 wave, which constituted the most dramatic, rapid, and far-reaching spread of regime contention in history'. See 'The Diffusion of Revolution: "1848" in Europe and Latin America', *International Organization*, 63.3 (2009), 391–423, p. 396.

³ Francesco Marroni, *Victorian Disharmonies: A Reconsideration of Nineteenth-Century English Fiction* (Rome: John Cabot University Press, 2010), p. 16.

All three Brontë sisters – who wrote about political wars and class conflict from an early age in their Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal sagas, as noted in Chapter One – have been firmly placed in their contemporary political context by critics including Terry Eagleton, Patricia Ingham, and Simon Avery.⁴ As Charlotte Brontë’s lifelong friend, Mary Taylor, recalled to Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontës were ‘furious politicians’ as children and Charlotte herself ‘said she had taken interest in politics ever since she was five years old’.⁵ The decision to focus on Charlotte rather than Anne or Emily Brontë in regard to political violence rests on the more overt nature in which Charlotte Brontë grapples with the link between violence and the political. Anne and Emily Brontë were by no means apolitical writers, and their writing reveals an astute awareness of the legal, cultural, and socioeconomic moment in which they lived, but their novels do not deal explicitly with a specific historical moment or piece of legislation.⁶

Charlotte Brontë, on the other hand, recycles the same narrative of political violence throughout her writing life. As noted, *Shirley* places political violence at its centre and includes multiple mediated scenes of brutality and bloodshed, several of which were based on real-life accounts of Yorkshire Luddism. Much of her early writing, primarily between the years 1833 and 1838, runs along similar lines, revealing a fixation with certain instances of political violence from the early nineteenth century. Several of her Angrian

⁴ Terry Eagleton’s *Myths of Power* situates the Brontës in their social and industrial context through a Marxist reading of their work. Eagleton writes: ‘[f]ar from being sublimely secluded from their history, that history entered, shaped and violated the inmost recesses of their personal lives.’ See *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Anniversary Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 7. Patricia Ingham notes the centrality of politics in the Brontës’ juvenilia, a significance that fed into their later works: ‘As the Angrian stories reveal by their plots, it was largely the manoeuvres in the struggle for control between the two political parties that seem to have fascinated the Brontës’. See *The Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 40. See also Simon Avery, ‘Politics’, in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 261–8; and Simon Avery, ‘Politics, Legal Concerns, and Reforms’, in *A Companion to the Brontës*, eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Deborah Denenholz Morse (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 471–84.

⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 131. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁶ Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is arguably responding to issues of coverture and the lack of legal rights for women and wives, but it does not explicitly contend with a particular law. Chapter Three discusses the novel’s engagement with the legal system and violence against women in more depth. See also Ian Ward, ‘The Case of Helen Huntingdon’, *Criticism*, 49.2 (2007), 151–82.

stories, which will be discussed later in this chapter, revolve around the threat of revolt, the burning of mills, and the shooting of mill-owners. Despite Charlotte Brontë's contention that she lacked the skill to write books about 'the topics of the day', as she told her publisher George Smith in 1852, she clearly felt comfortable writing about topics of the recent past.⁷ As Patricia Ingham writes: 'Though written during the collapse of the Chartist movement for political reform, the confrontation preferred by Brontë [in *Shirley*] is one safely sealed into the past of almost forty years earlier'.⁸ This distance is important to keep in mind when considering the historical instances of political violence to which Charlotte Brontë so often returns, particularly in relation to the mediated nature of her representations of conflict and the ambivalent tone adopted in *Shirley* and a selection of her juvenilia.

The Boundaries of Political Violence

The prominence of politics, violence, and, indeed, political violence in Charlotte Brontë's work provokes the question of what is meant by the term "political violence", primarily in relation to the nineteenth-century context. As Sarah Cole notes, 'for contemporary theorists, violence is almost always political' and, since 'at least the nineteenth century, violence has been understood and registered as an ineluctable aspect of industrial modernity'.⁹ In 1844, Friedrich Engels drew the violent nature of industrialisation down class lines, writing that: 'this war grows from year to year, as the criminal tables show, more violent, passionate, irreconcilable. The enemies are dividing gradually into two great

⁷ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, 30 October 1852, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume III: 1852–1855*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 74–5, p. 75.

⁸ Patricia Ingham, *The Language of Gender and Class: Transformation in the Victorian Novel* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 34.

⁹ Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 20–1.

camps – the bourgeoisie on the one hand, the workers on the other.¹⁰ Engels positions the ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘the workers’ as both reliant on force, an idea which Brontë’s *Shirley* also raises.¹¹ Yet, during the period in which the Brontës published their novels, violence was typically located as a working-class issue. This is borne out by Gaskell’s depiction of Haworth in the opening of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), as the working people of the district are characterised as violent and “uncivilised”. This representation fits with J. Carter Wood’s delineation of the emergence of two clashing ‘dominant mentalities of violence’ in nineteenth-century England, as outlined in the Introduction: the “civilised”; and the “customary”.¹²

The association of the middle and upper classes with ‘rationality and self-restraint’ also meant that, when they did use force, it was more readily justifiable than violence stemming from a working-class source. As Anna Clark writes, due to the ongoing association between violent behaviour and working-class life, violence ‘acquired a symbolic currency in political discourse, for middle-class men pointed to their own self-control as a justification for their claims to political power while at the same time attacking the working class as too violent to deserve the vote’.¹³ The middle- and upper-classes, then, had ‘the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’, in line with Max Weber’s conceptualisation of the state.¹⁴ Such formulations of political violence as rooted in class and industrial conflict, alongside the differentiation between “civilised” and “customary” approaches to violence, are central to the proceeding considerations of Brontë’s work.

¹⁰ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 143.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 3–4.

¹³ Anna Clark, ‘Humanity or Justice?: Wifebeating and the Law in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, ed. Carol Smart (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 187–206, p. 197.

¹⁴ Max Weber, ‘Politics as a Vocation’, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 77–128, p. 78.

Much has been written on the violent political episodes in *Shirley*, particularly the mill attack. Critics such as Sally Shuttleworth and Philip Rogers have contributed immeasurably to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of politics and its interactions with violence in *Shirley*.¹⁵ This is by no means an exhaustive list, as the presence of Luddism in the novel has and continues to have a certain critical currency.¹⁶ Although many of these critics mention or elaborate on violence of a political nature in Charlotte Brontë's writing, the violence in and of itself – as a mediated, often unseen presence in the novel – remains a largely un-broached topic. Even nineteenth-century reviewers, as Ingham notes, 'often ignored' the attack on Moore and his mill in their critical appraisals.¹⁷

This chapter seeks to partially rectify this gap by focusing specifically on scenes of political violence in *Shirley* and a selection of Brontë's juvenilia. While there are several instances of violence within the novel, such as the dog bite Shirley Keeldar receives and then cauterises herself, as well as the societal suppression of women with which Caroline Helstone mentally and physically grapples, politically inflected violent incidents are the focus here. This chapter considers political violence to be embodied by physical or linguistic force committed against a person or property; and as something that emerges, as Ekkart Zimmerman writes, out of a '*process* that takes place between various groups or categories of actors within a political system'.¹⁸ Crucially for the following discussion, politicised acts of violence are not 'limited to acts performed by rebels against the state, but should also apply to violent activities carried out by agents against its citizens'.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Philip Rogers, 'Tory Brontë: Shirley and the "MAN"', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58.2 (2003), 141–75.

¹⁶ Critics who have written about Luddism and the mill attack in *Shirley*, but are not mentioned elsewhere within this chapter, include: Asa Briggs, 'Private and Social Themes in *Shirley*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 13.3 (1958), 203–19; Ken Hiltner, 'Shirley and the Luddites', *Brontë Studies*, 33.2 (2008), 148–58; and Peter J. Capuano, 'Networked Manufacture in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Victorian Studies*, 55.2 (2013), 231–42.

¹⁷ Ingham, *The Language of Gender and Class*, p. 32.

¹⁸ Ekkart Zimmerman, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research* (Oxford: Routledge, 1983), p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Charlotte Brontë's Early Tales of Political Violence

Much of Charlotte Brontë's juvenilia reveals an early fascination with political violence, particularly riots, frame-breaking, and the destruction of property. And, as Avery notes, Glass Town was founded on the 'European colonisation of an African state, massacre of the native race, revolution and aristocratic figures fighting for political control'.²⁰ Brontë's 'The Bridal' (1832), 'Something About Arthur' (1833), and 'Stancliffe's Hotel' (1838) all feature a rioting mob, with the former two stories also involving an attack on a mill. These stories, written by Brontë between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, adumbrate many of the issues that emerge in her later novels, but they are especially germane to the climactic scenes of political conflict represented in *Shirley* over ten years later. This section explores these three stories' representations of political violence, tracing the overlaps and differences between *Shirley* and earlier iterations to gain a deeper understanding of Brontë's evolving perception of nineteenth-century class conflicts and her preoccupation with certain instances of political violence.

Gaskell accounts for the centrality of political violence within Charlotte Brontë's oeuvre through the frequent stories told by Brontë's headmistress at Roe Head and long-term friend, Margaret Wooleer. During the Saturday half-holidays from 1831 to 1832, around the time Charlotte wrote 'The Bridal' and a year before she wrote 'Something About Arthur', Wooleer would tell her pupils local stories from the past while out on long rambles. As Gaskell relates, she spoke 'of those times; of the mysterious nightly drillings; of thousands on lonely moors; of the muttered threats of individuals too closely pressed upon by necessity to be prudent; of the overt acts, in which the burning of Cartwright's mill took a prominent place' (*Life*, 134–5). These were unstable times in the early nineteenth century, when, as Gaskell writes, 'the people of England, represented by the

²⁰ Avery, 'Politics', p. 262.

workers of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire, should make their voice heard in a terrible slogan, since their true and pitiful complaints could find no hearing in parliament' (*Life*, 134). Through Wooler's account, Gaskell offers a sympathetic take on the Luddite uprisings: far from being a result of 'half-ludicrous' grievances, as they are often remembered, there was a 'real intensity' to 'their sufferings'; they 'were maddened and desperate' (*Life*, 134). As we shall see later in this chapter, some of this compassion for the working 'people of England' is detectable in *Shirley*, although the novel's ambivalence means that its depiction of the Luddites often eludes any fixed interpretation. Yet it was the political machinations and the accompanying violences of Margaret Wooler's stories that 'sank deep into the mind' of Charlotte Brontë, so much so that political violence became a recurring motif throughout her writing life (*Life*, 135).

In 'Something About Arthur', Brontë re-imagines an uprising against a mill which resembles the attack on William Cartwright's mill in 1812, one of the stories re-counted to Charlotte by Miss Wooler at Roe Head and which acted as a source of inspiration for the central political conflict in *Shirley*. As Christine Alexander notes, the mill attack in 'Something About Arthur' 'crudely foreshadows the attack on Robert Moore's mill in *Shirley*'.²¹ Indeed, Heather Glen writes that a 'key to the novel can [...] be found in the writings of Glass Town and Angria', and that *Shirley* offers an 'ironic, distancing, self-referential narrative stance' to rival that of Charles Townshend, the sardonic narrator of much of Brontë's juvenilia.²² Brontë's second published novel can be figured, then, as a return to an earlier narrative of the same event. The significance of Brontë's early writing both in and of itself, as well as in relation to her later published novels, has been emphasised in recent years, with the Brontë juvenilia now positioned as foundational to

²¹ Christine Alexander, n. 39, in Charlotte Brontë, 'Something About Arthur', in *An Edition of The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II: The Rise of Angria 1833–1835: Part I: 1833–1834*, ed. Christine Alexander (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 7–40, p. 26. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

²² Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 146–7.

twenty-first-century understandings of the family's lives and works. Much of Charlotte's early work, including the tiny books she and Branwell – initially alongside Anne and Emily Brontë, before the pair broke away to form their own fantasy realm of Gondal – created together, acted as a testing-ground for the themes she would revisit throughout her career as a published author. These early stories were safe spaces in which she could, as Alexander writes, 'subvert topical political events of Victorian England' and 'indulge in gratuitous violence'.²³ Yet the specificity of the violences in Charlotte Brontë's Angrian stories is hard to ignore, particularly as she returns to the same scenes of such 'gratuitous violence' repeatedly throughout her writing life.

'Something About Arthur' sees the perennial Byronic hero of Brontë's earlier work, Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Zamorna, traverse the boundaries of class by leading a coup against his enemy's father's mill. After a disagreement with Lord Caversham, in which he sabotaged the chances of Zamorna's horse winning a race, Zamorna challenges Caversham to a duel which results in the former falling from a monument 'with a force that dashed every bone in his body to atoms' ('SAA', 24). Such humiliation, coupled with a desire for vengeance, leads Zamorna into collusion with Ned Laury, a loyalist to Zamorna's father, the Duke of Wellington, and a man who seeks his own form of revenge against Caversham. For, it was Caversham who 'clapped' Laury's father in 'one of those vile rumbling mills of his just for shooting a few brute beasts such as deer and partridges' ('SAA', 26). Alongside 'some other sweet apes' – notably animalistic language – Laury plans to 'burn the mill, kill the guard and overseers, and let all the prisoners loose' ('SAA', 26). Zamorna is invited to join the rebellion and he accepts on the condition that he is appointed their 'leader for [he] cannot submit to act under part in any enterprise' ('SAA', 26). This demand is, as Laury says, 'rather bold' and ultimately places the command of

²³ Christine Alexander, 'Autobiography and Juvenilia: The Fractured Self in Charlotte Brontë's Early Manuscripts', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, eds. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 154–72, p. 162.

the rebellion in the hands of the aristocracy ('SAA', 26). While the mill attack in 'Something About Arthur' is not perpetrated for the same political motives as in *Shirley* (although the freeing of prisoners is a defiant act against authority and vengeance is a recurring motive in both narratives), it is intriguing that, in *Shirley*, Brontë replaces the distinctly upper-class Zamorna with the 'mad', often drunken working-class Luddites such as Mike Hartley (*S*, 224).

The nuances of nineteenth-century class conflict – which will be considered in more depth in relation to *Shirley* later in this chapter – could have been lost in the subverting of class in 'Something About Arthur'. Yet it is telling that the reader is given access to the rioters' perspective in the story and is encouraged to root for Zamorna's side, including the rebels. Zamorna's 'coadjutors in this desperate undertaking' are 'as wild a group a[s] could be found in the most savage recesses of the Alps or Apennines', though they could also pass 'for a model of Hercules or Miletus' ('SAA', 26). Their arms are no longer limbs, but 'pistols, long fowling pieces, bludgeons and knives of a peculiar form' ('SAA', 27). Notably, prior to the attack on Cartwright's mill in 1812, as Margaret Wooler recalled to Gaskell, some 'hundreds of starving cloth-dressers [...] were armed by their leaders with pistols, hatchets, and bludgeons' ready for the rebellion (*Life*, 135).

In Gaskell's *Life*, these starving men are not given a voice; and in 'Something About Arthur', these "savages" only speak once and in monosyllables – a simple and collective "We do" – which emphasises their apparent intellectual paucity ('SAA', 27). Unlike Zamorna and Laury, and indeed the Luddites of the 1810s, these men have no apparent motive with which to justify their subsequent violence; they are there to fight, not talk. Even Laury, however, is reduced to barbarity. When the guards are found drunk, Laury tells Zamorna that they may 'now all be butchered without trouble', a statement which Arthur terms 'barbarous' ('SAA', 29). He proceeds to give a politicised lecture to the rebels, telling them that they did not 'come here to murder a few paltry defenceless

underlings but to rescue the oppressed and to wreak vengeance on the head of a treacherous tyrant' ('SAA', 29). The order to simply "bind [the guards] hand and foot, carry them to the opposite bank of the river, set the prisoners free, fire the mill and then return quietly to [their] own homes" is met with some disappointment from his "savage" assistants, who were looking forward to using their weapons ('SAA', 29). The prisoners, including Laury's frail father, are freed and (somewhat predictably) Zamorna is showered with thanks for his brave leadership. Having set fire to the mill, Zamorna makes his own escape, revelling privately in the success of his plan of vengeance against Caversham. Uttering aloud his delight in having "revenged [*sic*]" the fate of his horse Thunderbolt, Zamorna's jubilation is broken suddenly by a 'shrill voice close beside' him: "And so shall my Lord Caversham" ('SAA', 31). Before Zamorna 'could turn to glance at the speaker, the report of a pistol followed and he fell senseless to the earth with an ounce of cold lead in his body' ('SAA', 31).

The divergences, as well as the similarities, between the shooting of Zamorna and the shooting of Robert Moore in *Shirley* are noteworthy. In both cases, the act of violence itself is unseen by the reader, witnesses, and target. Zamorna is hit in the moment between hearing Captain Tree's words and turning around, meaning that Tree goes unobserved. It is only after Laury finds Zamorna, 'weltering in a pool of blood', that Tree is tracked down by a 'diligent investigation' and found dead in an old drain ('SAA', 33). Conversely, Moore is shot from behind a hedge and – while it is unclear as to whether he sees Mike Hartley shooting him – the witness of the attempted assassination, Hiram Yorke, sees only a hat rising and a voice speaking from behind the wall.²⁴ Unlike Laury, Moore 'knew who had shot him'; instead of pursuing him, however, the would-be murderer goes unpunished and dies of 'delirium tremens a year after the attempt on Moore, and Robert

²⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley: A Tale*, ed. Jessica Cox (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 508. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

gave his wretched widow a guinea to bury him' (S, 596–7). This decision not to pursue justice at the novel's end contrasts with Moore's earlier efforts to hunt down 'like any sleuth-hound' the leaders of the earlier mill attack (S, 362). Both acts are committed to avenge someone: in 'Something About Arthur', it is Lord Caversham, the despotic owner of the mill-prison, who is punished; in *Shirley*, it is the 'four convicts of Birmingham', the men found guilty of the attack on Moore's mill and subsequently deported to Australia (S, 508). This cycle of vengeance in *Shirley* is broken by Moore's refusal to hunt down his assailant, implicitly positioning him as the moral arbiter of the political conflict.

The fact that the mill-owning Caversham is painted in such an unappealing way – as a powerful man who incarcerates others simply for shooting game, 'gloats' over his prisoners' 'prolonged torments' ('SAA', 31), and unfairly prevents Arthur's prized horse from winning its race – suggests that the reader is encouraged to side with Zamorna and condemn Tree for shooting him. In *Shirley*, however, it is the mill owner, Moore, who is shot. Alexander's assertion that 'Something About Arthur' was a crude prefiguring of *Shirley* is apt here, as the implications of Moore's shooting are more refined than that of Zamorna's. As we shall see, in *Shirley*, it is less clear as to where the narrator wishes the reader's sympathies to lie, as Moore's character is not always represented sympathetically; one of the few working-class voices in the novel, William Farren, considers him to be 'a selfish, an unfeeling, and [...] a foolish man' (S, 134). But, repeatedly, the reader is shown Moore's perspective over that of the rioters', who appear more as a mob than individuals.

In its earlier incarnation in 'Something About Arthur', then, the mill attack presents a more straightforward hero/villain binary regarding political violence in which there is far less nuance than in *Shirley*. Although, it must be noted that Brontë inverts this binary by positioning the 'heroes' as the (aristocratic) rioters and the 'villains' as the mill owners. Zamorna is unequivocally the hero, and Lord Caversham and Captain Tree the villains. By the time Charlotte Brontë came to write *Shirley*, her understanding of and

ability to depict the subtleties and contradictions involved in offering both sides of the conflict had understandably matured.

‘The Bridal’, written a year before ‘Something About Arthur’, also features a political insurrection and a shooting: the ‘Great Rebellion headed by Alexander Rogue [the Earl of Northangerland]’.²⁵ Notably, 1832 was itself a momentous year politically, as it saw the passing of the Great Reform Act, partly in a bid to curb the ‘threat of violence’ and revolt in Britain following the Swing Riots of 1831 and the ongoing fallout from the French Revolution.²⁶ In the story, knowledge of the Great Rebellion falls upon the city of Verdopolis ‘with the suddenness and violence of a thunderbolt’ and, in response to the news of imminent rebellion, ‘the lower orders in Verdopolis’ begin to show ‘symptoms of dissatisfaction’ (‘TB’, 344). Such discontent leads to workmen at ‘the principal mills and furnaces’ striking ‘for an advance in wages, and, the masters refusing to comply with their exorbitant demands, they all turned out simultaneously’ (‘TB’, 344). Soon after this dissonance, one of the ‘great mill-owners’ is shot and presumably killed (‘TB’, 344–5). As with the would-be assassin of Zamorna, and those who attacked Moore’s mill, the perpetrators are rounded up, ‘delivered up to justice’, and ‘interrogated by torture’ (‘TB’, 345). In a similar way to Patrick Brontë’s alleged ‘habit [...] of invariably carrying a loaded pistol about with him’ after having lived in the West Riding during the Luddite disturbances (*Life*, 90), Brontë has her Verdopolitan authorities declare that ‘no citizen should walk abroad unarmed’ (‘TB’, 345). The threat of impending violence pushes the fictionalised state to double the police force and to openly encourage citizens to bear arms, underlining the contagious potency of the threat of political violence.

²⁵ Charlotte Brontë, ‘The Bridal’, in *An Edition of The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë: Volume I: The Glass Town Saga: 1826–1832*, ed. Christine Alexander (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 335–48, p. 344. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

²⁶ See Tokes S. Aidt and Raphaël Franck, ‘Democratisation Under the Threat of Revolution: Evidence from the Great Reform Act of 1832’, *Econometrica*, 83.2 (2015), 505–47.

Through Zamorna, Brontë offers an alternative version of Lord Byron's famous polemic against the Frame-breaking Act, which made frame-breaking a capital offence, in his maiden speech in the House of Lords in February 1812. Byron's speech highlighted the 'unparalleled distress' of industrial workers at that time and took Parliament to task on the ease with which they passed 'death-bills' rather than reform bills: 'When a proposal is made to emancipate or relieve, you hesitate, you deliberate for years, you temporise and tamper with the minds of men; but a death-bill must be passed off hand, without a thought of the consequences.'²⁷ Zamorna's stirring speech, however, diverges from Byron's in tone, not least because he contends that the 'latent flame of rebellion smouldering' in the city can be quenched with 'blood alone' ('TB', 345). Here, and in contrast to Byron, he is inciting violence and, like the state in 1812, encouraging citizens to meet blood with blood. He tells the people of Verdopolis to '[a]rm for the battle [...] be not faint-hearted [...] and let [their] war-shout in the onslaught ever be: "God defend the right!"' ('TB', 346). Zamorna is given the last word on the threatened uprising, while – as we shall see in *Shirley* – the dissatisfied and suffering people of the 'lower orders' remain virtually silent but always primed for violence. It is this silence which perhaps engenders the fear, as articulated by Arnold, felt by the middle and upper classes, who perceived the working classes to be an elusive, volatile, and 'incomprehensible' section of society.

Brontë's 'Mina Laury' (1838) – which centres on the relationship between Zamorna and his first love, Mina Laury, daughter of Ned Laury – opens after the civil war, catalysed by Northangerland's plotting against his son-in-law, Zamorna. In the story, the reader is plunged into the political machinations of Angria and its surrounding provinces, a realm plagued by civil unrest and scarred by the ravages of recent war. The

²⁷ Lord Byron, 'Maiden Speech', in R. C. Dallas Esq., *Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron: From the Year 1808 to the End of 1814* (London: printed for Charles Knight, 1824), 205–18, pp. 206, 217.

embers of the violent civil war sparked by Northangerland's plot are kept alight by newspapers in a bid to undermine Zamorna's authority, particularly the *War Despatch*, 'noted for the ardour of its sentiments, which growls a threat concerning the power of Angria to elect a new sovereign whenever she is offended with her old one'.²⁸ The violence of the conflict left Angria 'laid in ashes – plague and famine and slaughter'; yet, Zamorna refuses to break absolutely his bond with Northangerland, as he is 'guided, ruled and beguiled' by his father-in-law.²⁹

The unrest caused by Zamorna's decision to continue his interaction with Northangerland emerges again in 'Stancliffe's Hotel', set six months after the incidents of 'Mina Laury'. As the narrator, Charles Townshend, watches 'from a window in the second storey' of the hotel, a 'frantic mob' gathers outside Stancliffe's Hotel awaiting the Duke of Zamorna's imminent arrival into the city of Zamorna to protest his ongoing relations with Northangerland.³⁰ As Townshend informs us, 'the nobility and gentry of the town were by no means at war with the lower orders' and, in fact, relished their vocal protestations against 'the arch-enemy', Rogue ('SH', 110). Yet they did fear the eruption of 'unseemly and impolitic ebullition' ('SH', 110). Notably, 'few ladies' are seen on the streets before the crowd gathers ('SH', 109); and Mary, the Duchess of Zamorna, hides herself in fear of the rioters while her husband attempts to appease them with the threat that they will be 'ridden down in five minutes' by 'three hundred horsemen' if they do not cease ('SH', 115). When Zamorna finally addresses this welcome to his kingdom, it is the 'lads' and '[m]en of Zamorna [the city]' to whom he speaks, making it clear that the domain of political violence is a male one ('SH', 114–5). The scene escalates as Zamorna's call for order fails to calm the crowd. They ignore his pleas and assail the 'royal carriage'

²⁸ Charlotte Brontë, 'Mina Laury', in *Tales of Angria*, ed. Heather Glen (London: Penguin, 2006), 3–62, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁰ Charlotte Brontë, 'Stancliffe's Hotel', in *Tales of Angria*, ed. Heather Glen (London: Penguin, 2006), 63–124, pp. 110, 113. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

(‘SH’, 114). With his authoritative position threatened, Zamorna commands his cavalry to attack the mob.³¹

In this moment, the failure of language to calm the crowd leads to the use of state-sanctioned violence as a political weapon. The need for physical violence transcends the power of language, complicating Burkhard Liebsch’s view that violence and language are ‘*internally* connected’.³² Where linguistic force fails to elicit the desired response, violence is used. Notably in this scene, and unlike in ‘The Bridal’, Zamorna speaks directly with one of the agitators in the crowd. The individualising of a member of the mob makes it harder for Zamorna to assume ultimate control, as though the intrusion of a working-class voice into the political arena dilutes the potency of Zamorna’s power. Crucially, it is Zamorna who escalates the scenario from reasoned debate with a bannerman to a full-blown clash between the people and the state. By signalling for ‘six special constables’ to ‘execute the Duke’s mandate’, thereby removing the banner from the bannerman, Zamorna tips the crowd over the edge (‘SH’, 114).

Weber’s view that the state is ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ is apt here. As is Avery’s observation that the Angrian tales ‘raise issues to do with [...] strategies of war and seemingly “legitimate” violence’.³³ Zamorna has the authoritative right – the monopoly – to wield “legitimate” violence upon his people; they hold no such power and, so, their attempts to hold the state accountable for its actions backfire and are subsequently rendered illegitimate. When the mob finally disperses, only a ‘few wounded

³¹ There are echoes here of the Peterloo Massacre of 16 August 1819, in which the military charged at a crowd of sixty-thousand people gathering on St Peter’s Fields in Manchester to ‘hear Henry Hunt and local radicals proclaim the message of universal suffrage’. Six-hundred and fifty people were injured and eighteen killed. As Katrina Navickas notes, the ‘question of legitimacy’ has surrounded interpretations of Peterloo ‘ever since that fateful day’. See *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 82–4.

³² Burkhard Liebsch, ‘What Does (Not) *Count* as Violence: On the State of Recent Debates About the Inner Connection Between Language and Violence’, *Human Studies*, 36.1 (2013), 7–24, p. 8.

³³ Avery, ‘Politics’, p. 262.

men [...] were left with shattered limbs, lying on the pavement'; these men were soon taken to hospital, 'their blood was washed from the stones, and no sign remained of what had happened' ('SH', 115). Again, the instance of violence that causes these injuries is not detailed; the moment passes in a 'whirlwind' as the protestors 'flew like chaff' from the cavalry ('SH', 115). Their broken, nameless bodies are then removed from the scene and their blood is washed away. The traces of political violence can be obliterated from the environment, just as the remnants of the attack on Moore's mill in *Shirley* are eradicated; but not necessarily from memory, especially the collective memory of Angria and, indeed, Charlotte Brontë's own.

Brontë's fascination with the Luddite stories told by Miss Wooler divulges a broader interest in political violence. What drove this captivation with and desire to rewrite this specific moment in history? Why does Brontë repeatedly re-imagine the same tropes throughout her writing life? There is the obvious point that her father had lived through this period of instability and that the Brontë siblings grew up in the surrounding area, making it likely that they heard similar tales from various quarters. As Marianne Thormählen writes, the Luddite years 'were in [Charlotte Brontë's] imaginative bloodstream and she used them'.³⁴ It is, however, harder to account for her ongoing impulse to rework the same scene again and again. Kate Brown contends that, through their Glass Town and Angrian sagas, Charlotte and Branwell Brontë 'perpetuate the Napoleonic era, with its prospects for heroic action'.³⁵ Although, as Thormählen notes, 'the main action in every single Brontë novel is set in a pre-Victorian historical period',

³⁴ Marianne Thormählen, 'The Brontë Novels as Historical Fiction', *Brontë Studies*, 40.4 (2015), 276–82, p. 279.

³⁵ Kate Brown, 'Beloved Objects: Mourning, Materiality, and Charlotte Brontë's "Never-Ending Story"', *ELH*, 65.2 (1998), 395–421, p. 396.

suggesting that this desire to return to and even preserve a specific era was not limited to their early writing.³⁶

Brown goes on to associate their ‘manipulation of external history’ with a ‘larger refusal of causality within the Angrian legend’, in which they possess ‘godlike powers to reverse effects’, thereby enabling ‘conflicting versions of the same events [to] coexist without possibility or necessity of adjudication’.³⁷ For Charlotte Brontë, “‘the real’ is, first, a fiction, and, second, a fiction whose role is not to mirror reality but to change it’.³⁸ Brontë is, indeed, rewriting and manipulating history; there is something cyclical and, as Brown notes, “‘never-ending’” about her returning to the shadowy outline of the same story.³⁹ Of course, the mill attack and the accompanying political violences are not the only recurring themes found throughout Brontë’s work. But the political violences of her early writing and its overlaps with *Shirley* feel noticeably persistent, particularly as the underlying structure of the plot never really changes. Contrary to Brown’s view that there is a ‘refusal of causality’ in Brontë’s tales of Glass Town and Angria, a teleological development is detectable between her early representations of political violence and her second novel, one seemingly put to rest with the latter’s publication.

Another recurring preoccupation for Brontë, particularly pertinent in relation to the following discussion of *Shirley*, is that the political violences represented in ‘The Bridal’, ‘Something About Arthur’, and ‘Stancliffe’s Hotel’ all exist alongside romantic narratives, largely revolving around women’s infatuation with Zamorna. Alexander contends that, unlike Branwell Brontë’s early stories which chronicle ‘wars and political upheavals [...] in obsessive detail’, Charlotte Brontë’s early work focuses on ‘the

³⁶ Marianne Thormählen, ‘Introduction’, in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–8, p. 4.

³⁷ Brown, ‘Beloved Objects’, p. 396.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

entangled love affairs of Zamorna and Percy and their many wives and mistresses'.⁴⁰ These more domestic strands of the stories often involve their own forms of violence, such as Mina Laury's rather far-fetched stabbing of a tigress ('SAA', 36) and Lady Zenobia Elrington's threat to kill herself if Zamorna refuses to reciprocate her love ('TB', 346). Violence committed or threatened by women is most often directed at an animal or towards themselves, as will be discussed in Chapter Four on religious violence in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853). In these texts, a woman's wrath is rarely levelled at a man, indicating that, when it comes to violence, there are different rules for men and women.

While this is only a sample of Charlotte Brontë's early work, the divide between male and female experiences of violence is also raised in *Shirley* and will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Three on gendered violence in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), and in the Afterword. Female violence directed inwardly, rather than externally, is much more common in Charlotte Brontë's work, as will be considered in Chapter Four regarding the biblically inflected representations of Lucy Snowe's psychological pain in *Villette*. What Brontë's blending of political violences with domestic themes in her juvenilia and *Shirley* tells us, however, is that the personal does indeed encroach on the political; and the unifying feature of this encroachment is – in both her early writing and later novel – violence.

Translating and Legitimising Violence in *Shirley*

In an echo of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's politically charged *Shirley* often resists the temptation to represent violence explicitly. This is despite

⁴⁰ Christine Alexander, 'Juvenilia', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 98–106, p. 100.

– or perhaps because of – the text taking the violences of West Riding Luddites in the 1810s as its backdrop. Set between 1811 and 1812, *Shirley* centres on Yorkshire Luddism, at a time when new industrial technological advancements were being introduced into factories across England. These machines, as the narrator of *Shirley* explains, ‘threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life’ (*S*, 30). A pocket of these disenfranchised workers sought retaliation by destroying the technology that had replaced them and by disseminating their political message to a wider audience through poetry and other literary forms. The Luddites were also associated with more serious crimes, including the assassination of William Horsfall, the owner of a large woollen mill near Huddersfield.⁴¹ This real-life murder inspired Brontë when dramatising the attempted assassination of her novel’s “hero” Robert Moore, the Anglo-Belgian mill-owner. Moreover, this was a period of widespread disorder beyond national borders, as the Napoleonic Wars were ongoing from 1803 to 1815 and had a direct impact on the textile industry in the North of England.⁴² The narrator of *Shirley* remarks that, during this period, the ‘throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties. But, as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice’ (*S*, 30).

By taking Yorkshire Luddism as *Shirley*’s framework, Charlotte Brontë places political violence at the centre of its narrative. Despite this, much of the novel’s inclusions of violence are largely undescribed and even unwitnessed, often displaced to another site, such as a letter or nameless voice. When politically motivated attacks committed by working-class characters are represented, these moments are mediated by an upper-middle-class spectator or translator. The remainder of this chapter focuses on such instances of political violence in *Shirley*, seeking to identify and explore the presence and

⁴¹ Charlotte Brontë read about this incident in the back issues of the *Leeds Mercury*, which reported the assassination on 2 May 1812, referring to William Horsfall as a ‘very extensive Manufacturer’. See ‘Atrocious Murder’, *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1812, 2445 (Leeds).

⁴² See Ingham, *The Brontës*, p. 111.

significance of politically motivated violence in the novel, emphasising its centrality within the text, and highlighting its connection with nineteenth-century attitudes to and ideas of legitimacy, terrorism, class conflict, and the contaminating effects of (political) violence.

While fixing the novel in the context of early-nineteenth-century frame-breaking in Yorkshire, *Shirley* also responds to the contemporary issue of the Chartist uprisings of 1838 to 1848 through the more distant, and seemingly resolved, concerns of Luddism.⁴³ Brontë's novel *Shirley* has become one of the primary interlocutors within twentieth- and twenty-first-century discussions of both Luddism and Chartism, arguably bridging the gap between these two formative periods in Britain's industrial and political history.⁴⁴ This historical distancing is central to a fuller understanding of the representations of political violence in *Shirley*, which is itself distanced through an upper-middle-class mediating spectator or translator. While this chapter does not offer an in-depth consideration of *Shirley*'s connection to Chartism, it is worth raising this link primarily because it situates Brontë within her contemporary moment, indicating that she was, indeed, responding to nineteenth-century discourses on political violence. Brontë's novel gives an insight into the legacy of Luddism, how it was remembered by society, and how it can shed light on the Chartist movement. Indeed, E. P. Thompson writes of how 'faithfully' *Shirley* reimagines certain key events from instances of frame-breaking in Yorkshire, including the Rawfolds Mill attack and the shooting of Horsfall.⁴⁵ Yet Thompson also acknowledges that the novel's 'limitations' lie 'in the treatment of the Luddites and their sympathisers'.⁴⁶ Such apparent 'limitations' will be explored throughout this chapter.

⁴³ As Eagleton writes, 'there can be no doubt that Chartism is the unspoken subject of *Shirley*'. See *Myths of Power*, p. 45.

⁴⁴ For instances of Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* being referenced within studies of Luddism, see 'The Luddites at 200' website's 'Resources and Links' list <<http://www.luddites200.org.uk/links.html>> [Accessed 19 October 2018]; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 613, 615, 638, 640; and Brian Bailey, *The Luddite Rebellion* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1998), pp. 61–2. R. J. Morris's article linking the Luddites with Jacobinism also mentions *Shirley* and cites the novel as an example of 'Further Reading' on the subject. See 'The Luddites', *Futures*, 15.2 (1983), 154–5.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 613.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Much of *Shirley*'s "faithfulness" comes from Brontë's decision to acquaint herself with the 1812 to 1814 editions of the *Leeds Mercury*, a frequent presence in the Parsonage and a newspaper read by the Brontë siblings from an early age.⁴⁷ In terms of the newspaper's reporting of violence, Patrick Collier notes that, 'on a weekly basis, [the *Leeds Mercury*] provided its readers with the spectacle of violent crime in grotesque physical detail'.⁴⁸ While the *Mercury* was not as overt in its descriptions of war and bloodshed as the '[m]anly, independent print, the *War Despatch*' of the Brontës' juvenilia, it often – like many other nineteenth-century newspapers – represented riots, frame-breaking, and national crimes in unsparing terms ('SH', 80).⁴⁹ The representation of violence in newspapers is important to bear in mind when considering Brontë's depictions of violence in *Shirley*, not least because, as Clive Emsley notes, 'media accounts, sensational or not, provide a window onto contemporary attitudes and understandings [of violence]'.⁵⁰ As we shall see, Brontë was influenced by newspaper reports of Luddism, further indicating that her representations of political violence were in line – or, at least, in dialogue – with contemporary depictions.

Within the early pages of the novel, Charlotte Brontë's narrator pointedly acknowledges the possible delight experienced when writing and reading about brutal behaviour. Yet, instead of indulging such questionable pleasures, the narrator asks to be 'excused from sully[ng] his page with the record of [child-torturers', slave masters' and

⁴⁷ Notably, Joanne Shattock writes of the *Leeds Mercury* that it 'had the support of the Yorkshire mill-owners'. She also quotes from Gaskell's *Life*, which confirms that Brontë 'sen[t] to Leeds "for a file of the "Mercuries" of 1812, '13 and '14" when she was writing *Shirley*'. See 'Newspapers and Magazines', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 269–76, pp. 272–3. For further context regarding the influence of the *Leeds Mercury* on *Shirley*, see also Herbert J. Rosengarten, 'Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and the *Leeds Mercury*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 16.4 (1976), 591–600.

⁴⁸ Patrick Collier, "'The Lawless by Force ... the Peaceable by Kindness": Strategies of Social Control in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and the *Leeds Mercury*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 32.4 (1999), 279–98, p. 283.

⁴⁹ In 'Stancliffe's Hotel', residents at the hotel discuss reports of the Prime Minister's possible resignation in the *War Despatch*. One 'furious man' contends that the newspaper '[d]elivers the sentiment of the nation at large'. See Charlotte Brontë, 'Stancliffe's Hotel', p. 80.

⁵⁰ Clive Emsley, *Hard Men: The English and Violence Since 1750* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 9.

drivers'] deeds' (S, 59). From the outset, the reader is made aware that Robert Moore – the owner of Hollows Mill and the primary target of Luddite discontent in the novel – and his overseer, Joe Scott, are not 'savage men' nor 'coarse and cruel masters' (S, 59). Neither of them hit their workers and the harshest punishment they give out is fining those who arrive 'considerably too late' for work (S, 59).

While laying out the apparent fairness of Moore's mill, the narrator disappoints certain expectations held by the reader, writing: 'Instead, then, of harrowing up my reader's soul, and delighting his organ of Wonder, with effective descriptions of stripes and scourgings, I am happy to be able to inform him that neither Mr Moore nor his overlooker ever struck a child in their mill' (S, 59). Any hopes held by the reader in this direction are deflated by the narrator's refusal to indulge their voyeuristic desire to read explicit depictions of violence. There is a knowingness to the narrator's puncturing of expectations here, as though he or she knows the unspoken cravings of readers, cravings perhaps often satiated by the newspapers of the day. Instead, Brontë is positioning Moore and his men as morally superior individuals not naturally disposed to violence, thereby insinuating that the violence they become embroiled in, through the frame-breakers' actions, is unprovoked and stems from the working classes. The subsequent scenes of violence – many of which are unseen or depicted in outline – revolve around this gap between the "masters" and the "workers", the "civilised" and the "customary".

In *Shirley*, the reader is introduced to the violence of the Luddites via a voice and a letter. As Robert Moore, the Anglo-Belgian mill-owner, waits for the safe delivery of his new machinery, the 'still, dark, and stagnant' night is disturbed by the sound of 'heavy wheels crunching a stony road' (S, 31). The noise anticipates the arrival of the frames, which Moore 'love[s]' and on which he 'had risked the last of his capital', as though the risky purchase of the machines was a testament of his love (S, 32). The darkness prevents Moore from seeing who drives the waggons: whether it is Joe Scott, his 'over-looker' and

right-hand man; or his ironically named ‘well-wishers’, workers who are reportedly planning to smash his equipment in revenge for their being replaced by technology (S, 14). The fact that the waggons are empty does not become apparent to Moore until an unidentifiable figure appears from one of the carts and responds to the mill-owner’s query as to whether “‘all [is] right’”: “‘Ay, ay, divil, all’s raight! We’ve smashed ’em!’” (S, 31). The words render Moore ‘silent, and even motionless’, with only a discomfiting ‘smile’ detectable on his face, until a horse appears with a letter attached to its harness (S, 32). It is addressed to “‘the Divil of Hollow’s miln’” and written in a ‘peculiar’ orthography which the narrator chooses to ‘translate [...] into legible English’:

“Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro’ Moor, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children to go home to when they have done this deed. If you get new machines, or if you otherwise go on as you have done, you shall hear from us again. Beware!” (S, 32)

This practice of changing and explaining coarser, less “genteel” language is echoed in Charlotte Brontë’s 1850 ‘Preface’ to *Wuthering Heights*, in which she addresses a ‘large class of readers’ unaccustomed to ‘the rough, strong utterance, the harshly manifested passions, the unbridled aversions, and headlong partialities of unlettered moorland hinds and rugged moorland squires, who have grown up untaught and unchecked’.⁵¹ Her tone here is (arguably) ironic; she subtly disparages those ‘with feelings moderate in degree, and little marked in kind’ to whom the language of the ‘wild moors of the north of England’ is ‘unintelligible, and – where intelligible – repulsive’.⁵² Brontë never sides with or condones this perspective, though she acknowledges the North/South divide in terms of vernacular and outlook. In an 1848 letter to her publisher and confidant, W. S.

⁵¹ Charlotte Brontë, ‘Editor’s Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), l–liv, p. l.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Williams, she addresses the issue of Yorkshire dialect while editing *Wuthering Heights*, writing that she may ‘modify the orthography of the old servant Joseph’s speech’ as she is ‘sure Southerners must find it unintelligible – and thus one of the most graphic characters in the book is lost on them’.⁵³

Viewed in this light, the transcription in *Shirley* enables the Yorkshire – and, in this instance, dissenting – voice to be heard and the ‘Southerners’ to understand what is being said.⁵⁴ The narrator’s decoding of the letter into ‘legible English’ is not therefore necessarily, in Albert D. Pionke’s words, ‘reductive’ or even an indication that ‘sympathy’ lies with Moore and not the machine-breakers.⁵⁵ The translation opens up the content of the letter to a wider audience (indeed, to a ‘large class of readers’, as Brontë’s ‘Preface’ states), ensuring that the ‘graphic’ nature of the situation – the machine-breakers’ desperation, their family’s suffering, Moore’s loss of immediate income, and the implicit threat of violence (“‘Beware!’”) – is not ‘lost on’ anyone.

By ‘granting the letter space in the novel’, as Heather Miner notes, ‘the narrator allows the working classes their own textual power, enabling them to represent themselves in a historically distinct and accurate mode’.⁵⁶ Brontë’s use of the letter is in keeping with historical Luddism, in which ‘letters, poems, and hymns’ played a vital role in publicly expressing the demands of the movement.⁵⁷ Indeed, it was a ‘leaflet [...]

⁵³ Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 27 September 1850, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume II: 1848–1851*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 479–80, p. 479.

⁵⁴ Despite Brontë’s self-consciousness in this regard, contemporary critics still commented on what G. H. Lewes’s referred to as the ‘Yorkshire roughness’ of the novel, with the *Atlas* magazine remarking: “‘Remote from towns,” the people run a rather godless and very uncivilised race; and, to our southern visions, the entire environments of the piece seem somewhat strange and uncouth.’ See from an unsigned review, *Atlas*, 3 November 1849, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 119–21, p. 120; and see G. H. Lewes, from an unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1850, in Allott, 160–70, p. 165.

⁵⁵ Albert D. Pionke, ‘Reframing the Luddites: Materialist and Idealist Models of Self in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*’, *Victorian Review*, 30.2 (2004), 81–102, p. 90.

⁵⁶ Heather Miner, ‘Dissent in Fragments: Multivocality in *Shirley*’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 9.1 (2013), paras. 1–33, para. 11

<<http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue91/New%20PDFs/NCGS%20Journal%20Issue%209.2%20-%20Dissent%20in%20Fragments%20-%20Heather%20Miner%20.pdf>> [Accessed 20 October 2018].

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 10.

distributed in Leeds, in very much more insurrectionary terms than anything attributed to the Nottingham Luddites', which sparked the wave of frame-breaking in Yorkshire in 1812.⁵⁸ Literary form was central to the development and dissemination of regional Luddite identity. In the 'Foreword' to a collection of Luddite writings, Adrian Randall writes that the 'hallmark of Luddism [...] was the threatening letter'.⁵⁹ In enabling the letter to be read by all, including 'Southerns', Charlotte Brontë propagates the message across class and country, while also providing an authentic – in terms of medium – insight into the non-physical, but not necessarily non-violent, methods adopted by the Luddites to further their cause.

Yet the decision to alter the dialect of the machine-breakers does suggest a linguistic gulf between them and the readers, thereby highlighting the difference between the few working-class voices in the novel and the predominantly middle-class readership. Susan Belasco Smith extends this point, writing that dialect is used by Brontë to 'call attention to the barriers established by a society that discriminates against its less powerful members'.⁶⁰ On one level, Brontë could be said to be dismantling these barriers by translating the note and thereby opening up its meaning to a wider audience. Yet this conclusion feels unsatisfactory, as it ultimately erases the vernacular of one class while elevating another. For Pionke, the 'self-conscious task of translation effectively distances reasonable readers from the content as well as the form of the Luddite's message'.⁶¹ The narrator's tone – suggested by her/his use of 'peculiar' (odd, abnormal) in opposition to the preference for 'legible' (clear, identifiable, not-foreign) words – is not sympathetic, and her/his decision to decode the note places the narrator on the side of those who

⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 609.

⁵⁹ Adrian Randall, 'Foreword', in *Writings of the Luddites*, ed. Kevin Binfield (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, c.2004), xiii–xviii, p. xv.

⁶⁰ Susan Belasco Smith, "'A Yorkshire Burr': Language in *Shirley*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 27.4 (1987), 637–45, p. 638.

⁶¹ Pionke, 'Reframing the Luddites', p. 90.

speak 'legible English'. While universalising the letter's content, by making it comprehensible to non-Yorkshire people, the narrator also prioritises a standardised, arguably elitist, Southern vernacular over a regional one. This preference is highlighted later in the novel when one of the supposed ringleaders of the frame-breakers, Noah o' Tim's, demands Moore to "hear reason, and should you refuse, it is my duty to warn you [...] that measures will be had resort to (he meant recourse)" (S, 130). The interjection of the narrator deflates the forcefulness of Noah's speech, reminding the reader that, though he calls for reason from Moore, he does not understand his own language and therefore cannot fully express his meaning.

As Miner points out, this translation and "correction" of the Yorkshire dialect anticipates the 'translation of French into English throughout the book', equating the 'outcast and alien' Moore family of Belgian descent with the disenfranchised and desperate Luddites (S, 37).⁶² Considering the instability of the 1810s, partly caused by the tumultuous political situation in France, there was a general suspicion of the French at this time, which accounts for the Moore family's designation as outcasts. Similarly, the Luddites were and, according to Thompson, continue to be seen as 'an uncouth, spontaneous affair of illiterate handworkers, blindly resisting machinery'.⁶³ This implicit alignment of the different languages of the "workers" and the "masters" – however tenuously implied through the translation of the Luddite letter and (some) of the French passages – reveals the novel's resistance to neat interpretations, as it complicates the clear-cut demarcation often made between "workers" and "masters".

What implications does this translation have on the violence which precedes and follows the delivery of the note? As the epistle is the first concrete indication that the machines have been damaged, with the actual violent event left partly undescribed and

⁶² Miner, 'Dissent in Fragments', para. 15.

⁶³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 604.

unseen, where does the violence reside if not in the letter? Randall writes that, in regard to Luddism, '[t]hreatening letters [...] were in themselves a significant weapon'.⁶⁴ By figuring the billet as something with which to commit violence, the harm caused by the frame-breaking is extended by the letter's delivery. It stands in for the violent event in the novel while also embodying a form of violence in itself. The note comes after the deliberate and illegal damaging of property, as well as the forceful binding of men on the moor during "a wet night" (S, 34). In distancing – or, even, divorcing – readers from the machine-breakers' regionality (and, perhaps, ideology) through the translation of the letter, Charlotte Brontë also detaches readers from the violence and from the potential justification of – or, indeed, the empathetic reaction to – such destructive action. Any effort to comprehend the reasons behind the Luddites' violence is therefore always mediated, whether by the letter or by its translation.

The attempt, and arguable failure, to legitimise the violence which the letter represents is suggested through the double decoding of the note. This involves, firstly, the articulation of the violence within the letter form, which transforms a physical act into a textual expression; then, secondly, the translation of the note itself from the Yorkshire dialect into a more "neutral" one. By writing down their actions in the form of a letter, the frame-breakers are offering their opponents a means of interpretation. This, alongside the narrator's translation of the letter, suggests that the violence embodied by and in the note can be transformed into something justifiable and reasonable. If something can be made 'legible', and therefore understandable, the writing must contain a message that itself can be understood and even acknowledged as legitimate. Arguably, by expressing the violent actions through language, the frame-breakers in *Shirley* are attempting to explain and, thus, justify their position; and, by then ensuring this position

⁶⁴ Randall, 'Foreword', *Writings of the Luddites*, p. xvi.

could be read and comprehended by ‘Southerners’, the narrator is emphasising their right to be heard and recognised, thereby enabling their message to become logical and valid. As Cole writes, in regard to modernism and violence, but pertinent to *Shirley*, ‘[p]olitical violence is notable [...] for its implications about language, since its defining feature is the idea that violence is a potent form of political expression’, enabling ‘the reception of violence’ to be transformed ‘from the criminal to the exalted’, an idea which will be further explored in Chapter Four on religious violence.⁶⁵ We see something similar in ‘Stancliffe’s Hotel’, when the dialogue between Zamorna and the bannerman comes close to (but ultimately fails at) establishing an understanding of the rioters’ perspective. In *Shirley*, by trying to render their violences legitimate through language, the Luddites are attempting to shift the perception of their violent actions away from the unlawful towards something legible.

Yet, at the same time, the translation dilutes the Luddites’ message and undercuts the Luddites’ claim to the legitimacy of their violence. By dismissing the acceptability of their speech, the narrator is challenging the justifiability of Luddite violence. Liebsch’s point that violence has found a ‘home’ in language applies to the Luddite letter in *Shirley*, as does his repudiation that ‘language and violence are mutually exclusive’.⁶⁶ Liebsch expands upon this stance, writing that there is a ‘prevailing prejudice’ that ‘where there is speech, violence must fall silent [...] it must be “silent” all the more where people talk to each other reasonably’.⁶⁷ This latter statement is in keeping with Eric Weil, who was convinced of the opposition of violence and language; ‘[f]ollowing his position, violence can only interrupt, cut short, or destroy language’.⁶⁸ The Luddite note in *Shirley* brings together these two competing perspectives on language and violence. The largely

⁶⁵ Cole, *At the Violet Hour*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Liebsch, ‘What Does (Not) Count as Violence’, p. 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 7–8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

unrepresented violence of the frame-breaking resides in the language of the note; yet the translation of the letter can also be seen as an act of silencing, or stifling, that language and the violence it represents.

Terrorism and Political Motives in *Shirley*

Political violence, as well as accompanying issues of legitimacy and “reasonableness”, is often aligned with terrorism, a term with powerful modern resonances, but which also had strong connotations when the Brontës were writing. As Brett Bowden and Michael T. Davis write, the ‘French Reign of Terror, no less, which followed the French Revolution, provides the very origins of the contemporary usages of the concept of terror and its derivatives – terrorism and terrorist’.⁶⁹ Terry Eagleton agrees, stating that ‘terrorism is in fact a modern invention. As a political idea, it first emerged with the French Revolution – which is to say, in effect, that terrorism and the modern democratic state were twinned at birth’.⁷⁰

It is not entirely appropriate to label the Luddites in *Shirley* or in history as terrorists, particularly because the Reign of Terror was, as Eagleton points out, a form of ‘state terrorism’, thereby differing from the contemporary understanding of terror as involving ‘a strike against sovereignty by its faceless foes’.⁷¹ Notably, however, nineteenth-century frame-breakers, including those represented in *Shirley*, were often seen as ‘faceless’ and undoubted ‘foes’ of authority. Indeed, as Alan Brooke and Lesley Kipling write, the Luddites were ‘described by Lord Fitzwilliam, in a strikingly modern cliché, as “murderers

⁶⁹ Brett Bowden and Michael T. Davis, ‘Preface’, in *Terror: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism*, eds. Brett Bowden and Michael T. Davis (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2008), xix–xxv, p. xx.

⁷⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

and terrorists”⁷². Furthermore, links between the Luddites and the Jacobins were, and continue to be, made. Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* aligns the two groups in the early pages of the novel when Michael Hartley, who goes on to shoot Robert Moore partly in vengeance against the deportation of fellow Luddites, is denounced as a “violent Jacobin and leveller” (S, 15), as well as a “mad Calvinist and Jacobin weaver” (S, 224). Yet, in keeping with the complexity of the text, Moore himself is also painted as Jacobinical by traditional native inhabitants of the West Riding – though Moore himself rejects such a view, believing he makes a “queer Jacobin!” (S, 243). The characterisation of both the mill-owner and frame-breakers as Jacobins feeds into the previously mentioned issue of foreignness: both Moore and the Luddites are intrusive forces attempting to disrupt the norm in different ways.

The following sections seek to situate *Shirley* within – and, in some instances, outside of – competing definitions of terrorism in the nineteenth century. While terrorism often stemmed from the state in the early nineteenth century, there are also (as Fitzwilliam’s comment indicates) overlaps between Luddite violence and more modern notions of terrorism. David Claridge’s 2006 definition of terrorism foregrounds violence, both its threat and actualisation:

Terrorism involves political objectives and goals. It relies on violence or the threat of violence. It is designed to generate fear in a target audience [...]. The violence involves an organisation and not isolated individuals. Terrorism involves non-state actors or actors as the perpetrators of the violence, the victims, or both. Finally, terrorism is violence that is designed to create power in situations in which power has previously been lacking [...].⁷³

⁷² Alan Brooke and Lesley Kipling, *Liberty or Death: Radicals, Republicans and Luddites, 1793–1823* (Honley: Workers’ History Publications, 1993), p. 35.

⁷³ David Claridge, ‘State Terrorism? Applying a Definitional Model’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8.3 (1996), 47–63, p. 50.

Claridge's delineation of terrorism pinpoints three aspects traceable in *Shirley*: the notion of organised, deliberate violence; the contrast between collective and individualistic violence; and the attempt to establish power for and by the powerless. In this section and in the following two sections, these three strands of terrorism will be explored in relation to the (non-)representation, mediation, and contamination of political violence in *Shirley*, through a close examination of the attack on Hollows Mill and the attempted murder of Robert Moore.

In most instances of early nineteenth-century politicised violence, as Malcolm I. Thomis writes, the violent act 'has been seen as instinctive, retaliatory, or primitive behaviour, but rarely as a form of conduct consciously and deliberately chosen in preference to other forms or because other forms had been found wanting'.⁷⁴ Yet the Luddites' recourse to 'machine-breaking occurred only after a collapse of collective bargaining, petitioning and peaceful negotiation'.⁷⁵ Thomis continues:

But this was a use of violence in its most sophisticated form, for not only was violence widespread and prolonged; it was also controlled in its application, as if violence were a legitimate and usable weapon that could be invoked as and when necessary by the working classes.⁷⁶

As this chapter has shown, the Luddites in *Shirley* attempt to legitimise and justify their violent methods through verbal means. Eagleton further contends that terrorists, no matter of what century or creed, 'are not in general bereft of ideas [...] Their terror is intended to help execute their political visions, not substitute for them'.⁷⁷ Yet, in *Shirley*, there is no overarching political vision that drives the violence, other than the occasional, and shadowy, reference to Jacobinism. Moore dismisses two of the apparent ringleaders,

⁷⁴ Malcolm I. Thomis, 'The Aims and Ideology of Violent Protest in Great Britain, 1800–48', in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe*, eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (London: Macmillan, 1982), 20–31, p. 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Eagleton, *Holy Terror*, p. 1.

Moses Barraclough and Noah o' Tim's, as "restless, meddling, impudent scoundrels, whose chief motive-principle is a selfish ambition, as dangerous as it is puerile" (*J*, 131). That childish ambition is to "stir up dissension", either for its own sake or to herald in a shift of power (*J*, 131). No other overarching ideology or collective purpose is expressed; and, if there is a desire to loosen the marketplace's stranglehold over people's lives, it is indistinct and unfocused.

Ian Ward sets out the 'terrorist imagination' of Emily Brontë at work in *Wuthering Heights*, writing that, as opposed to the visual terror of the 'banal cartoon of hazy Hollywood caricatures' offered up by George Bush in the wake of 9/11, 'Emily proffered an altogether deeper, more troubling spectre of textual violence'.⁷⁸ Ward's description of Emily Brontë's linguistic form of terrorism suggests a more insidious and inescapable terror, one that resides in language itself; and this is further traceable in the Luddite letter in *Shirley*, another instance of the absent presence of violence in the Brontës' work. For Ward, 'the terror of *Wuthering Heights*, and the terrorism, lies in the strategic destruction of the patriarchal order plotted and executed, with demonic precision' by Heathcliff and Cathy.⁷⁹

The Luddites in *Shirley* are, arguably, attempting to achieve something similar. Yet, for the workers in Charlotte Brontë's novel, the system of paternalism upon which their livelihoods and identities depended has already been eroded to reveal the evident imbalance of power beneath. There is still, however, in Ward's understanding of terrorism, the consideration that terrorism relies on the plotting and executing of plans 'with demonic precision'. During the organised attack on Moore's mill, the frame-breakers recognise their comparative lack of preparation in the face of Moore's 'fortified and garrisoned' mill: 'Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks: he was

⁷⁸ Ian Ward, 'Emily Brontë and the Terrorist Imagination', *English Studies*, 89.5 (2008), 524–41, pp. 532–3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

prepared for it at every point' (*S*, 327). The contrast between Moore's readiness and what is presented as the machine-breakers' cowardice when met with the 'composure and determination' of their enemy is another means of undermining the legitimacy of the Luddites' violence (*S*, 327). Unlike both state and non-state terrorists, these men were ill-prepared and, worst of all, arrogant; they had 'never been so met before' and 'an organised, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering' (*S*, 327). This lack of preparation paints the frame-breakers as chaotic, driven by instinct, not reason.

Then, there is the argument put forward in the novel by William Farren, who becomes an unofficial mouthpiece for the non-violent workers, as well as the "honest though misguided men" who have been tempted to join the Luddites (*S*, 131). Contrary to Rogers's view that Brontë allows the working-class characters to have 'no opinions at all', Farren is given space to set forth his perspective.⁸⁰ Farren attempts to explain the workers' position to Moore, focusing, like the Luddite letter, on the intense hunger of the men's families and on the fact that they "can get naught to do [... and] can earn naught" (*S*, 132). The fact that hunger is posited as the driving force of the Luddites' violence circumvents any wider political motive. As Pionke writes, the emphasis on hunger as the catalyst of the violence leaves 'even the most sympathetic reader to surmise that, at best, hunger is to blame'.⁸¹ Sally Shuttleworth agrees, though in less critical terms, writing that the 'social conflict between the millowners and the workers is essentially a conflict over the right to bread'.⁸² While extreme hunger is by no means a trivial concern, Brontë chooses to highlight the workers' bodily needs over their intellectual and emotional ones. This may be strategic: focusing on the immediate, more easily remedied needs of the workers and their families may have struck a stronger chord with middle-class readers,

⁸⁰ Rogers, "Tory Brontë: Shirley and the "MAN"", p. 166.

⁸¹ Pionke, 'Reframing the Luddites', p. 91.

⁸² Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 189.

who may have felt threatened – or, indeed, terrorised – by an appeal to anything more radical.

What Farren is calling for is the slowing of progress, not its termination or the overthrow of the “system”. Time and food is what men like Farren require, *Shirley* suggests, not emancipation or legal redress (*S*, 133). Through speech, and often in Yorkshire dialect, Farren attempts to explain the workers’ position to Moore, focusing, like the Luddite letter, on the intense hunger of the men’s families and on the fact that they “can get naught to do [... and] can earn naught” (*S*, 132). For Farren, who does not align himself with Luddism, talking is the most powerful weapon to wield in the face of injustice: “I’m not for shedding blood: I’d neither kill a man nor hurt a man; and I’m not for pulling down mills and breaking machines: for, as ye say, that way o’ going on ’ll niver stop invention; but I’ll talk, – I’ll mak’ as big a din as ever I can” (*S*, 132–3). Words are his defence and his appeal to “reasonableness” is noted by Moore: later in the novel, we learn that Moore has secured Farren a job as a gardener for Shirley Keeldar (*S*, 158). Unlike the other men who visit Moore, “William did not threaten” (*S*, 180). Moore responds to reason and not intimidations, even though he himself deals in threats, by wielding his pistol before Farren steps forward to speak up (*S*, 132). This distinction between reason and threat opens a gulf between the more “rational” working-class characters within the novel and the figures who use terror as their primary weapon. But is there really a difference between the verbal weapons wielded by the likes of Farren and the (often linguistic) political violence committed by the Luddites in *Shirley*?

Mediating and Mediated Violence in *Shirley*

The shadowy, indistinct representation of violence identified in Emily Brontë’s poetry and prose also emerges in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*, including in the mill attack and the

shooting of Moore. The ambiguity surrounding the attack stems partly from the mediation of the violent events through the eyes of Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. Instead of being amid the struggle between the “workers” and the “masters” (comprised of the mill-owner, his overseers, and a host of soldiers), the reader is given only a partial view from the female perspective. Much of the description of the mill attack and its build up relies on sound, echoing Emily Brontë’s poem ‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light’, as discussed in Chapter One. Pionke also notes that the retelling of the Luddite violence is often ‘aural’ and ‘only indirectly overheard by the reader’, thereby ‘doubly distanc[ing]’ us from the action, as much of the political violence committed in the novel goes unseen by the characters.⁸³

While the men gather at Moore’s mill, Shirley, acting as her masculine alter-ego “Captain Keeldar” (*J*, 196), is left in charge as “master of the Rectory, and guardian of [Mr Helstone’s] niece and maids” (*J*, 315). Both she and Caroline are armed with pistols and a carving-knife respectively in case the Luddites force their way in. Notably, and in keeping with her male persona, Shirley admits she is ready to use her gun “if goaded by certain exigencies which [she] can imagine”, exigencies which the reader can also only imagine (*J*, 316). The suggestion that the frame-breakers know the bedrooms in which Caroline and the two maids sleep is ominous, made worse by one man telling the group to leave the “women folk” alone “except [if] they shrieked, and then I’d soon quieten ’em” (*J*, 319). While his methods of silencing the women are coded, the violent intent is clear. In this moment, both the Rectory and the bodies of Shirley and Caroline are threatened with violation, positioning the Luddites as a potentially dangerous, terrorising force.

⁸³ Pionke, ‘Reframing the Luddites’, p. 91.

Imagination plays a major role in Brontë's representation of the "battle" between the workers and the masters. As Eagleton writes, 'nothing can actually be seen'.⁸⁴ He goes on to add that, for much of the attack, Caroline and Shirley's 'perception of the event remains purely auditory' rather than visual.⁸⁵ Susan Zlotnick substantiates Eagleton's observation, but also emphasises the fact that it is specifically women who overhear the events: 'For women like Caroline and Shirley, history is heard, or to be precise, heard about.'⁸⁶ Indeed, most of Shirley's guarding of the Rectory involves her "efforts to listen" (*J*, 317); and, as midnight approaches, her exertions are rewarded when 'a muffled sound on the road below the churchyard', a 'measured, beating, approaching sound', the 'dull tramping of marching feet' is heard (*J*, 318). As the narrator informs us, and as Eagleton notes, the young women 'see nothing'; to 'hear, however, was not enough' and, so, Shirley leaves the safety of the Rectory and stands by the wall behind which three hundred Luddites are gathered (*J*, 318). A barrier divides Shirley from the possible intruders, establishing another layer of distancing between her and "them", a possible allusion to the socio-economic gap between the landowning gentlewoman and the starving unemployed.

When the Luddites are overheard contemplating the invasion of the Rectory, Shirley's readiness to shoot is reiterated, as she tells Caroline: "My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated on" (*J*, 320). The "three hundred" men standing behind the would-be intruder, and the wall, prevent Shirley from firing the pistol; and she admits that the scale of the gathering behind the wall meant she "could not have effectually protected" Caroline or herself (*J*, 320). Despite this suggestion of comparative weakness, Shirley's

⁸⁴ Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Susan Zlotnick, 'Luddism, Medievalism and Women's History in *Shirley*: Charlotte Brontë's Revisionist Tactics', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 24.3 (1991), 282–95, p. 285.

admission is striking, as it – however briefly – upsets the assumption that men partake in and commit violence, while women watch or are victims.⁸⁷ This is evidenced by the fact that, in nineteenth-century England, ‘women who defended themselves forfeited their right to legal protection’.⁸⁸ As opposed to their Irish counterparts, English women were viewed ‘as delicate creatures who required the protection and supervision of men,’ and they were therefore punished if they stepped beyond such boundaries.⁸⁹ In some ways, Shirley’s later marriage to Louis Moore reiterates this image of womanhood, as she wishes her husband to be her ““*master*”” and will ““accept no hand which cannot hold [her] in check”” (*J*, 516, emphasis in original). By the novel’s ending, Moore tells Shirley: ““Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*”” (*J*, 586, emphasis in original).

Caroline takes a less active role in the defence of the Rectory and only ‘glance[s] at the weapon on the sideboard, but left it behind her’ when the sound of the marching troop emerges (*J*, 319). When they have left the Rectory and are watching the mill attack unfold below them in the Hollow, however, Caroline’s passivity dissolves, as she attempts to ““join”” Robert in the fray, telling Shirley that it is ““natural that [she] should be at his side”” (*J*, 323). Notably, it is Shirley who holds her back, telling her: ““Men never want women near them in time of real danger”” (*J*, 323). Caroline does not necessarily wish to partake in the clash, but simply – and somewhat naively – wants to be closer to the man she loves. In her perceptiveness, however, Shirley recognises the inappropriateness of Caroline’s hopes. Despite her self-asserted, but never-tested, capacity to shoot someone, Shirley is fully aware that she and Caroline, as upper-middle-class women, must remain at a distance from the sphere of violence. In times of battle, their place is on the periphery.

⁸⁷ As Susan Sontag writes, ‘the killing machine has a gender, and it is male’. See *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 5. The Brontës complicate this assumption in different ways, as will be further explored in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter One showed that Isabella’s interest in violence further subverts the notion that men commit and partake in violence, while women remain passive.

⁸⁸ Carolyn A. Conley, ‘No Pedestals: Women and Violence in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Journal of Social History*, 28.4 (1995), 801–18, p. 801.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Their marginal position does, however, come with its own share of power. The mill attack is, after all, represented through the eyes of Shirley and Caroline, positioning them as the mediators of the scene. Though the two sides of the attack do speak during the event, these moments of vocalisation are brief. Instead of coherent sounds, the uprising is accompanied with gunshots, the smashing of property, and an uncanny yell which almost silences the commotion. This minimal use of language aligns with Weil's view that the possibility of language is erased, or even obliterated, in the presence of violence. For Weil, as noted by Liebsch, violence 'must fall silent [...] where people talk to each other reasonably'.⁹⁰ This can surely be inverted, so that, where there is violence, language and "reasonableness" are stifled. The limited use of language during the attack therefore suggests a lack of "reasonableness", underlined by Caroline and Shirley's mutual, though unspoken, 'guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being' (*J*, 326). For Brontë's narrator, and, perhaps by implication, for Shirley and Caroline, the violence enacted in the attack is distinctly non-human; and, notably, every man involved in the attack is represented in animalistic terms, including Moore.

This animalism is emphasised by the narrator's arresting description of the 'rioters' yell' heard by Shirley and Caroline, a sound which pierces through other noises raised by the violent commotion:

A crash – smash – shiver – stopped their whispers. A simultaneously-hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragment. A yell followed this demonstration – a rioters' yell – a North-of-England – a Yorkshire – a West-Riding – a West-Riding clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound

⁹⁰ Eric Weil, *Logique de la Philosophie* (Paris: Librairie J. Vrin, 1950), quoted in Liebsch, 'What Does (Not) Count as Violence', p. 8.

before, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears – perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the Hyena: Caste stands up, ireful, against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative Class. It is difficult to be tolerant – difficult to be just – in such moments. (*S*, 325)

Brontë's narrator gives a precise definition of the kind of 'rioters' yell' heard by Shirley and Caroline, one which recalls the translation of the Luddites' note in the novel's opening. Not only is the sound distinctive to the North of England; it is unique to rioters working in the clothing district of Yorkshire's West Riding. Like the note, the yell must be explained and decoded for the reader, whom the narrator assumes would 'never [have] heard' such a sound before. While this regional specificity is perhaps an attempt to pinpoint and therefore elucidate the noise and its meaning, Brontë's exactness also alienates those unfamiliar with this kind of sound. As Tillotson notes, the novel is 'defiantly regional', reflected in the 'steadily narrowing definition of locality' in the yell.⁹¹ Unless the reader has lived in a clothing district of the West Riding, the yell is placed pointedly beyond the realm of their experience and imagination. Brontë reminds us, once again, of the gap between those uninitiated with the ways and people of Yorkshire, and those of whom she writes. Through the exact description of the shout, the reader, like Shirley and Caroline, is positioned outside of the attack, both physically and culturally.

The cry also sets the two sides of the conflict even further apart, as the narrator makes it clear that this is a 'Caste' versus 'Caste' scenario, with Moore's side positioned as superior. Moore, and the 'Middle Rank' he represents, is imagined as a 'Lion' shaking its 'mane' in response to the 'howl of the Hyena', the 'Operative Class'. This

⁹¹ Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 90.

dehumanising metaphor both emphasises the notion that violence reduces men to animals and underlines the supremacy of Moore. As the ‘Lion’ of the battle, Moore and his men embody the military prowess, courage, and strength enshrined in the British character by the “legend” of King Richard I, Cœur de Lion. This patriotic image, in which the French Moore is positioned as a protector of the land, is in direct contrast to that of the scavenging joker of the animal kingdom, the ‘Hyena’. Nineteenth-century characterisations of hyenas propagated the perception of the animal as ‘cowardly and malign’, and the media at that time regularly portrayed them as ‘dangerous (though cowardly) beasts prone to escape from menageries and bite the hands that fed them’.⁹² Though no longer fed by their work at the mill, the frame-breakers are violently demonstrating against those who hold the purse-strings. As the description of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* as a ‘wild animal’ and ‘clothed hyena’ standing ‘tall on its hind-feet’ suggests,⁹³ hyenas were also connected to madness through its ‘association with female revenge that continued through to the nineteenth century’.⁹⁴ Anna Wilson writes that, during the nineteenth century, there was the notion that the ‘boundary between hyena and human just might be permeable, and with consequences more unpleasant than attend the discovery of other beasts within’, a proximity heightened perhaps by hyenas’ uncanny laughter for which Bertha Mason is also renowned.⁹⁵ While Brontë does not explicitly align her narrator with a side, her decision to represent Moore as a lion and the frame-breakers as hyenas reveals an inherent bias, one enabled by the attack’s mediation through

⁹² Mikita Brottman gives an illuminating overview of the kind of phrases used to describe hyenas during this period: hyenas are “rank and coarse”, “a most mysterious and awful creature”, with “revolting habits”, “singularly coarse and ferocious in character”. See *Hyena* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), pp. 53–4.

⁹³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 338.

⁹⁴ Helen Small, *Love’s Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 159.

⁹⁵ Anna Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena: Intraspecies Readings of the Female Phallus’, *Signs*, 28.3 (2003), 755–90, p. 761. Valerie Grosvenor Myer adumbrates this point, writing that Bertha Mason as hyena ‘stands in our memories, desexed by her author’s pronouns, precariously, unstably poised, bridging the gap between human and animal’. See ‘*Jane Eyre*: The Madwoman as Hyena’, *Notes and Queries*, 35.3 (1988), p. 318.

the upper-middle-class female characters whose immediate and personal sympathies lie with the lion.

While the cry both involves the reader in and distances them from the conflict, the yell also echoes through historical accounts of working-class unrest, as well as the poetry and fiction which Brontë read both before and after the publication of *Shirley*. Despite its pointed specificity, the sound is still recognisable as an audible symbol of war and political clashes. In 1878, the West Riding journalist, Frank Peel, drew on oral tradition to relate the Luddite uprisings across Yorkshire, giving an account of the attack on William Cartwright's mill in 1812, which influenced Brontë's own depiction of Luddism.⁹⁶ Peel's recounting of the Rawfolds attack opens with an epigraph taken from Sir Walter Scott's 'Marmion' (1808), with which Brontë was familiar: 'And such a yell was there / Of sudden and portentous birth, / As if men fought upon the earth / And fiends in upper air'.⁹⁷ The centrality of such a 'portentous' yell within both Peel's non-fictional and Brontë's fictionalised accounts of Luddite mill attacks suggests the intertextual resonance of this sound in representations of political violence.

The yell in *Shirley* is also re-imagined in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, published five years later in 1854, when a crowd of mill-workers violently attempts to gain entry into John Thornton's mill: 'As soon as they saw Mr. Thornton, they set up a yell, – to call it not human is nothing, – it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening'.⁹⁸ The starvation of the workers is, as in *Shirley*, highlighted as the driving force of their wildness; and, once more, the workers are envisioned as 'wild beasts', hyena-like. Notably, as Margaret Hale approaches

⁹⁶ See Frank Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites: Chartists and Plug-drawers*, intro. E. P. Thompson (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968).

⁹⁷ Sir Walter Scott, 'Marmion', canto VI, section 26, in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott: Volume II*, ed. Rev. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1857), p. 186, quoted in Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites*, p. 87.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 175. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

the mill before the mob arrives, there ‘was no near sound [...], – no click of machinery, or mingling and clashing of many sharp voices’ (*N&S*, 171). Only a ‘far away [...] ominous gathering roar, deep-clamouring’ can be heard (*N&S*, 171). Like Brontë’s depiction of the mill initially remaining ‘mute as a mausoleum’ amidst the disturbances of the Luddites (*S*, 325), Gaskell focuses on sound – the calm before the onslaught. As Charlotte Brontë, as well as Gaskell, show, the sounds – the yells, crashes, and smashes – of violence feature prominently in literary representations of politicised conflict. Notably, these authors describe violent noises of insurrection through the eyes and ears of female spectators, again placing the power of representation and interpretation with female witnesses rather than male participants.⁹⁹

The yell in *Shirley*, as well as in *North and South* and ‘Marmion’, is not that of an individual; it is part of a collective. The fact that the rioter is pluralised hints at the presence of a crowd, an image which haunted the early- to mid-nineteenth-century imagination as a reminder of the atrocities of the French Revolution. Francesco Marroni contends that, in presenting the reader with the ‘rioters’ cry, Brontë is concerned with ‘depicting an anonymous entity that, on a dark summer night, loses any physiognomic trait of humanity to become the very embodiment of evil’.¹⁰⁰ For Marroni, it is the lack of an individual voice that heightens the non-human uncanniness of the cry. This feeds into the fear of “the crowd”, which, per Marroni, ‘unites and concentrates thousands of individuals and transforms them into a savage and uncontrollable force that has neither a single given behaviour nor a dominant voice’.¹⁰¹ Brontë’s description of the source of the cry – ‘the famished and furious *mass* of the Operative Class’ (emphasis added) – underlines this homogenisation of the working class. Later, the Luddites are again

⁹⁹ Although, in *North and South*, Margaret Hale does become embroiled in the violence, as she intervenes during John Thornton’s confrontation with his workers and is then struck by a ‘sharp pebble’ (*N&S*, 177).

¹⁰⁰ Marroni, *Victorian Disharmonies*, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

described as a ‘mass of rioters’ (*J*, 326); and it is only when the battle is over that individual men, other than Moore, are noticed, though never identified or named: ‘a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust’ (*J*, 328). Upon seeing the dead and injured men, humanised by their suffering, Shirley’s ‘countenance changed’, as the ‘excitement and exertion’ created by the fighting mass is replaced with the ‘death and pain’ experienced by individual men (*J*, 328).

For Gustave le Bon, writing at the tail-end of the nineteenth century in 1895, the violence of a crowd resided in the shift from humanity to barbarity which has been the subject of much of this chapter: ‘Isolated, [a man] may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct.’¹⁰² When gathered in a group, men (women are not mentioned by le Bon) possess ‘the spontaneity, the violence, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings’, phrasing which chimes with the positive invocation of the lion, but not that of the hyena.¹⁰³ Yet, while the shout does provoke a sense of terror, not least through its unfamiliarity to the reader, the specificity of the yell does not only invite animalistic comparisons. Though indeed anonymous, in that there is no individualised source, the sound is also human and, as discussed, Brontë is careful in placing the yell within certain parameters. Not only is the sound unique to that region within the county; it is the ‘cry of Hate’, blasted by the ‘famished and furious mass of the Operative Class’ (*J*, 325). Contrary to Marroni’s view, there is a single source; it may not stem from an individual, but it does issue from a collective with a distinct and recognisable identity.

The “crowd” has become a prominent motif in discussions on nineteenth-century British fiction.¹⁰⁴ Isaac Land writes that, in the nineteenth century, ‘self-emancipating

¹⁰² Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), p. 12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2000).

slaves, workers on strike, and campaigners for woman's suffrage all counted as terrorists, whether or not their tactics included intimidation and atrocity'; and those 'who feared the terrorist also feared the crowd'.¹⁰⁵ Both terrorists and crowds generate fear, deliberately or otherwise. Notably, J. S. McClelland sees the 'mid nineteenth century, perhaps 1848, more probably 1871' as 'the turning point in the history of the idea of the crowd'.¹⁰⁶ From 1848, as McClelland contends, the crowd 'was fast on the way to becoming a permanent threat to established patterns of social living, to a stable political order, and to a received notion of culture'.¹⁰⁷ This is in keeping with Brontë's own representation of collective violence in *Shirley* (and in a selection of her juvenilia), with her emphasis on the slide into animalism.

Yet this attitude, which revolves around the binary of the "civilised" and "customary" mentalities of violence, coincided with 'an underlying fear that the mob also represented revolutionary popular politics'.¹⁰⁸ Although the rioters are not personalised, Brontë does, as mentioned, make their class explicit. Janet Gezari writes that 'the main effect of the workers' invisibility as individuals is to make them newly visible as a class'.¹⁰⁹ The fact that "the crowd" was often portrayed as working class in character, just like the mass of rioters in 'Stancliffe's Hotel' and *Shirley*, indicates Brontë's awareness of the implications embodied by that image. Through her use of this motif, Brontë was drawing on popular contemporary perceptions of political violence, which her predominantly middle-class readership would have recognised and interpreted in a similar way to how Emily Brontë relied on her readers' shared knowledge of what violence is and how it works in society (see Chapter One). Yet Charlotte Brontë is not necessarily emphasising

¹⁰⁵ Isaac Land, 'Introduction', in *Enemies of Humanity: The Nineteenth-Century War on Terrorism*, ed. Isaac Land (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–19, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰⁶ J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Janet Gezari, *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 115.

the class of the rioters to provoke a backlash against the Luddites; and it should be noted that the ‘indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank’ is not individualised either, save for the figures of Moore and Joe Scott (who is himself of ambiguous class distinction).

The lack of individuation in the mill attack is remedied by the shooting of Robert Moore, committed by the distinctive figure of Mike Hartley, one of the few named Luddites in the novel.¹¹⁰ Instead of a rioter’s yell or non-human noises, Moore’s shooting is preceded by a speech by Hartley which acts as a kind of justification for his subsequent action. Notably, the source of the words is not identified until after the event, so the voice heard during the attack is given the dehumanised pronoun, “it”, like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*: ““When the wicked perisheth, there is shouting,” it said; and added, “As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more (with a deeper growl) [...] He shall die without knowledge”” (*S*, 508). The gunshot, like the rioters’ yell, pierces through the evening: ‘A fierce flash and sharp crack violated the calm of night’ (*S*, 508). The word ‘violated’ is a loaded one, signalling a violent break with nature and suggestive of the physical violation of Moore’s body by the bullet. This double violation – and the ‘crack’ that heralds it – is the only reference to violence in the scene. Once again, the moment of violence is hidden from the reader, as well as from Yorke, who is accompanying Moore on the way home. It is described through sound alone.

This distance is reflected in the reporting of actual attempted and successful assassinations by the Luddites in 1812 upon Cartwright, whom the *Leeds Mercury* refer to as the ‘intrepid defender of Rawfolds Mill’, and Horsfall respectively.¹¹¹ Cartwright’s assailants – Brontë altered the event so that there was only one in her novel – were hidden

¹¹⁰ Although, notably, there is no direct confirmation of Hartley’s involvement with Luddism. It is only ever implied: “[w]hen he is very drunk, his mind is always running on regicide [...] The fellow exults strangely in murder done on crowned heads, or on any head for political reasons. I have already heard it hinted that he seems to have a queer hankering after Moore” (*S*, 15).

¹¹¹ ‘Disturbances, &c.’, *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812, 2444 (Leeds).

‘behind an hedge’, an impulse to conceal which remains in *Shirley*.¹¹² The *Mercury*’s reporting of William Horsfall’s death also mentions that his murderers were hidden from view, as they placed the ‘barrels of their pistols in apertures [*sic*] in the wall’.¹¹³ Brontë brings these aspects of the two reports together in *Shirley*, as Yorke, ‘no longer surrounded by heath’, sees ‘a hat rise’ and hears ‘a voice speak behind the wall’ before the gun is fired (*S*, 508). Through the impermeable wall, only the gunshot is heard by Yorke, alongside the words spoken by Hartley. As with Shirley and Caroline observing the mill attack, very little is seen by Yorke.

It is Yorke who considers the words to be strange, not necessarily the narrator, as the reader is told that the appearance of the hat and the sound of the voice were ‘not startling to Mr Yorke’: ‘The words, however, were peculiar’ (*S*, 508). Looking back to the Luddite note at the novel’s opening, the word ‘peculiar’ is a familiar one: the orthography of the letter was also deemed ‘peculiar’ by the narrator, suggesting a link between the note and Hartley’s words, as well as the specific yet almost unfathomable rioters’ yell. The source of this commonality is, somewhat paradoxically, alienation: all three instances of speech and writing are difficult – if not impossible – to comprehend. There is an otherness to these forms of communication and the violence that they signify, one which the *Mercury* deemed ‘so foreign to the feelings of Englishmen, and so much at variance with the courage and humanity of our national character’.¹¹⁴ The image of the lionhearted patriot who uses violence justifiably is conjured in contrast to the – both literal and figurative – “foreign” radical as the wielder of terror-inducing and seemingly illegitimate violence. Moore’s own “foreignness” complicates this neat division, of course, undercutting his alliance with the British establishment.

¹¹² ‘Disturbances, &c.’, *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812.

¹¹³ ‘Atrocious Murder’, *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1812.

¹¹⁴ ‘Disturbances, &c.’, *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812.

The potential injustice of the attempted murder is gestured to in Moore's speech preceding the attack, in which he tells Yorke that he will continue to "resist a riotous mob just as heretofore", but it will now be "chiefly for the sake and the security of those [the runaway ringleader of the riot] misled" (*J*, 508). Having spent time in Birmingham and London searching for the instigators of the mill attack, Moore observed "what taught [his] brain a new lesson": people "to whom lack of education left scarcely anything but animal wants, disappointed in those wants, ahungred, athirst, and desperate as famished animals" (*J*, 508). His previous mercenary incentives are replaced by a more holistic outlook on the workers' concerns. Yet his promises of protection still revolve around animalistic violence: he will "open on the scent of a runaway ringleader as eagerly as ever, and run him down as relentlessly, and follow him up to condign punishment as rigorously" (*J*, 508). The outcome of this violent pursuit is presumably death by hanging for the rebel leaders; although, unlike the instigators against Cartwright's mill in 1812, who were hanged, the four ringleaders of the mill attack in *Shirley* have been 'safely shipped prior to transportation', an arguably less overt (or, at least, less public) form of violence (*J*, 494).¹¹⁵ The alteration in punishment is notable when we recall the gap in time between the novel's setting and the author's own. As Clark notes, there had been a shift in attitudes towards punishment by the 1830s, as 'police surveillance and long prison sentences replaced the threat of death as the means for the state to regulate violence'.¹¹⁶ This shift was emphasised in 1839 when the sentences of the Newport Chartists to be hanged, drawn, and quartered was 'commuted to transportation for life', a decision propelled by a nationwide petition and no-confidence debate in the House of Commons.¹¹⁷ Despite such modification surrounding the regulation of violence, Moore remains committed to seeking vengeance through violent means. His motivation may

¹¹⁵ See 'Execution', *Leeds Mercury*, 23 January 1813, 2483 (Leeds).

¹¹⁶ Clark, 'Humanity or Justice?', p. 197.

¹¹⁷ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 140.

now be less self-centred than his counterattack against the Luddites, but it is no less driven by violence and still ends with the promised defeat of the “enemy”, whether that be through death, deportation, or – as we shall see – the (partial) enforcement of his industrial vision.

Contaminating Visions and Revisions in *Shirley*

Hartley is introduced early in the text through a recounting of a vision he had, which adumbrates the events described later in the novel. While hedging “rather late in the afternoon”, he sees “moving objects, red, like poppies, or white, like May-blossom; the wood was full of them” (*S*, 16). These “moving objects” turn out to be soldiers, marching towards Briarfield; the vision disappears “when a column of smoke, such as might be vomited by a park of artillery, spread noiseless over the fields” (*S*, 16–7). Hartley, “like a wise Daniel as he is”, offers an interpretation of this hallucination: “it signifies, he intimated, bloodshed and civil conflict” (*S*, 17). Much later, Hartley’s prophecies make another appearance, this time through Moore. Threats against Moore’s life are veiled in biblical language, as Hartley tells the mill-owner: “God’s vengeance [...] was preparing for me, and affirmed that in a vision of the night he had beheld the manner and the instrument of my doom” (*S*, 225). On a later occasion, Hartley tells Moore to “set his house in order, as his soul was likely shortly to be required of him” (*S*, 225). These intimidations are dismissed as drunken ravings by Moore, who refers to Hartley as a “poor man” whose drinking has left him in a “state bordering on delirium tremens” (*S*, 225).

Hartley’s vision is itself lifted, at times almost verbatim, from a report featured in the *Leeds Mercury* on 18 July 1812, titled ‘Ghost Story’. In the newspaper, which Brontë

perused, two male ‘spectators’ disbelievingly watch a ‘spectacle’ unfold before them in the park below, as an ‘army of soldiers, dressed in white military uniform’ perform a ‘number of evolutions’ with ‘a Personage of commanding aspect, clothed in scarlet’ standing in the centre.¹¹⁸ This ‘body’ of soldiers, whom one of the witnesses initially believed to be ‘beasts’, is then followed by ‘another assemblage of men, far more numerous than the former, dressed in dark-coloured clothes’.¹¹⁹ The men recall that a ‘volume of smoke, apparently like that vomited by a park of artillery, spread over the plain’, a description which Brontë uses almost word for word in *Shirley*.¹²⁰ The account is referred to as a ‘strange vision’ and ‘*Phantasmagoria*’, and Brontë was clearly influenced by the ‘ghost story’, incorporating not only choice phrases from the report but also the distancing effect of spectators watching from afar.¹²¹

It is notable that mill-owner and “madman” speak on several occasions before Hartley’s final prophecy is self-actualised by his shooting Moore. As in *North and South*, in which the reader is familiar with Boucher, who hits Margaret Hale with a stone and thereby disperses the threat of a riot at Thornton’s mill (*N&S*, 177), Brontë individualises the would-be murderer of Moore. Yet, unlike Boucher, who is represented in broadly sympathetic terms, Hartley is depicted as a ‘half-crazed weaver [...], a frantic Antinomian in religion, and a mad leveller in politics’ (*J*, 597). His visions are embedded in the narrative with little fanfare and are at odds with the ‘unromantic’ agenda set out by the narrator at the novel’s opening (*J*, 3).

Yet Shuttleworth offers a possible ‘function of the visionary element in the text’: ‘not to displace or deny the force of the material power and violence marshalled against the labourers and their feminine counterparts, but rather to offer [...] an alternative

¹¹⁸ ‘Ghost Story’, *Leeds Mercury*, 18 July 1812, 2456 (Leeds).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

source of violence'.¹²² The visions within *Shirley* edge the reader away from realism towards the spiritual, even the fantastical, realm of the imagination, what Shuttleworth calls 'the alternative space of dream and vision which cuts across divisions of gender and class'.¹²³ Tara Moore echoes this sentiment, writing that the less powerful characters of *Shirley* create 'alternate, more realistic scenes of power' that 'defy convention' and that act as 'myth narratives'.¹²⁴ These 'myths function as alternate realities' within the text, offering another imaginative space in which to envision a different kind of future.¹²⁵ The scenes conjured in Hartley's head remind us that violence exists not only in its physical form, but also in the 'alternative source' of the imagination imprinted over reality, which will be further explored in Chapter Four in relation to *Villette*. The two worlds often coincide and – as we shall see – contaminate each other, as the line separating the two 'alternative' spaces blurs throughout the novel.

The only other character in Brontë's novel to envision scenes of war and bloodshed is Shirley Keeldar. Indeed, as Yolanda Padilla notes, she has 'visionary powers' which extend beyond scenes of violence, as Shirley 're-envision[s] her own being', by creating the male alter-ego of 'Captain Keeldar' for herself, and subversively reimagining Milton's Eve (*S*, 303).¹²⁶ Although her imaginings are not hallucinations, there is a correspondence between Shirley's visions and Hartley's "deliriums", as both revolve around the approach of soldiers and the threat of conflict. When marching to the school-feast on Whitsuntide, Shirley imagines that 'this priest-led and woman-officered company' are 'soldiers of the Cross', "'bound on a pilgrimage to Palestine'": "'But no, –

¹²² Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 188.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Tara Moore, 'Women and Myth Narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Women's Writing*, 11.3 (2004), 477–92, p. 490.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 489.

¹²⁶ Yolanda Padilla, 'Dreaming of Eve, Prometheus, and the Titans: The Romantic Vision of Shirley Keeldar', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 21.1-2 (1993), 9–14, p. 10. See also Kate Lawson, 'Imagining Eve: Charlotte Brontë, Kate Millett, Hélène Cixous', *Women's Studies*, 24.5 (1995), 411–26.

that is too visionary. I need a sterner dream: we are Lowlanders of Scotland [...] We know that battle may follow prayer [...] we are ready and willing to redden the peat-moss with our blood” (S, 286). This “sterner dream” is dissolved by the observant Caroline, who sees a “red speck above Stilbro’ Brow” which turns out to be “soldiers – cavalry soldiers” (S, 286–7). While avoiding the Sunday church service, and notably just after Shirley has outlined her alternative vision of Eve, she and Caroline see more soldiers on the day of the mill attack: ‘they looked, and saw a glitter through the trees: they caught through the foliage glimpses of martial scarlet; helm shone, plume waved. Silent and orderly, six soldiers rode softly by’ (S, 305). Shirley’s vision of soldiers marching to battle with “heaven” as the “reward” is pre-empted by Mike Hartley’s prophecy (S, 286); and, notably, both visions revolve around soldiers and conflict, and eventually become semblances of reality.

These revisionary abilities underline the disenfranchisement of Shirley (and Hartley). Despite her position of relative power as an heiress and landowner, she desires a very different reality to the one with which she is currently faced. Her visions and revisions, as well as Hartley’s, create a space for this alternative reality, one that pre-empts and coexists alongside the political violence enacted by both the mercantile and working classes. There is a similarity here between Charlotte Brontë’s earlier work, which often re-envisions scenes from history to fit with her own alternative universe of Glass Town and Angria, and Shirley’s visionary world. Both women – real and imagined – attempt to rewrite and rework history through imagination; and both of their fantasies and realities exist in parallel, with neither one superseding the other.

As several critics have noted, the shooting of Moore focuses the political conflict on individual concerns rather than those of the collective.¹²⁷ In *Shirley*, the political is, in

¹²⁷ Gezari writes that ‘Brontë connects Moore’s abandonment of Caroline with the assassination attempt by having it take place just after Moore tells Hiram Yorke the story of his having proposed marriage to

many ways, personal. The focus on the individual during the attempted assassination is mainly achieved through Moore's recounting to Yorke of his failed marriage proposal to Shirley, offered purely for financial gain rather than love: he 'spoke like a brigand who demanded [her] purse, rather than like a lover who asked for [her] heart' (*J*, 500). The proximity between Moore's confession and his near death not only positions his recovery as a form of 'moral reformation', in Gezari's words (though, his final pledge to protect the interests and safety of those 'mised' by Luddism suggests that Moore is already undergoing a process of reparation, however misled in itself).¹²⁸ It also connects Shirley to the shooting and, again, to Mike Hartley – as though his actions were avenging not just the 'four convicts of Birmingham', but also Moore's treatment of Shirley and, indeed, Caroline (*J*, 508).

The alignment of Shirley with Hartley – through their respective military visions and Moore's speech prior to being shot – gives a glimpse into the parallel inner-world of the upper-class woman. She may not be accused of drunkenness, madness, or (explicitly) radicalism; but her fantasies of shooting a man behind the wall of the Rectory are lived out by Hartley's actual shooting of Moore. It is a kind of inverted fantasy, as Shirley wants to shoot a Luddite *not* Moore; yet this inversion also brings the "workers" closer to the "master", as one stands in for the other. There is a symmetry within the political violence of the novel, one embodied by the visions which feel at odds with the 'real' and 'unromantic as Monday morning' tale promised in the opening pages (*J*, 3). The images conjured by Hartley and Shirley's imaginations reveal the need for an outlet for alternative – and predominantly violent – narratives and visions from working-class and female sources, but also disclose the contaminating effect of political instability on the subconscious. Although Shirley is willing her fantasies into being, unlike Hartley, whose

Shirley, betraying his love for Caroline and disclosing his base, mercenary motives as Shirley's suitor'. See *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct*, p. 116.

¹²⁸ Gezari, *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct*, p. 116.

hallucinations seem to come unprovoked, her imagination is steeped in violent tales and – in the case of her version of Eve – radical rewritings of history that turn into vivid, vocalised daydreams.

Both Shirley and Hartley's subconsciouses are haunted by the threat (or, indeed, the promise) of bloodshed and violent unrest, catalysed by and then perpetuating the pervasive fearful atmosphere enveloping the West Riding at the time. Whether you are an upper-class heiress with a good shot or a murderous zealot, the terror of the period and its associative violences seep into the mind. Through the symmetry between the violent visions and scenes of actualised violence in *Shirley*, Brontë suggests that there is a polluting quality to political violence and its threat, one that taints the narrative and the imaginations of its disenfranchised characters. The contaminating effect of political violence throughout the novel reveals the complex violent character of Charlotte Brontë's writing.

The final act of political violence in the novel comes at its close, heralded this time by the “[e]xtravagant day-dreams” of Robert Moore (*J*, 606). It is yet another kind of violent vision. As the romantic plots are tied up, there remains a distinct lack of resolution. Having declared their mutual love, Moore and Caroline discuss the future. Instead of a harmonisation of their hopes, in line with a more stereotypical romantic ending, their visions of the future differ significantly. Moore, who has now “seen the necessity of doing good” and “learned the downright folly of being selfish”, hopes to turn the Hollow into a mill town resembling that of Keighley in the 1840s and attempts to frame this transformation as beneficial to local people (*J*, 604).

As the narrator acknowledges earlier in the novel, Moore is ‘no self-sacrificing patriot’ (*J*, 162). Throughout the narrative, he is painted as deeply individualistic in outlook: ‘it was himself he had to care for, his hopes he had to pursue, and he would fulfil his destiny’ (*J*, 163). Although he has undergone a kind of ‘moral reformation’ after

Shirley's firm rejection of his marriage proposal and after being shot, his daydream ultimately aligns with his own self-interests and the fulfilment of his own destiny. Moore's vision of the future is not devoid of selfish intent and it is the only vision with which the reader is left. The difference between his former selfishness and later declaration of altruism is that he now recognises the necessity of compromise and cooperation to further his own personal industrial revolution. And, as Collier points out, while the 'commercial aspect of Moore's dream has been realised', the book is silent on whether 'his social program – higher wages and a day school – have followed'.¹²⁹

Moore offers an idealised solution to political conflict, telling Caroline, "I foresee what I will now foretell," and proceeds to give a detailed account of the Hollow's transformation from "copse" to "firewood", "green natural terrace" to "paved street", and "wild ravine" to "smooth descent" (*J*, 604–5). Initially, Caroline protests such a vision: "Horrible! You will change our blue hill-country air into the Stilbro's smoke atmosphere" (*J*, 606). As Moore continues to map out this brave new world, Caroline becomes less vocal and more passive when hearing of her future-husband's plans, simply smiling 'up in his face' and 'mutely offer[ing] a kiss' (*J*, 606). Any possibility of fighting against such industrial upheaval is extinguished by Caroline's silent acquiescence.

The phrase "[e]xtravagant daydreams" does admittedly undercut the seriousness of Moore's ambitions. There is a self-conscious acknowledgement of how outlandish his vision is. This recognition of the excessiveness of his fantasy is borne out by it being only partially realised, underscoring the fact that all visions in the novel are ultimately tempered. If some of Caroline and Shirley's private visions are not fully realised, neither are Moore's. As the narrator, who bursts back into the narrative in this chapter somewhat unexpectedly, confirms, Moore's overblown fancies become an incomplete reality – or,

¹²⁹ Collier, 'Strategies of Social Control in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and the *Leeds Mercury*', p. 295.

perhaps, something closer to Shirley's 'sterner dream', more realistic but no less transformative:

I suppose Robert Moore's prophecies were, partially, at least, fulfilled. The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes – the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage-gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel. (*S*, 607)

This 'mighty mill' is reminiscent of the one seen in 'Something About Arthur', itself an 'immense structure, 100 feet high and two hundred and fifty long', not dissimilar to the ambition embodied by the Tower of Babel ('SAA', 27). Similarly, in 'Stancliffe's Hotel', the banks of the river in Zamorna 'were piled with enormous manufactories and bristled with mill-chimneys, tall, stately and steep as slender towers' ('SH', 94). Here, again, there are '[c]olumns of smoke as black as soot' rising 'thick and solid from chimneys of two vast erections' ('SH', 94). A tall chimney similar to both Brontë's earlier descriptions and the Tower of Babel – which, as Glen notes, features heavily in the Brontë children's Glass Town tales – was also sketched out in Hartley's first vision as a 'column of smoke' that overtakes the fields.¹³⁰ Rather than coming from 'a park of artillery', the source of the ashes and 'cinder-blackness' of the highway emanates from the Babel-tower-like chimney churning out thick, black smoke. Glen notes the atmosphere of 'extinction and desolation' that pervades the narrator's vision of the mill town: 'Progress is figured as loss.'¹³¹ There is violence at play in the Hollow's transformation; and this damage is of a political nature, not least because the smoke of gunfire and burning buildings has – in this image – become interchangeable with that of industrial pollution. Moore's 'moral reformation' means he

¹³⁰ Glen writes that the Tower of Babel 'had been a potent symbol in the Brontë's youthful "plays"'. She then notes that the Tower appears in one of the advertisements in *Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine* (1829), 'The Bridal' (1832), a poem titled 'On Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel' (1830), and 'Albion and Marine' (1830). See *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*, pp. 166–7.

¹³¹ Heather Glen, 'Shirley and *Villette*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 122–47, p. 131.

now seeks success not only for his own mercenary motives, as his proposal to Shirley revealed, but for “the houseless, the starving, the unemployed”, those nameless figures who appear on the novel’s fringes (J, 606).

In the context of the wider novel, this is a statement of political intent; even if it is, as noted, potentially self-serving. Since Shirley attributes the frame-breaking to hunger, Moore’s plan to eradicate starvation and unemployment in the area is figured as a means of alleviating the urgency of political, social, and economic reform. Any possibility of a resurgence of Luddism is dampened by the neat rectification of its apparent source, hunger. The demolition of nature in Fieldhead Hollow is, then, directly tied to the political violence of the novel. It is implicitly positioned as a cure to future political conflict. The apocalyptic destruction of the “lonesome”, “bonnie spot – full of oak trees and nut trees” (J, 608), which embodied Caroline and Shirley’s alternative visions of the future and has now been ‘vanquished’, can be figured as a form of violence wrought on the environment and on these other visions, especially when we consider the bleak tone pervading the novel’s final pages.¹³² There is no celebration of the industrial “progress” brought to the land, but a sombre sense that something has been lost which can never be restored.

The violence of the novel’s ending is even more apparent when we consider that the Luddite’s violences grew out of the alarm generated by the rapid growth of industrialisation. Any remnants of their resistance have been met by further force, this time of a financial and environmental kind. Moore’s final act of defiance against Luddite sentiment is the destruction of the copse and the implementation of a capitalist vision for the Hollow, one veiled in philanthropic language. The novel fittingly ends with another vision, this time of a non-violent nature, as the narrator’s housekeeper relates how her

¹³² Shuttleworth writes that the embodiment of ‘the manufacturer’s day-dreams ensures the vanquishment of the alternative visions of the women and workers’. See *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 218.

mother saw a “fairish (fairy) in Fieldhead Hollow” fifty years previously and “that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this country side” (*S*, 607). The innocent benignity of this apparition, placed firmly in the past, contrasts with the unsettling present-day reality of Moore’s partially-realised daydream. While the narrator sardonically teases the ‘judicious reader’ about ‘putting on his spectacles to look for the moral’, of which ‘God speed him in the quest’ (*S*, 608), the juxtaposition of Moore’s realised vision and the housekeeper’s memory of the “fairish” is clear.

Shirley is a novel about conflict, but also one about negotiation. It does not seek resolutions to the conflicts it raises nor does it offer neat alternatives. Instead, it offers tempered daydreams and, in doing so, acknowledges the need for compromise. In a discussion on violence and language, Paul Ricoeur contends that ‘[s]tep by step everything political is touched by the turgid play of meaning and violence’.¹³³ *Shirley* resists infallible interpretation and the same can be said of its political violences. In their various forms, they interact with nineteenth-century understandings of terrorism, crowds, class, and the question of legitimacy; but there is no overarching formulation of political violence within the novel. Rather than appearing in any kind of “pure” form, it exists to contaminate. The final image of this contaminating effect of political violence – earlier evinced in the invasiveness of terror and the intrusion of visions – is embodied in the Moore brothers’ mill town. And, in fact, the novel has come full circle. It opens with a mediated act of political violence, embodied by the Luddite note which invades the world of the mill-owners; and it ends with a final sullyng vision of political violence, again mediated through the narrator. Political violence frames *Shirley*, bookending its internal conflicts, but not necessarily containing their unruly and contaminating effects.

¹³³ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Violence and Language’, *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française*, 10.2 (1998), 32–41, p. 35.

CHAPTER THREE

“I’ll try violence”:

The Threat of Abuse in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Patricia Ingham claims that, like ‘*Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, [*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights*] follow in the Gothic tradition of sensational plots but, unlike Charlotte’s work, they involve details of much brutality’.¹ Ingham’s comments are surprising, particularly considering the critical emphasis on dominance and submission, as well as violent passion, in Charlotte Brontë’s writing. Sally Shuttleworth writes of the ‘forces of female violence and insanity’ in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the fact that, ‘in its focus on passion’, the novel has often been viewed as a very ‘unVictorian text’.² As Heather Glen notes, the child Jane Eyre ‘is subjected to actual and psychological violence’; and, as a woman, she ‘feels the more seductive, but no less sapping, pressures of male social, economic, and psychological power’.³ While these responses illuminate some of the violent forces in Brontë’s novel, they do not directly engage with the threat and actuality of sexual and gender-based violence in *Jane Eyre* on a sustained level. One instance of ‘brutality’ in *Jane Eyre* – which has thus far been broadly neglected within Brontë studies, and which sparked the initial premise of this thesis – is the threat of rape voiced by Rochester after Jane’s discovery of Bertha Mason in the attic of Thornfield Hall:

“Jane! will you hear reason?” (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); “because, if you won’t, I’ll try violence.” His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond

¹ Patricia Ingham, ‘Introduction’, in *The Brontës*, ed. Patricia Ingham (Harlow: Longman, 2003), 1–23, p. 18.

² Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 166, 158.

³ Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 92.

and plunge headlong into wild licence. I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of frenzy more, I should be able to do nothing with him. The present – the passing second of time – was all I had in which to control and restrain him: a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom – and his.⁴

The words “I’ll try violence” are translated by Stevie Davies in the endnotes of the 2006 Penguin Classics edition of *Jane Eyre* as follows: ‘Rochester threatens rape.’⁵

The blunt simplicity of Davies’s interpretation belies the magnitude of what is taking place – and, indeed, what does not take place – in this scene. In her introduction to the same edition, Davies expands on her brief translation, aligning Rochester’s threat with St John Rivers’s suggestion to Jane that, should they marry, he would expect her to adhere to “all the forms of love” (*JE*, 467). Davies goes on to write that: ‘Men’s violence against women is treated by Charlotte Brontë with an unashamed openness unique in the period: St John implicitly proposes and Rochester contemplates rape [...] The two men have more in common than either would care to concede.’⁶ Davies’s comment on Rochester’s threatening rape has been instrumental in the development of this thesis, not only because it suggests Brontë’s apparently unique treatment of sexual violence, but also because it is a violent episode rarely discussed by readers and researchers. When critics do mention the scene, it is often framed in forgiving terms. Kathleen Anderson and Heather R. Lawrence read Rochester’s threat of rape as an expression of his love through ‘aggressive passion’ and (rightly) note Jane Eyre’s feelings of excitement in the face of such a ‘perilous’ crisis, a potentially controversial aspect of the scene which will be explored in-depth later in this chapter (*JE*, 349).⁷

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 349. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁵ Stevie Davies, n. 9, Chapter XXVII, *Jane Eyre*, p. 580.

⁶ Stevie Davies, ‘Introduction’, in *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006), xi–xxxiv, p. xix.

⁷ Kathleen Anderson and Heather R. Lawrence, “‘No net ensnares me’: Bird Imagery and the Dynamics of Dominance and Submission in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*”, *Brontë Studies*, 40.3 (2015), 240–51, p. 240.

Why does Brontë choose to insinuate rape in such an abrupt way while, at the same time, veiling the reference, both through language and Jane Eyre's ambivalent response to the threat? Crucially, she does not use the word 'rape' or 'assault' – Davies feels she must clarify the phrase "I'll try violence" on the reader's behalf. The reality of what Rochester threatens remains unspoken. This is in line with contemporary ways of voicing or indeed *not* voicing sexual violence, particularly when it stemmed from the middle or upper classes.⁸ As Ellen Rooney notes, in an essay on rape in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), 'representations of sexual violence are often characterised by silence, elisions, and ambiguities', which is also in keeping with Emily Brontë's depiction of the possible abuse experienced by Isabella in *Wuthering Heights* (1847).⁹ Furthermore, Jane's own excitement deflects the gravity of Rochester's words. The question remains, then: is Charlotte Brontë's handling of male violence and threatened sexual assault uniquely 'open' for the mid-nineteenth century, as Davies implies? And what might this tell us about the question of whether the Brontës were "violent writers" for their era?

Having threatened assault, Rochester later tells Jane: "If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose" (*JE*, 366). Far from his first threat of rape being a one-off, here again he threatens assault. The moment in which he says he will "try violence" acts as, what Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky call (and in a notable echo of Rochester's words), 'a kind of tear in the fabric of the narrative, momentarily rendering the invisible visible, reminding us of what is *not* represented'.¹⁰ In

⁸ During the nineteenth century, most acts of violence were predominantly located as working class in character and rarely attributed to more so-called "civilised" classes, such as the one to which Rochester belongs. Clive Emsley writes that 'wife beaters were generally seen as coming from the worst sections of the working class'. See *Hard Men: The English and Violence Since 1750* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 60.

⁹ Ellen Rooney, "'A Little More than Persuading': Tess and the Subject of Sexual Violence", in *Rape and Representation*, eds. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 87–114, p. 92.

¹⁰ Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 1 [emphasis in original].

the case of Rochester's threat to "try violence", it reminds us of what is never realised. Rochester's threat is a window into a substratum of violence that underpins the text, as well as his own narrative. It is this threatened, unseen force that – while it may not come to fruition – nevertheless resides in the seams of the narrative, reminiscent of the dash in Emily Brontë's poetry and prose. If, indeed, this violence exists beneath the novel's surface, to what extent can Rochester's threat be deemed sudden or even surprising?

Lisa Surridge argues that 'marital violence [was] being urgently and centrally explored in nineteenth-century texts', unlike Lawson and Shakinovsky who 'argue that it is "evaded or set aside"' and therefore left – it is insinuated – for the twenty-first-century critic to unearth and interpret for themselves.¹¹ Notably in relation to sexuality, John Maynard identifies the implicit nature of sex in Brontë's work, one which is redolent of her treatment of violence both in its political and sexual manifestations. Maynard writes: 'Brontë's is, again, not an art of explicit physical detail or pornography but of highly suggestive scenes and metaphorical language.'¹² This chapter brings together the latency of sexual violence in Brontë's writing, and seeks to uncover – while also problematising this process of "uncovering" – the seemingly oblique inferences of sexual assault and violence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, as well as Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), keeping in mind the more codified ways of representing sexual violence in nineteenth-century fiction. It also considers the reception of these two novels, focusing primarily on the gendering of Charlotte and Anne Brontë's respective literary violences within early reviews which often linked the apparent brutality and coarseness of their work to their being women writers.

The chapter responds to the following questions: first, did contemporary audiences and reviewers react to the sexual and gender-based violence depicted in these

¹¹ Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 12.

¹² John Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 45.

novels?¹³ Second, were Charlotte and Anne Brontë's – as well as Emily Brontë's – representations of sexual violence, however covert, singular to them as writers in the period or were their literary portrayals part of a wider trend, as SurrIDGE suggests? Throughout this chapter, the examination of absent yet ever-present violences, and the interrelated agency of language, will be extended and further developed in keeping with the two previous chapters.

To deconstruct and analyse the above questions, this section of the chapter firstly offers an in-depth analysis of Rochester's threat of rape in *Jane Eyre*. It focuses on locating the sexual nature of Rochester's threatened violence in his and Jane's combative flirtations prior to the aborted wedding, followed by a discussion of Jane's response to the risk of sexual assault. It ends with an exploration of Rochester's adherence to the Victorian ideal of masculinity in contrast to the depiction of Jane Eyre's and Bertha Mason's violences, as a means of commenting on the divergent nineteenth-century attitudes to male and female violence.

***Jane Eyre* and the Sadomasochistic “System”**

Davies's assertion that Rochester threatens Jane Eyre with rape requires some dismantling. Considering the codified nature of the language of sexual violence used throughout the scene, as will be discussed, it must be determined where and how it is known that the violence which Rochester threatens is of a sexual nature. Anderson and Lawrence identify the eroticism of the scene through Jane's reaction, her awareness that

¹³ Shelah S. Bloom writes: 'Gender-based violence (GBV) is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society.' See *Violence Against Women and Girls: A Compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators* (MEASURE Evaluation, 2008), p. 14 <<https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/ms-08-30>> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

the ‘crisis was perilous; but not without its charm’ (*JE*, 349). They read this response as an acknowledgment that ‘Jane is in danger in this moment, not only from Rochester’s physical aggression, but from her own desire’.¹⁴ Maynard is more candid in deciphering the scene prior to Jane’s retreat from Thornfield: ‘there is an odd way in which [Jane] can both see Rochester’s sexual force leading to a very real possibility of rape and yet also feel no real evil or threat in this condition’.¹⁵ He contends that the ‘rape would be bad; the sexual force is good and desirable in itself’.¹⁶ Erika Kvistad, in her thesis on sex and power in Charlotte Brontë’s writing, refers to the threat as an ‘ambivalent’ one, while noting that ‘Rochester’s roughness [...] inspires pleasure and a sense of power in Jane, even when it threatens to turn into actual violence’.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Dennis Porter, writing in 1976, articulates the ‘secret of Jane Eyre’s triumph’ as residing ‘in her instinctive understanding of the fact that [...] male sexuality is a potentially destructive force’.¹⁸ Porter goes on to note that the unconsummated ‘erotic power play’ – an evocative phrase used by Shuttleworth¹⁹ – between Jane and Rochester during their engagement is not an act of hypocrisy by Jane in an attempt to ‘excite [Rochester] the more’, to tease him and lead him on.²⁰ In fact: ‘The game she plays is vital, since it enables her to retain control over a potentially dangerous situation; it is dictated by an instinct for self-preservation.’²¹ Terry Eagleton echoes this sentiment – though in terms that deflect from Jane’s agency to suggest her passivity – writing that ‘[i]t is Jane’s

¹⁴ Anderson and Lawrence, ‘Bird Imagery and the Dynamics of Dominance and Submission in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*’, p. 248.

¹⁵ Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*, p. 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Erika Kvistad, ‘The Point of Agony: Sex and Power in Charlotte Brontë’ (unpublished thesis, University of York, 2012), p. 72.

¹⁸ Dennis Porter, ‘Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre*’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 17.3 (1976), 540–52, p. 547.

¹⁹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 170.

²⁰ Porter, ‘Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre*’, p. 547.

²¹ *Ibid.*

nun-like meekness which will help her to become Mrs Rochester'.²² If we see the “‘I’ll try violence’” scene as the culmination of this ‘game’, the sexual undertones of the violent threat can be traced within their interactions prior to Rochester’s threat of rape, particularly in the lead up to their wedding.

The ‘potential danger’ to which Porter, Anderson, and Lawrence refer is, on an implicit level, that of rape. Kvistad and Maynard are more explicit in interpreting the threat as that of sexual violence, but both highlight the ‘odd way’ in which Jane gains pleasure from the perilous moment. This seemingly perverse gratification arises because part of the danger resides in the possibility of premarital sex, not necessarily rape, an insinuation also made by Mrs Fairfax in the novel when she asks Jane: “‘Is it really for love [Mr Rochester] is going to marry you?’” (*JE*, 305). Seeing how much this question hurts Jane, Mrs Fairfax seeks to justify her ‘coldness and scepticism’: “‘I am sorry to grieve you [...] but you are so young, and so little acquainted with men, I wished to put you on your guard’” (*JE*, 305). She goes on to warn Jane that she should “[t]ry and keep Mr Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him’” (*JE*, 306). Without articulating it directly, Mrs Fairfax wonders whether the real source of Rochester’s desire for Jane is, simply, sex. She is highlighting Jane’s relative unworldliness in the face of Rochester’s comparative promiscuity. Such inexperience is inscribed earlier in the novel when Jane tells Rochester she suspects his “‘love will effervesce in six months, or less’”, a suspicion gleaned from “‘books written by men’” which assign six months as “‘the [period] furthest to which a husband’s ardour extends’” (*JE*, 300).²³ As with Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*, Jane’s knowledge of men comes from novels, not experience.

²² Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Anniversary Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. xviii.

²³ Anna Clark notes the ubiquitous presence of the “seduced woman” (often the victim of rape) in early to mid-nineteenth-century culture, writing that “[e]ndless scenes of virtuous maidens victimised by heartless libertines brought tears to the eyes of novel-readers and theatre-goers, who flocked to see *Black-eyed Susan* (1829) and *The Artizian’s Daughter* (1845)’. See *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (London; New York: Pandora, 1987), p. 76.

Mrs Fairfax's comments insinuate that she fears Rochester will take advantage of Jane's unworldliness. Even after his attempted bigamy is revealed, Rochester himself proposes something similar when he entreats Jane to live with him in France as "Mrs Rochester – both virtually and nominally"; there she "shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life" (*JE*, 350). Jane understands that, if she agreed to live with Rochester "as [he] desire[d]", she "should then be [his] mistress" (*JE*, 350). Even prior to the revelation of Bertha Mason's living in the attic, Jane tells Rochester that she is aware of how easily she could become another of his mistresses, like Adèle's mother: "I will not be your English Céline Varens" (*JE*, 311). Although Rochester told only Grace Poole and the surgeon, Carter, of Bertha's existence, Mrs Fairfax "may indeed have suspected", without gaining any "precise knowledge as to facts", the lawful impediment preventing Rochester from legally marrying his governess (*JE*, 357). It is also clear, from her own words, that Mrs Fairfax recognises the vulnerable and 'potentially dangerous' situation in which Jane finds herself, of possibly becoming Rochester's mistress or the victim of rape.

Conversely, Jane Eyre's liminal role as governess, her desire for her "master", and her willingness to use violence when rebuffing Rochester's flirtations also position her as dangerous. Mrs Fairfax's remark that Jane should distrust both Rochester *and* herself underlines the suspicion attached to governesses in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁴ While advising Jane to maintain a physical and emotional distance from Rochester, Mrs Fairfax emphasises the precarity of being a governess, both financially and sexually: "Gentleman in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (*JE*, 306). The unlikeliness of gentlemen marrying their governesses is emphasised by Mrs Fairfax's insinuation that "proud" men like Rochester usually marry with money in mind: "his father, at least,

²⁴ For further discussion of the perception of governesses in the nineteenth century, specifically in relation to notions of their "sub-humanity", see Chapter Four of this thesis.

liked money” (JE, 305). At this stage in the novel, Jane has no reliable source of independence.

In the 1840s, governesses were often viewed with suspicion, not least for being unmarried women living in close quarters with men, married or otherwise. The increased likelihood of temptation spilling into fulfilment positioned governesses as a potentially contaminating presence in the private containment of middle- to upper-class homes. Although the ‘sexual dimension of the relationship of governesses and men in the household is so rarely mentioned in Victorian literature’, it was, as M. Jeanne Peterson notes, a primary source of conflict, thereby necessitating the ‘denial of a governess’s womanliness – her sexuality’.²⁵ As Mary Poovey writes, governesses were ‘meant to police the emergence of undue assertiveness or sexuality in her maturing charges and [...] was expected not to display wilfulness or desire herself’.²⁶ Governesses inhabited an indeterminate societal position, as they resided between working- and middle-class women; as well-educated employees teaching the children of the middle and upper classes, such women crossed class frontiers while also being expected to regulate the gateway of the bourgeois home.²⁷ This emphasis on governesses as regulatory guardians alongside their indistinct social status led to the ‘mid-Victorian fear that the governess could not protect middle-class values because she could not be trusted to regulate her own sexuality’.²⁸ In this light, Jane Eyre must repeatedly keep her own desire in check in the face of Rochester’s advances, even if these rebuffs are often underpinned by – as we shall see – small though still sadistic acts of violence.

²⁵ M. Jeanne Peterson, ‘The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society’, *Victorian Studies*, 14.1 (1970), 7–26, p. 18.

²⁶ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 128.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Yet, crucially, it is not her “governessing slavery”, as Rochester terms it, that puts Jane on her guard (*JE*, 311). In fact, her status as governess offers her a form of protection, while also enabling her to take pleasure in her combative “system” of deterrence. As Mary Ann Davis notes, the *distance* which Jane keeps between herself and her employer/lover during their engagement signifies ‘the distance between classes of society, revealing Jane’s understanding of how these social distances are necessary to their erotic dynamic’.²⁹ Jane can hide behind her professional persona, which covers her in two ways: offering a legitimate way to protect her virginity, while also giving her a safe ‘source of pleasure’.³⁰ Far from placing her in further danger, Jane’s decision to remain Adèle’s governess until marriage allows her to put in place and maintain an arrangement with Rochester, in which they can both safely negotiate, but never cross, the line between temptation and fulfilment. Charlotte Brontë herself, in a letter to W. S. Williams in June 1848, gestures to this negotiation between pain and pleasure through self-discipline: a ‘governess’s [sic] experience is frequently indeed bitter, but its results are precious; the mind, feeling, temper are there subjected to a discipline equally painful and priceless’.³¹

Following Mrs Fairfax’s warning, Jane’s conduct towards Rochester alters. He is constantly trying to overstep the emotional and physical boundaries which Jane is struggling to uphold as both employee and lover. Prior to their engagement, Rochester tries to convince Jane of his love for her by ‘inclosing [her] in his arms, gathering [her] to

²⁹ Mary Ann Davis, “On the Extreme Brink” with Charlotte Brontë: Revisiting *Jane Eyre*’s Erotics of Power”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 52.2 (2016), 115–48, p. 134.

³⁰ While Shuttleworth does not link Jane’s behaviour to her role as a governess, she helpfully positions Jane’s ‘tactical’ game of withholding in relation to Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), whose main goal was the protection of their virtue. The ‘erotic charge’ for readers, not the heroines, in these eighteenth-century novels stems from the women always ‘hovering [...] on the brink of violation’. Meanwhile, for Jane, as Shuttleworth points out, maintaining one’s virginity is ‘a goal in itself’, but the ‘erotic charge’ of withholding becomes a ‘mode of regulating social and sexual interaction’, one based on sexual desire rather than solely concerned with purity and the threat of assault. See *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 172.

³¹ Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 15 June 1848, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume II: 1848–1851*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 72–5, pp. 72–3.

his breast, pressing his lips to [her] lips', an embrace from which Jane struggles to break free (*JE*, 293). Once she is convinced by his declaration and has accepted his proposal of marriage, Jane allows Rochester to kiss her 'repeatedly', in full view of an astonished Mrs Fairfax (*JE*, 296). The following day, Jane receives an 'embrace and a kiss' from Rochester; she writes that it 'seemed genial to be so well loved, so caressed by him' (*JE*, 298). Later, Jane herself initiates a caress, turning her 'lips to the hand that lay on [her] shoulder' (*JE*, 304). Yet, following Mrs Fairfax's admonition, instead of allowing herself to be enticed by his attentions, Jane persistently rebuffs his advances, seeing even his smile as one that 'a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure' (*JE*, 310). She reports to the reader that she 'was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed' (*JE*, 315). Jane writes of keeping Rochester, and herself, 'from the edge of the gulph' (*JE*, 315), adumbrating her fear of Rochester plunging 'headlong into wild licence' following his threat of rape (*JE*, 349). She fears the consequences of their giving in to temptation, while gaining pleasure from the process of resistance.

The sexual dimension of the unrealised violence threatened by Rochester is foreshadowed in Jane's use of small acts of violence to keep her fiancé in check. With Mrs Fairfax's words still upon her, Jane feels her 'sense of power over [Rochester]' fading, as she almost 'mechanically' obeys him (*JE*, 306). As noted, instead of taking his hand, she 'crushe[s]' it 'vigorously' and 'thrust[s] it back to him red with the passionate pressure'. Though these are not extreme acts of violence, they turn a seemingly loving gesture into something more alarming, and set a precedent for the development of their relationship as engaged employer/employee. Such brief moments of brutality are the only reported instances of physical violence committed by Jane against Rochester. Subsequently, she

uses her 'tongue' as a 'weapon of defence' against the threat of a '[s]oft scene' or 'daring demonstration', both of which she is 'in peril' of receiving from Rochester after he serenades her with a love song (*JE*, 314). In these moments, Jane recognises that one of the only means of controlling Rochester – and herself – is through violence, whether physical or linguistic.

The sadistic "system" upon which Jane enters and then pursues 'during the whole season of probation' is not entirely displeasing to Rochester (*JE*, 315). He goes along with the game, taking pleasure in and, 'on the whole', remaining 'excellently entertained' by it (*JE*, 315). He gives as good as he gets, too, swapping caresses for grimaces, 'a kiss on the cheek' for 'a severe tweak of the ear' (*JE*, 315). Despite his sportsmanship, Rochester reminds Jane that, though she wields power now, his turn will come shortly: "It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain like this" (touching his watchguard)' (*JE*, 311–2). The interjection here is telling, as Rochester feels the need to remind Jane, and perhaps himself, that he is only speaking figuratively rather than literally. He is willing to play along with Jane's teasing because he knows he will have his own 'awful vengeance for [her] present conduct at some period fast coming' (*JE*, 316) – a period when he will have the legal, and hopefully consensual, ability to touch and be touched by Jane as much as they please. In the meantime, Jane's use of minor violence, her refusal to kiss Rochester, as well as her words of 'asperity', have the desired effect. During their 'evening conferences', Jane 'thwart[s] and afflict[s]' him with her cool distance (*JE*, 315). Finally, Rochester begins to call her "provoking puppet" and "malicious elf" instead of "love" or "darling", replacing his usual soft touches and kisses with sharper, less gentle contact (*JE*, 315). Jane's minor violences introduce some viciousness, however playful, into their relationship and give Rochester a gateway through which to follow her lead.

This is not to say that Jane's little acts of violence justify Rochester's later recourse to more serious threats of brutality. Jane's use of sadistic measures within her "system" does, however, confirm the connection between sex and violence within her and Rochester's relationship. To push against Rochester's seductive encroachments, Jane reacts with violence, which later leads Rochester to replace his tenderness with teasing toughness. This conversion of sentiment into flirtatious cruelty infuses those playful tweaks and grimaces with a sexual charge. The pair eroticise violence. This is how we know that Rochester's threat to "try violence" is imbued with a sexual undercurrent that tips from pleasure and playfulness into potential danger. By the time Rochester threatens sexual assault, repeatedly, violence has already been established as part of a "system" of articulating, as well as containing, their mutual desire.

Melodramatic Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*

It is worth pausing briefly to note that playful clashes and sexually-charged violence appear in other novels by the Brontës, including Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Towards the novel's end, Catherine Linton is seen by Lockwood committing similarly small acts of sadism against her fiancé, Hareton Earnshaw. One evening while teaching him to read, she becomes irritated by Hareton's apparent inability to say correctly the word "contrary": "Con-*trary*! [...] That for the third time, you dunce! I'm not going to tell you again – Recollect, or I pull your hair!"³² The playfulness of this threat is revealed in Hareton's response: "Contrary, then," answered another, in deep, but softened tones. "And now, kiss me, for minding so well" (*WH*, 307). Catherine does not comply with this request, however; she commands Hareton to repeat the word again "without a single

³² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 307. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

mistake” (*WH*, 307). Instead of reacting violently – as he did only a few pages earlier, prior to their engagement, when Catherine mocked his illiteracy and he gave ‘a manual check [...] to her saucy tongue’ (*WH*, 302) – Hareton’s ‘handsome features glowed with pleasure, and his eyes kept impatiently wandering from the page to a small white hand over his shoulder, which recalled him by a smart slap on the cheek, whenever its owner detected such signs of inattention’ (*WH*, 307). Once Hareton has recited the word with accuracy, he claims his ‘reward and receive[s] at least five kisses, which, however, he generously returned’ (*WH*, 308). This scene exemplifies Jane and Rochester’s “system” in miniature, as it is the woman who wields the power, while both gain pleasure by withholding then indulging in caresses and committing small acts of violence.

It is telling that, in both examples from *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, playful sadism is initiated by women. As Davis writes, ‘Jane’s existence between resistance and yielding – the verge – is a pleasure *to them both* [Jane and Rochester]; but Jane is the one who wields this pleasure, controlling its ebb and flow’.³³ It is Jane – and, in *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Linton – who controls the oscillation between retreat and surrender, and who must be constantly vigilant against Rochester’s overbearing attentions and evident capacity to tip them both over the gulf of temptation.

Not only is the sexual nature of Rochester’s threat located in their previous exchanges as an engaged couple; it also becomes evident in the interaction that follows. Rochester attempts to justify his threat, telling Jane: “‘But I am not angry, Jane: I only love you too well; and you had steeled your little pale face with such a resolute, frozen look, I could not endure it”’ (*JE*, 349). By defending his behaviour, Rochester inadvertently admits to the severity of his words, while also imposing responsibility on Jane and rendering her complicit in the warning. Once again, Rochester repeats his threat

³³ Davis, “‘On the Extreme Brink” with Charlotte Brontë”, pp. 131–2.

and positions Jane as responsible: “Jane, you must be reasonable, or in truth I shall again become frantic” (*JE*, 350). In this moment, his ‘voice and hand quivered: his large nostrils dilated; his eyes blazed’ – Jane senses that she is losing him to his previous “passion” and therefore to a second threat of rape; but she speaks out regardless to remind Rochester that his wife is living and that to “say otherwise is sophistical – is false” (*JE*, 350). Her words have the dreaded effect, as Rochester becomes frantic once more: “Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man – you forget that: I am not long-enduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your finger on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and – beware!” (*JE*, 350–1).

There is a pointed melodrama to this threat which undercuts the gravity of the warning. This theatrical edge is introduced through the various genres Brontë brings together in the novel, particularly the Gothic and fairy tales which incorporate sensationalised, and often excessively violent, incidents into their narratives.³⁴ Angela Carter identifies this combination of genres in *Jane Eyre*, describing it as ‘the most durable of melodramas, angry, sexy, a little crazy [...] – one of the oddest novels ever written, a delirious romance replete with elements of pure fairytale’.³⁵ Violence is a unifying leitmotif running through the genres of melodrama, the Gothic, and fairy tale. Rosalind Crone writes of the ‘ease with which extreme violence could be comfortably slotted within’ the ‘rigid framework of melodrama’.³⁶ Similarly, Maria Tatar makes the point that, in fairy tales even beyond the Brothers Grimm collection, ‘nearly every character – from the most

³⁴ While the genres of melodrama, Gothicism, and fairy tale are distinct, they share similarities, particularly in their inclusion of emotional and violent excess. As Peter Brooks notes, melodrama and the Gothic novel are ‘two early Romantic (“pre-Romantic”) forms that in fact nourish one another’. See *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 17.

³⁵ Angela Carter, ‘Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*’, in *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 161–72, p. 161.

³⁶ Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 125.

hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary – is capable of cruel behaviour’.³⁷ Within Gothic novels, rape and murder, or the threat of these acts, feature heavily, often in explicit detail, such as in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796).

In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is often presented as an embodiment of these literary genres’ competing articulations of masculinity, particularly as an amalgamation of the romantic hero and the Bluebeard-esque Gothic villain, a combination also identifiable in Heathcliff.³⁸ As Jessica Cox writes, ‘Rochester is both Prince Charming and Bluebeard, while Jane is caught in a position which promises/threatens either a Cinderella-like transformation, or imprisonment and perhaps death at the hands of her own husband’.³⁹ Deborah Lutz agrees, noting that Rochester ‘wrap[s] up the contradictions of lover and enemy into one subjectivity’, thereby collapsing ‘the blackguard and sweetheart into one’.⁴⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert puts it even more succinctly when she writes that ‘it’s possible to summarise this novel’s narrative with a *National Inquirer* headline: CINDERELLA MEETS BLUEBEARD!’⁴¹ Here, Cox, Lutz, and Gilbert articulate through Brontë’s use of various genres the paradox inherent in Rochester’s threats, as both something to be feared *and* enjoyed or, even, encouraged.

In his review of *Jane Eyre*, G. H. Lewes writes that the novel’s primary weakness was there being ‘too much melodrama and improbability, which smack of the circulating-

³⁷ Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 5.

³⁸ John Sutherland points out the similarities between the romantic lead of Brontë’s hero and the wife-murdering villain of the eponymous fairy-tale, Bluebeard. Sutherland writes that the ‘echoes of “Bluebeard” in *Jane Eyre* are obvious. Rochester is a swarthy, middle-aged, rich country gentleman, with a wife locked up in a secret chamber in his house. He wants another wife – like Bluebeard, he is a man of voracious sexual appetite’. See *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy? More Puzzles in Classic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 69.

³⁹ Jessica Cox, ‘Sensational Realism? *Jane Eyre* and the Problem of Genre’, *Cycnos*, 25 (2008), paras. 1–29, para. 15 <<http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=5962>> [Accessed 31 October 2018].

⁴⁰ Deborah Lutz, *The Dangerous Lover: Gothic Villains, Byronism, and the Nineteenth-Century Seduction Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 29–31.

⁴¹ Sandra M. Gilbert also asks the pertinent question: ‘what if Prince Charming is not just a charming aristocrat but a Bluebeard who elicits a passionate desire in Cinderella?’ See ‘*Jane Eyre* and the Secrets of Furious Lovemaking’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 31.3 (1998), 351–72, pp. 357–8.

library'.⁴² Although Lewes is alluding in particular to 'the mad wife and all that relates to her', as well as 'the wanderings of Jane when she quits Thornfield', his comments chime with the excesses of Rochester's rhetoric when he tells Jane to "beware".⁴³ Brontë herself sought to defend her work against Lewes's warning 'to beware of Melodrame' and his exhortation 'to adhere to the real', telling him that, in order to gain success in the literary market, novels had to 'suit the circulating libraries' upon which readership 'mainly depended' – and that meant introducing some sensationalism into proceedings.⁴⁴ And, in opposition to Ingham's view – as quoted in the opening of this chapter – that *Jane Eyre* follows 'in the Gothic tradition of sensational plots' but does not 'involve details of much brutality', Rochester's melodramatic explosion of rage brings together both 'the Gothic tradition of sensational plots' and the excessive violence that often accompanies them.

Rochester's elaborately violent rhetoric may be of a piece with Lewes's accusations of melodrama, but the question of whether this injection of gothic theatricality heightens or dampens the severity of the potential violence still stands. The indeterminacy of both Rochester's characterisation, as Prince Charming and Bluebeard, and of whether the melodrama of his threats punctures or inflates their severity, points to Rochester's abilities as an actor. In one of the most improbable scenes in the novel, Rochester dresses up as a 'gipsy' to trick his guests, particularly Blanche Ingram but also Jane herself, into revealing their true feelings and any ulterior motives (*JE*, 227). Blanche and others seem to accept his disguise, while Jane claims to have suspected '[s]omething of a masquerade' – but she does not suspect that it was Rochester (*JE*, 234). This suggests that he is an effective dissembler, capable of adopting a persona not his own.

⁴² See G. H. Lewes, 'Recent Novels: French and English', *Fraser's Magazine*, December 1847, 36 (London), 686–95, p. 692. Other reviewers noted the 'melo-dramatic' nature of certain incidents in the novel, such as the unsigned review featured in *Atlas* on 23 October 1847. See *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 67–9, p. 68.

⁴³ Lewes, 'Recent Novels: French and English', p. 692.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Brontë to G. H. Lewes, 6 November 1847, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II*, 559–61, p. 559.

Robert Kendrick has noted the affectation inherent in Rochester's character, particularly in connection to the construction of his masculinity, writing that he 'has affected in the past' the role of 'libertine' and that 'his posturing as a brooding Byronic hero does not result in his successful conquest of Jane'.⁴⁵ James Eli Adams extends this to nineteenth-century constructions of masculinity more broadly, positioning 'the intractable element of theatricality in all masculine self-fashioning, which inevitably makes appeal to an audience, real or imagined'.⁴⁶ The excessiveness of Rochester's threats is theatrical, but it is also an acknowledgement of his physical male strength in comparison to Jane's "weaker" frame. The "hammy" element to the performance undercuts the severity of his intimidations, as it acts as an extension of the drama acted out by both Rochester and Jane throughout their courtship. He is playing the role of rejected lover, while also embodying a kind of aggressive maleness through performance, but that does not mean he will act on his threats.⁴⁷ Yet the calculation involved in such acting is itself disturbing. Even if Rochester is exaggerating his part as jilted male lover, he still chooses to adopt the violent aspect of the role. As with Jane's knowledge that violence is one of her only means of controlling Rochester, Rochester is also acknowledging the centrality of violence in his own melodramatic attempts to win Jane round. He calculates, perhaps wrongly, that the spectre of violence must be summoned in order for him to act his part convincingly and gain the happy ending he desires.

After the second threat, Jane is less fearful for her own safety and more so for Rochester's, as she recognises that to 'agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so

⁴⁵ Robert Kendrick, 'Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*', in *The Brontës*, ed. Patricia Ingham (Harlow: Longman, 2003), 203–15, p. 211.

⁴⁶ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY.; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Notably, Angela Carter also considers Jane Eyre in terms of acting: 'Jane is only pretending to be a heroine of romance or fairytale. She may act out the Gothic role of "woman in peril" for a while at Thornfield Hall, when she is menaced by her lover's first wife, but, when things become intolerable, she leaves.' See 'Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*', p. 163.

abhorred, was cruel'; but she also knows that 'to yield was out of the question' (*JE*, 351). What follows is a lengthy justification of Rochester's attempted bigamy, a last-ditch attempt to convince Jane of his need for her love. Despite her own distress, Jane continues to resist Rochester's efforts of persuasion. This sparks another frenzy of rage which in turn leads to another contemplation of rape by Rochester. Jane tells us that his 'fury was wrought to the highest' and that 'he must yield to it for a moment, whatever followed; he crossed the floor and seized my arm and grasped my waist' (*JE*, 365). Held in this 'painful' grip and shaken by 'the force of his hold', Jane endures Rochester's verbalised meditation on harming her body to reach "the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of" her eye (*JE*, 366). He knows that he could "bend her with [his] finger and thumb", but:

"what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her? [...] Whatever I do with [the wild, free thing's] cage, I cannot get at it – the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose. Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place. And it is you, spirit [...] that I want: not alone your brittle frame. Of yourself you could come with soft flight and nestle against my heart, if you would: seized against your will, you will elude the grasp like an essence – you will vanish ere I inhale your fragrance. Oh! come, Jane, come!" (*JE*, 366)

He openly considers – though in a way that suggests he has already discounted – the possibility of tearing, rending, conquering, and possessing Jane's body against her will. This description of physical force is graphic and even hints at violence leading to Jane's death, her "escap[ing] to heaven". Perhaps most disturbingly, Rochester only disregards using sexual violence as a method of attaining Jane's body and mind because he knows instinctively that it would only push her further from him, either by killing her or by making her vanish. It is also her spirit which Rochester covets, and he recognises that he

cannot enter her spirit through her body. His decision to not rape Jane comes down, then, to Rochester's ultimate acknowledgment that he cannot get what he wants by violating her physically.

Locating Gendered Violence in *Jane Eyre*

As Rochester's intimidations are never realised, the question of where the violence resides remains. His threats are themselves violations of the unspoken "system" in place between him and Jane. His words indicate an inclination – however hesitant – to disregard Jane's boundaries to fully possess her body and mind. As Maynard writes, 'there is no question that [Rochester's] way of overcoming [Jane's] scruples is in itself a kind of attempted rape, a violation of her conscience that would allow him to touch her body'.⁴⁸ Here, Maynard draws attention to Rochester's desire to force himself upon Jane to grasp her conscience, that 'inward power' which prevents her from entirely obeying Rochester's wishes. While dressed as the gipsy, Rochester divulges his knowledge of Jane's "inward treasure", "which can keep [her] alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld" (*JE*, 233). It is not only Jane's body which Rochester wants, but her spirit – though it remains unclear as to whether Rochester wants access to Jane's spirit due to his love for it or his desire to possess and therefore control it. He certainly misreads Jane's conscience, as he tells her, while still playing the part of gipsy, that he has "formed [his] plans – right plans [he] deem[s] them – and in them [he has] attended to the claims of conscience" (*JE*, 233). In contemplating his plan to marry Jane, he declares that, in committing bigamy and thereby trespassing against Jane's conscience, he does not "want sacrifice, sorrow, dissolution", nor "to wring tears of blood" (*JE*, 233). This is a disturbing adumbration of what is to

⁴⁸ Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*, p. 112.

follow. Even when weighing up the ethics of his plan, Rochester anticipates the possibility of violent resistance if Jane's conscience should rebel against it. The threat is, then, an ethical – as well as a potentially physical – violation, heightened by Rochester's acknowledgement that he will be testing the limits of Jane's inner power by coercing her into an illegal marriage.

Maynard's remarks also illuminate the fact that Rochester only ever *threatens* sexual violence, rather than committing it. Once again, violence resides in language: not only because it is described within a novel, but because no actual physical act of violence is committed by Rochester against Jane. Yet Rochester's words can still hurt Jane; they 'cut' and 'torture' her (*JE*, 350). The word 'torture' is used twice, as Jane reiterates that Rochester's 'language was torture' to her while he recounts the beginnings of their relationship (*JE*, 362). The physical pang caused by Rochester's words stem from her awareness of the pain that she must inflict upon him, as she believes that she 'had wounded' him by rejecting his proposal to live an unmarried life together in France (*JE*, 350). Both Jane and Rochester are aware of the blows dealt by their words alone, and Rochester's threat of violence is no exception.

The conversion of caresses to small assaults and scowls within the couple's "system" of courtship accounts for Jane's response to Rochester's threat of rape. There is, however, a jarring gap between these earlier "minor" violences and the brutality of Rochester's threat and Jane's surprisingly energised response. Though comprehending Rochester's meaning and feeling a level of fear, Jane does not view the moment as unappealing. Maynard, as noted, recognises the 'odd' contradictions at play in the scene. And Shuttleworth argues that 'Brontë cuts through the niceties of romance tradition, daring to give her heroine [...] a sense of enjoyment at the conventional moment of

supposed greatest suffering'.⁴⁹ Shuttleworth's careful use of qualifiers like 'supposed' and 'conventional' is telling, as it points to the gap between Jane's responses to the 'supposed greatest suffering' and the reader's possible reaction, as they may otherwise be shocked by the novel's inclusion of a rape threat met with mixed feelings. Davis notes that the enjoyment felt during the 'perilous' crisis of Rochester's frenzy 'centres in Jane Eyre's ability to control Rochester through a strategizing of her emotional reactions'.⁵⁰ It is true that Jane feels 'an inward power; a sense of influence which supported [her]' (*JE*, 349). Yet this 'inward power' is not necessarily a strategy. As well as being the "wild, free" spirit of which Rochester seeks possession, Jane's inner strength, or her belief in her own strength, is also what enables her to subdue Rochester and avoid rape. Ironically, this inner strength both puts Jane at risk of and saves her from sexual violence.

Jane's success in repelling Rochester's threat of sexual assault is in keeping with early to mid-nineteenth-century attitudes towards sexual violence and its victims, particularly regarding the belief that there was a hazy overlap between seduction and assault. Anna Clark writes in relation to sexual assault in the nineteenth century, it was 'always women's responsibility to defend themselves against men's allegedly uncontrollable passions'.⁵¹ As in *Jane Eyre*, the onus to prevent rape is on the woman, while the man's "passion" is positioned as inevitable and even natural.⁵² This responsibility does not negate the agency of Jane; she is able to turn the 'perilous' situation round in her favour through her own means. Yet the emphasis on women as accountable deflects from the reality of the threat: that it stems from Rochester. Contemporary

⁴⁹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 173.

⁵⁰ Davis, "On the Extreme Brink" with Charlotte Brontë', p. 137.

⁵¹ Anna Clark, 'Rape or Seduction? A Controversy over Sexual Violence in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men's Power, Women's Resistance*, ed. London Feminist History Group (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 13–27, p. 19.

⁵² Although, as will be discussed, one key component of idealised Victorian masculinity resided in the expectation of male self-discipline. Clive Emsley writes that the 'ideal type of Englishman varied during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and there were disagreements about the importance of different attributes, but strict control of the passions was central'. See *Hard Men*, p. 55.

reviewers, such as Elizabeth Rigby, were quick to notice the similarities between *Jane Eyre* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), in many ways itself a seduction novel. Indeed, in the first chapter of the novel, we learn that Bessie used to read from 'the pages of "Pamela"' to a young Jane Eyre (*JE*, 11). Rigby writes that 'Jane Eyre is merely another Pamela, who, by the force of her character and the strength of her principles, is carried victoriously through great trials and temptations from the man she loves'.⁵³ Both Jane and Pamela must resist the (often aggressive) advances of their suitors, always perilously close to "giving in" to temptation. Clark goes on to note that, if 'a woman's resistance to rape failed, she lost her place in the patriarchal system'.⁵⁴ Within this (what we would now deem) victim-blaming context, Jane's position in the patriarchal system remains unchallenged. She succeeds in dissolving the moment of crisis and avoiding sexual assault, thereby enabling her to continue her narrative without the "stain" of sexual contamination.

While Jane's response to the apprehension of rape and her prevention of it can be read as gendered, Rochester's own outbursts of violence and passion can also be viewed in terms of constructions of masculinity in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As Clive Emsley notes, the 'concept of the English gentleman, and the overall English view of themselves, was central to English people's understanding of violence within their society'.⁵⁵ Despite this link between violence and masculinity in nineteenth-century England, it was recognised 'above all' that 'Englishness required reserve and restraint; striking the first blow was wrong'.⁵⁶ Throughout *Jane Eyre*, we are reminded repeatedly of

⁵³ Elizabeth Rigby, from an unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, in Allott, 105–12, p. 106. In the introduction to the 2006 Penguin edition of *Jane Eyre*, Davies writes that '[t]races of *Pamela* abound in *Jane Eyre*, not least in the supple, idiomatic banter [between Jane and Rochester] which renders the courtship so poignantly delightful and maintains a sense of sexual arousal even when the two are most peaceful together'. See Davies, 'Introduction', *Jane Eyre*, p. xxiv.

⁵⁴ Clark, 'Rape or Seduction?', p. 24.

⁵⁵ Emsley, *Hard Men*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13.

Rochester's capacity for violence, of his being often on the threshold of committing an assault, and of his ability to bring himself back from the brink. When Bertha Mason's brother, Richard Mason, interrupts the wedding ceremony, Jane recounts that Rochester 'could have struck [him], dashed him on the church-floor, shocked by ruthless blow the breath from his body' (*JE*, 335). It is only when Mason asserts his comparative weakness, by shrinking away and crying 'faintly, "Good God!"', that Rochester backs down (*JE*, 335). Similarly, in Rochester's dealings with Bertha after the aborted wedding, and in keeping with his meditation on violence rather than his acting on it, Jane observes that he 'could have settled [Bertha] with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle' (*JE*, 339). Rochester's restraint here is emphasised by Bertha's own strength: 'the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled [...] she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was' (*JE*, 338–9). Despite Bertha's "virility", she is still a woman, as well as a "lunatic", and therefore the weaker party in the struggle. As Jane remembers it, Rochester could have been murdered by Bertha during their struggle; and, despite this, he does not resort to cruelty in this scene, other than by physically restraining her.

Rochester's predisposition towards violence is evident not only in relation to contemplating violence against others, but also against himself. Rochester tells Jane that he had once 'meant to shoot [him]self' during a 'crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair', precipitated by the sound of Bertha's manic shrieks heard clearly through the "thin partitions of the West Indian house" in which they lived (*JE*, 355). The reassurance that he refuses to use violence against his wife despite her own violent behaviour, as well as against himself and others, positions Rochester as a "reasonable" figure capable of restraining himself, an exemplification of the idealised visions of masculinity at play when *Jane Eyre* was published. Herbert Sussman writes that 'the early Victorians [... defined]

manhood as self-discipline, as the ability to control male energy'.⁵⁷ John Tosh agrees, noting that Victorian codes of manliness emphasised 'self-control'.⁵⁸ It must be acknowledged, however, that both Sussman and Tosh are primarily discussing masculinity as envisioned by the professional and industrial classes, not necessarily the landed gentry of which Rochester is a member.⁵⁹ St John Rivers is, in many ways, a far more "typical" example of this masculine ideal due to his extreme morality and cold detachment. Yet, as Davies notes, Rivers also threatens Jane with a form of sexual violence, by asking her to be his wife and become a missionary with him in India, a proposition which would involve 'all the forms of love (which [Jane] doubt[s] not he would scrupulously observe)' (*JE*, 467). Even within a more stereotypically self-controlled vision of Victorian masculinity, the threat of coercive violence remains.⁶⁰

For Judith E. Pike, however, Rochester 'does not embody the ideal of manliness, for he does not exercise the prerequisite moral restraint'.⁶¹ Pike also contends that – far from choosing not to strike Bertha – 'Brontë shows how Rochester struggles to refrain from using physical violence against his lunatic wife [...] Furthermore, her unchecked violence has the potential to unleash his own rage, which if acted upon would unman him

⁵⁷ Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 11.

⁵⁸ John Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop*, 38 (1994), 179–202, p. 183.

⁵⁹ Tosh writes that the 'dominant code of Victorian manliness, with its emphasis on self-control, hard work and independence, was that of the professional and business classes'. See 'What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?', p. 183. Tosh's views are echoed by Sussman, who notes that the 'definition of manhood as self-discipline' was 'specific to bourgeois man': 'For the industrialist as for the Pre-Raphaelite by valorising manliness as self-regulation over what was seen through middle-class eyes as the libertinism and idleness of the gentry and the irregularity and sexual license of the working class.' See *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Patricia Menon notes the similarities in metaphors used by Jane when Rochester threatens rape and when propositioned with marriage by St John. Jane describes the crisis with Rochester as 'perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe' (*JE*, 349). In contrast, her encounter with St John is presented in similar terms: 'I was tempted to cease struggling with him – to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own' (*JE*, 482). See *Austen, Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and the Mentor-Lover* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 103.

⁶¹ Judith E. Pike, 'Rochester's Bronze Scrag and Pearl Necklace: Bronzed Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Juvenilia*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.2 (2013), 261–81, p. 276.

by reducing him to the level of a brute.⁶² Violence plays a crucial part in Pike's evaluation of Rochester's "manliness", as well as her consideration of Robert Moore in *Shirley* (1849). She writes that 'Brontë's heroes must eventually reform their violent tendencies and actions' to embody the mid-nineteenth-century ideal of masculinity, as this requires 'self-restraint and the ability to refrain from the abuse of masculine power over weaker creatures, especially women and children'.⁶³ Ultimately, Rochester *does* refrain from committing direct physical violence against both Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. In this regard, he succeeds in fulfilling certain nineteenth-century expectations of men and their relationship to violence, by refusing to submit to his baser instincts and carry out his threats.

Yet the incarceration and tying up of Bertha are forms of violence, as is his shaking of Jane and the language he uses to try to persuade her to be his mistress. As Pike rightly notes, Rochester clearly struggles with the concept of self-restraint, as he finds himself in a constant battle between his instinctive desires and his awareness that he should not act upon those instincts. Yet considering the contested nature of both masculinity and violence in the mid-nineteenth century, Rochester's oscillation between theatrical threats and self-restraint suggests he in fact embodies the paradoxes inherent in contemporary notions of male violence. Adams identifies 'the importance of this anxious conjunction of discipline and performance in middle-class Victorian constructions of masculinity', a combination which resonates with Rochester's own violences.⁶⁴ His apparent readiness to threaten or commit violence is countered by his ability to control such impulses just in time, so that he exists always on the edge. Although early nineteenth-

⁶² Pike, 'Bronzed Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia', p. 276. Martin J. Wiener's view reiterates this point, writing that, in Victorian England, 'male violence [was] coming more and more to be denounced as a relic of benighted ages and a practice of barbaric peoples'. See *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁶³ Pike, 'Bronzed Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia', p. 276.

⁶⁴ Although, as noted in relation to Tosh and Sussman's respective arguments, Rochester is not middle class. See Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, p. 11.

century understandings of masculinity were grounded in ‘the possession of an innate, distinctively male energy’, as Sussman writes, the macho force that required suppression had to exist already.⁶⁵ The ideal of masculinity is underpinned by the internal battle against this intense male energy. With his expressive theatricality, his dissembling, and his much-tested self-restraint, particularly in relation to his relationships with Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, Rochester can be positioned – if not as the embodiment of the Victorian masculine ideal – then as an equally paradoxical, ambivalent force capable of slipping between, as well as challenging, multiple states.

The violent maiming of Rochester in the fire at Thornfield – which Richard Chase refers to as a ‘symbolic castration’ – points to the necessity of dampening his passionate *male* energies to allow him and Jane to marry.⁶⁶ Only violence, that of a destructive fire lit by Bertha, can minimise the brutality in Rochester’s character. Angela Carter also sees Rochester’s temporary blindness and the loss of his left hand as, if not a castration, then a dampening of his masculinity, believing that Brontë made this choice ‘to get him on an egalitarian and reciprocal basis [with Jane], because in fact she hasn’t castrated him at all, she’s got rid of his troublesome *machismo*’.⁶⁷ Indeed, the host of the inn tells Jane that, after she fled Thornfield following the threat of rape, Rochester “‘grew savage – quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a mild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her’” (*JE*, 493). This dangerousness is only quelled by the flames of an act of female violence.

In a subversion of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s canonical view that ‘Bertha [...] is Jane’s truest and darkest double’,⁶⁸ Sue Thomas argues that ‘Bertha acts

⁶⁵ Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Richard Chase, ‘The Brontës: A Centennial Observance (Reconsiderations VIII)’, *The Kenyon Review*, 9.4 (1947), 487–506, p. 495.

⁶⁷ Angela Carter, quoted in Lorna Sage, ‘The Savage Sideshow: A Profile of Angela Carter’, *New Review*, 52.2 (1977), 51–7, p. 56.

⁶⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edition (New Haven, CT.; London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 360.

occasionally as Rochester's double, a sign of the uncontainable violence of his desires, and its implications'.⁶⁹ While this position limits Bertha's subjectivity and once again figures her as a cypher, Thomas's comments illuminate the connection between Rochester's and Bertha's respective violences. Where Rochester restrains himself from enacting the brutality he often threatens, Bertha acts upon her violent impulses. As Rochester tells Jane, "[Bertha] has never failed to take advantage of her guardian's temporary lapses; once to secrete the knife with which she stabbed her brother, and twice to possess herself of the key of her cell" (*JE*, 357). When free to roam the house, instead of seeking escape, Bertha commits acts of violence by attempting to burn Rochester in his bed (*JE*, 174) and paying Jane a 'ghastly visit', during which she tears the new would-be Mrs Rochester's wedding veil (*JE*, 357). Notably, Thomas writes that the destruction of the veil 'symbolically prefigures rape', again aligning the (threatened) violences of Rochester and Bertha.⁷⁰ In her final violent act, Bertha "set fire first to the hangings of the room next her own, and then [...] made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's [...] and she kindled the bed there" (*JE*, 492). She is then seen "waving her arms above the battlements", where Rochester attempts to beckon her back; he "approach[ed] her; and then [...] she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement" (*JE*, 493).

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is the primary agent of violence. The defining form of violence in the novel is therefore female. Shuttleworth refers to the 'forces of female violence and insanity in *Jane Eyre* [...] as latent, secretive, and beyond control', energies embodied most explicitly by Bertha Mason.⁷¹ But Jane's rage also explodes into physical

⁶⁹ Sue Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 49.

⁷⁰ Thomas continues: 'Had Rochester's first marriage been disclosed after the consummation of his bigamous marriage to Jane, the consummation might have been refigured as a rape procured by false inducement to sex.' See *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre*, p. 50.

⁷¹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 166.

violence, particularly during the retelling of her childhood. The red room scene, itself identified by numerous critics as a rich embodiment of and metaphor for female sexuality and imprisonment, is one of the first instances of violence in the novel. She is kept there after sparring with her bullying cousin, John Reed, who initiated the attack against Jane by throwing a book at and thereby cutting her head. Jane responds by calling John a “[w]icked and cruel boy”: “You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman emperors!” (*JE*, 13). John then launches himself at Jane, ‘grasp[ing]’ her hair and shoulder; Jane ‘receive[s] him in frantic sort’ and tells the reader she does not ‘very well know what [she] did with [her] hands’ (*JE*, 14). Unlike John’s brutality, Jane’s violences are punished as unnatural by her Aunt Reed and she is subsequently locked in the red room where she believes she is visited by the ghost of her deceased Uncle Reed (*JE*, 20–1). This scene traumatises Jane, and embeds the issues of female incarceration and female rage within the novel. Shuttleworth points out that ‘Jane’s primary crime, in her aunt’s eyes, is her sudden flaring into violence which suggests a history of secrecy and concealment’.⁷² While she later relies on a “system” of control and mutual self-regulation to keep Rochester’s (and her own) sexual instincts at bay, Jane’s capacity for violence is prefigured in her early, more extreme outbursts of unregulated passion.

Unlike the older Jane Eyre, Bertha is presented as being unable to contain her desires and aggression. The lack of self-governance evidenced by Bertha’s behaviour and her resultant violence act as a warning to Jane, but also to Rochester. He is complicit in the breakdown of restraint within his and Bertha’s relationship, particularly as he then enforces self-containment by imprisoning his wife. Once Jane returns to him, his violence appears to have diminished; yet, Bertha’s death proves there are consequences for the exertion, and threat, of unbridled violence. Unlike that of Rochester, Bertha’s violence –

⁷² Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 157.

which is itself a response to her husband's incarceration of her – ends fatally, indicating that the rules for violent women in the nineteenth century were very different to those for men.

“Unfeminine” Coarseness in the Brontës' Novels

Despite the frequency with which allusions to sexual violence appear in *Jane Eyre*, contemporary reviewers did not directly remark upon these moments. It was rare for a critic in the 1840s to highlight explicitly the violent aspects of the novel; and even rarer to mention Rochester's threat of sexual assault. In the reviews, it is never referred to directly. When discussing Rochester's character, reviewers note that he was 'fierce in love and hatred, rough in manner, rude in courtship, with a shade of Byronic gloom and appetising mystery', picking up on the intensity of Rochester's passion.⁷³ E. P. Whipple, in the *North American Review*, writes that 'the profanity, brutality, and slang of the misanthropic profligate [Rochester] give their torpedo shocks to the nervous system'; and that 'we are favoured with more than one scene given to the exhibition of mere animal appetite, and to courtship after the manner of kangaroos'.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, in a review of *Shirley* from November 1849, Albany Fonblanque refers to Rochester as a 'social savage'.⁷⁵ And, even more explicitly, James Lorimer describes Rochester in the following terms: 'Proud, tyrannical, violent, and selfish though he was, he had the element of power, which [...] in a woman's eyes, supplies the deficiency of every other good quality'.⁷⁶ While the moments of violence are not pinpointed by these critics, Whipple, Fonblanque, and

⁷³ From an unsigned review, *Christian Remembrancer*, April 1848, in Allott, 88–92, p. 90.

⁷⁴ E. P. Whipple, 'Novels of the Season', *North American Review*, October 1848, in Allott, 97–9, pp. 98–9.

⁷⁵ Albany Fonblanque, from an unsigned review, *Examiner*, 3 November 1849, in Allott, 125–9, p. 125.

⁷⁶ James Lorimer, from an unsigned review, *North British Review*, August 1849, in Allott, 113–6, p. 114.

Lorimer identify an animalistic masculinity in Rochester, indicating that his violent tendencies did not go unnoticed.

The contemporary reviews circle the issue of violence and rarely give specific examples from the text of what exactly caused such consternation and outrage. The references to sexual desire are clear, but throughout the contemporary criticism there is, from this thesis's perspective, a lack of direct engagement with the literary violences in Brontë's novel. Regarding the scene after the interrupted wedding ceremony in *Jane Eyre*, one reviewer in the *Spectator* writes that Rochester, 'in spite of his exposure [as a bigamist], persists in wishing Jane to live with him; which leads to the third act'.⁷⁷ Rochester's threatening attempts to persuade Jane to be his mistress are glossed over here. This may be because the violent scenes represented, or gestured to, in *Jane Eyre* were not as shocking as its other subversive qualities. Reviewers and readers may have found nothing singular in Rochester's threats of rape. Elizabeth Rigby, in her famous critique of *Jane Eyre* for the *Quarterly Review*, remarks that Rochester 'is made as coarse and brutal as can in all conscience be required to keep our sympathies at a distance'.⁷⁸ Yet this apparent coarseness and brutality does not necessarily relate to Rochester's violences or, indeed, the violences represented in the novel more broadly.

The repeated use of the words 'savage', 'brutal', and 'coarse', especially the latter, when describing the Brontës' novels may explain the critical silence regarding Charlotte Brontë's literary violences. On the use of 'coarseness' in early discussions of the Brontës' work, Lucasta Miller defines the word as a 'catch-all moralistic term which encompassed a range of elements considered unfeminine and indecorous'.⁷⁹ Miller also aligns the ubiquitous use of 'coarseness' with 'the [Brontës'] novels' depiction of passion and violence, which were held to challenge the modesty and refinement of normative

⁷⁷ From an unsigned review, *Spectator*, 6 November 1847, in Allott, 74–5, p. 75.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Rigby, from an unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, in Allott, 105–12, p. 107.

⁷⁹ Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 18.

femininity’.⁸⁰ This link suggests that ‘coarseness’ encompasses the violences of the Brontës’ work, similar to Emily Brontë’s own use of ‘frenzy’ to signify violent emotional states and actions in her poetry and prose.

Miller is accurate in noting the connection between coarseness and unfemininity, as well as its implicit association with representations of violence. A review of *Shirley* in *The Times*, which did not review *Jane Eyre* when it first appeared, begins with a belated appraisal of Brontë’s first published novel and focuses on its apparent flaws, primarily its being ‘disfigured by coarseness’.⁸¹ Writing to Ellen Nussey a few days after the review was printed, Charlotte Brontë admits that the ‘thundering “Times” has attacked me savagely’.⁸² In another review of *Shirley* from 1850, this time in *Sharpe’s London Journal*, the critic wrote that ‘with [Brontë], to feel deeply is to paint coarsely’.⁸³ For the unnamed reviewer, the ‘error’ in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* ‘consists in making a woman and a heroine, one in whom we are to take special interest and delight, such that her sex disowns her – nay, will even blush for her’.⁸⁴ This remark echoes Rigby’s accusation that, if *Jane Eyre* was by a woman, she must have ‘for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex’.⁸⁵

One of the recurring sources of disapproval of the Brontës’ novels was not simply their ‘coarseness’, but the fact that such ‘coarse’ novels were (suspected to be) written by women and often represented female characters behaving ‘coarsely’. Miller writes that the ‘negative comments about *Jane Eyre* began to intensify as they became more closely bound

⁸⁰ Ibid. Kate Flint also connects the Brontës’ literary violences to ideas of “unfemininity”, writing that the ‘intensity of expression which is given to anger and desire, the vivid metaphors of violence and repression, and the frequent directness of expression in the narrative voices of the Brontës were considered unwomanly by some’. See ‘Women Writers, Women’s Issues’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 170–91, p. 175.

⁸¹ From an unsigned review, *The Times*, 7 December 1849, in Allott, 148–51, p. 148.

⁸² Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 9 December 1849, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II*, 305–7, p. 306.

⁸³ ‘Shirley’, *Sharpe’s London Journal*, January 1850, 11 (London), 370–3, p. 371.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Rigby, *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, p. 111.

up with the debate over the mystery author's gender'.⁸⁶ The unsigned review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Christian Remembrancer*, which declares that 'every page [of *Jane Eyre*] burns with moral Jacobinism', notes the curiously 'unfeminine' aspect of the novel with its 'masculine power, breadth and shrewdness, combined with masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression'.⁸⁷ The review goes on to say that there 'is an intimate acquaintance with the worst parts of human nature, a practised sagacity in discovering the latent ulcer, and a ruthless rigour in exposing it, which must commend our admiration, but are almost startling in one of the softer sex'.⁸⁸

The perceived gap between coarseness and femininity within contemporary responses to *Jane Eyre*, as well as Emily and Anne Brontë's novels, reveals the double standard in nineteenth-century – and, as the Afterword explores, even twenty-first-century – literary and artistic expectations. Women were not expected to write novels that dealt with the 'grosser and more animal portion of our nature'.⁸⁹ In the case of Charlotte Brontë's work, such comments referred to her often unflinching depiction of female sexuality, not necessarily or directly her literary violences.

Yet, when it came to Anne Brontë's work, criticism generally reacted to her representations of debauchery, including scenes of physical and emotional abuse. In her 'Preface to the Second Edition' of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, written a month after the novel was initially published in June 1848, Anne Brontë responded directly to accusations of "unfemininity": 'in my own mind, I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be'.⁹⁰ Brontë added:

All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read,
and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to

⁸⁶ Miller, *Brontë Myth*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Christian Remembrancer*, April 1848, p. 89.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ From an unsigned review, 'Mr Bell's New Novel', *Rambler*, September 1848, in Allott, 266–8, p. 267.

⁹⁰ Anne Brontë, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), xxxvii–xxxix, p. xxxix.

write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.⁹¹

When Brontë wrote the ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, the novel had only been reviewed by the *Spectator*, the *Athenaeum*, *The Economist*, and *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper*, published between 8 July and 15 July 1848. The *Spectator* identified a ‘coarseness of tone throughout the writing of all these Bells, that puts an offensive subject in its worst point of view’.⁹² Meanwhile, the *Athenaeum* warned the “Bells” ‘against their fancy for dwelling upon what is disagreeable’.⁹³ *The Economist* noted that the ‘delineations’ of the novels of Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell ‘have all a quality of coarseness’, and echoed the sentiment that *Wildfell Hall* included scenes and language inappropriate for ‘the perusal of young persons of either sex’.⁹⁴ In *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper*, the reviewer argued that the novel’s ‘exposition of vice [...] is absolutely painful and disgusting’.⁹⁵

The rapidity with which Brontë responded to such criticism – which did, in fact, mirror subsequent reviews after the publication of the second edition – suggests she was not only retaliating against early appraisals of her second novel, but also against previous criticism of *Agnes Grey* (1847) and, perhaps, against her sisters’ books, too. The first print-run of *Wildfell Hall* was advertised as being ‘ready on the 27th of June’;⁹⁶ and, in the second edition, the ‘Preface’ is dated 22 July 1848.⁹⁷ This leaves only three and a half weeks for reviews to appear and be read by Anne Brontë before writing and then publishing the

⁹¹ Brontë, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, p. xxxix.

⁹² From an unsigned review, *Spectator*, 8 July 1848, in Allott, 249–50, p.250.

⁹³ From an unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 8 July 1848, in Allott, p. 251.

⁹⁴ ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. By Acton Bell’, *The Economist*, 15 July 1848, 6.255 (London), p. 802.

⁹⁵ ‘*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. By Acton Bell’, *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper*, 15 July 1848, 105 (London), p. 908.

⁹⁶ Margaret Smith writes: ‘On 10 June 1848 the *Athenaeum* advertised “MR. NEWBY’S NEW WORKS FOR JUNE. | NOTICE. – MR ACTON BELL’S NEW NOVEL. | THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL. | Will be ready on the 27th of June”.’ See n. 9, Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 22 June 1848, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II*, 77–81, p. 80.

⁹⁷ Anne Brontë, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: T. C. Newby, 1848), iii–vi, p. vi.

‘Preface’. Notably, in November 1849, Charlotte Brontë received reviews of *Shirley* and wrote the following to W. S. Williams: ‘It strikes me that those worthies – the *Athenaeum*, *Spectator*, *Economist* made haste to be first with their notices that they might give the tone’.⁹⁸ This perhaps explains why these three publications were also the first to review *Wildfell Hall* and why Anne Brontë was so quick to respond to their criticism. Like Charlotte, Anne understood that these initial reviews would set the tone for subsequent critiques and wanted to have her own say in the debate.

Anne Brontë was right to pre-empt further similar reactions, such as the critique given by *Sharpe’s London Magazine* in August 1848, in which the anonymous reviewer contended that:

none but a man could have known so intimately each vile, dark fold of the civilised brute’s corrupted nature [...] On the other hand, no man [...] would have made his sex appear at once coarse, brutal, and contemptibly weak [...] Still there is a bold coarseness, a reckless freedom of language, and an apparent familiarity with the sayings and doings of the worst style of *fast* men, in their worst moments, which would induce us to believe it impossible that a woman could have written it.⁹⁹

With Anne and Emily Brontë’s novels, reviewers pinpointed and denounced their representations of violence more readily and directly than with Charlotte Brontë’s work. In an unsigned review of the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, G. H. Lewes remarked that the novels of Anne and Emily Brontë were ‘coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conception, the coarseness apparently of violence and uncultivated men’.¹⁰⁰ Such an appraisal of their work is all the more surprising, Lewes suggests, because the books ‘turn out to be the productions of two girls living almost

⁹⁸ Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 19 November 1849, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume II*, 290–3, p. 291.

⁹⁹ From an unsigned review, *Sharpe’s London Magazine*, August 1848, in Allott, 263–5, p. 265.

¹⁰⁰ G. H. Lewes, from an unsigned review, *Leader*, 28 December 1850, in Allott, 291–3, p. 292.

alone [...] and writing these books from a sense of duty, hating the pictures they drew, yet drawing them with austere conscientiousness!¹⁰¹ Here, Lewes makes a direct link between the coarse elements of Anne and Emily Brontë's work, their literary violences, and the "masculine" quality of their writing. Lewes's comments position their literary coarseness and violence as so singular, however, that they are coarse and violent '*even for men*'. The apparent singularity of their literary coarseness and violence places them in an in-between space, as they are both judged by gendered literary norms and seem to exist beyond those normative literary parameters.

As Miller notes, of all the Brontë sisters' publications, Anne Brontë's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 'shocked critics the most'.¹⁰² *Wildfell Hall* was, as Miller's comment suggests, positioned as especially vulgar and coarse in relation to her sisters' respective novels, with one critic stating that the characters are all 'commonplace, vulgar, rough, brusque-mannered personages [...]; while the scenes which the heroine relates in her diary are of the most disgusting and revolting species'.¹⁰³ Certainly, as Ian Ward notes, 'there was little in *The Tenant* that was calculated to ingratiate its author with the critics'.¹⁰⁴ Although the *Rambler* argued that '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is not so *bad* a book as *Jane Eyre*' in terms of its morality, it also felt that the novel 'details with offensive minuteness the disgusting scenes of debauchery, blasphemy, and profaneness, in which, with a herd of boon companions, [Arthur Huntingdon] delighted to spend his days'.¹⁰⁵ Lorimer, writing in the *North British Review* in August 1849, considered there to be 'scenes in which the author [of *Wildfell Hall*] seems to pride himself in bringing his reader into the closest

¹⁰¹ Lewes, *Leader*, 28 December 1850, p. 292. Lewes's language here is inflected by Charlotte Brontë's 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', which appeared in the 1850 reissue of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Charlotte Brontë writes of Anne Brontë: 'She hated her work, but would pursue it.' See 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), xliii–xlix, p. xlvi.

¹⁰² Miller, *The Brontë Myth*, p. 24.

¹⁰³ 'Mr Bell's New Novel', *Rambler*, September 1848, p. 267.

¹⁰⁴ Ian Ward, *Sex, Crime, and Literature in Victorian England* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2014), p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ 'Mr Bell's New Novel', *Rambler*, September 1848, pp. 267–8.

possible proximity with naked vice, and there are conversations such as we had hoped never to see printed in English'.¹⁰⁶ Even Charlotte Brontë denounced the novel's subject as 'an entire mistake'.¹⁰⁷

Lisa SurrIDGE argues that, when *Wildfell Hall* was published, 'Victorian critics remarked on the stark violence of the Georgian scenes'.¹⁰⁸ She quotes from the *Rambler* review of 'Mr Bell's New Novel', in which the anonymous critic writes that 'the scenes which the heroine relates in her diary are of the most disgusting and revolting species'.¹⁰⁹ SurrIDGE also notes the *Spectator's* reference to Anne Brontë's 'morbid love of the coarse, not to say the brutal'.¹¹⁰ *Sharpe's London Magazine* wrote an appraisal of unspecified scenes of the novel: 'so revolting are many of the scenes [in *Wildfell Hall*], so coarse and disgusting the language put into the mouths of some of the characters, that the reviewer to whom we entrusted it returned it to us, saying it was unfit to be noticed in the pages of *Sharpe*'.¹¹¹ The subsequent reviewer agreed, stating that their 'object in the present paper is to warn our readers, and more especially our lady readers, against being induced to peruse it'.¹¹² Yet these reviews do not directly reference the extracts which SurrIDGE suggests.

In this sense, modern critics make an assumption about what specific scenes of debauchery reviewers were referring to, in order to anchor their own analysis of the text. This assumption, though not necessarily wrong, may disclose twenty-first-century preoccupations more so than nineteenth-century concerns, as it reveals what current critics consider shocking rather than giving an accurate representation of contemporary

¹⁰⁶ Lorimer, *North British Review*, August 1849, p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice', p. xlvii. Notably, Lyndall Gordon recently linked this denouncement of Anne Brontë's novel to its representation of domestic abuse: 'Charlotte deplored Anne's telling portrait of domestic violence in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'. See *Outsiders: Five Women Writers Who Changed the World* (London: Virago, 2017), p. 99.

¹⁰⁸ SurrIDGE, *Bleak Houses*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁹ 'Mr Bell's New Novel', *Rambler*, September 1848, p. 267.

¹¹⁰ *Spectator*, 8 July 1848, p. 250.

¹¹¹ *Sharpe's London Magazine*, August 1848, p. 263.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

perspectives. Yet it is safe to assume that the original reviewers of *Wildfell Hall* were referring to the scenes of drunkenness and debauchery at Grassdale Manor, many of which included acts or threats of violence. Indeed, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* is unconvinced by Brontë's representation of upper-class society, writing that '[y]oung noblemen and gentlemen of the nineteenth century do not assemble together in gangs' to 'entertain [women] with coarse language and idiot brawling and violence'.¹¹³ The paper quotes from the text, but it is an extract from Helen's attempt to say goodbye to Gilbert Markham after he has read her diary.

It does, however, highlight the scene in which Gilbert whips Frederick Lawrence, writing that he 'breaks poor Laurence's [*sic*] head in a brutal "Wuthering Heights" style, quite unwarrantably, and with a very unpleasant effect upon the reader, for it is likely to make him feel sick'.¹¹⁴ Even this description of literary violence is unusually explicit for contemporary reviewers. Considering the superior, moralistic tone with which reviewers approached *Wildfell Hall*, it is unsurprising that they were unwilling to quote directly from the text. Their reticence to pinpoint the most "revolting" scenes aligns with the instances of subtextual depictions of or references to violence in the Brontës' fiction. Viewed in this light, commentators were perhaps unable to pinpoint the shocking scenes because such scenes were so difficult to identify categorically. As Raymond Chapman writes: 'Words like "coarse" and "licentious" are employed [...] by social observers, equally unable to be explicit about what they have heard.'¹¹⁵ In different ways and for different reasons, both reviewers and the Brontës often avoid direct, explicit representations of brutality.

Like the 'priceless treasure' for which Brontë asks her reader to dive in her 'Preface', the reader must often seek out and uncover the "buried" violences alluded to

¹¹³ *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 July 1848, p. 908.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Raymond Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (London; New York: Longman, 1994), p. 128.

throughout *Wildfell Hall*, particularly those that occur in relationships between men and women.¹¹⁶ With her diving metaphor, Anne Brontë was not referring directly to the novel's violences, but to its moral: readers must sift through the debauchery in order to discover and, then, more fully comprehend the ethics at work in *Wildfell Hall*. Yet the didacticism of the text is closely bound up with its literary violences. In her 'Preface', which anticipated many of the criticisms levelled at the novel, Brontë admits that she 'may have gone too far [...] but when we have to do with vice and vicious characters, [she] maintain[s] it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear'.¹¹⁷

In her biography of Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Langland perceptively outlines the differences in the literary visions presented by each Brontë sister, particularly highlighting the ways in which Anne's work differs from that of her two sisters. Langland writes:

In Anne's novels, heroines do not humble themselves before male aggression in the often disturbingly submissive manner of Charlotte's heroines. Anne shares with Emily a clear-eyed understanding of the cruelty to which passion coupled with power and mastery can lead. But Anne then departs from Emily in refusing to glorify that cruelty in a figure like Heathcliff.¹¹⁸

While it is arguable as to whether Emily Brontë sought to 'glorify' Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Anne Brontë certainly refuses to elevate violent male characters to the role of romantic hero, including, as we shall see, Gilbert Markham. This is perhaps because she wishes to portray the story as realistically as possible, thereby indicating that the potential for violence lurks in all of us, including the future husband of the novel's heroine. Langland goes on to contend that women writers 'do not often depict physical violence

¹¹⁶ Brontë, 'Preface to the Second Edition', p. xxxvii.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (Totowa, N. J.: Barnes & Noble, 1989), p. 30.

in men but, when they do, the power revealed commands respect'.¹¹⁹ While appearing to make a more generalised statement about “women writers” here, Langland in fact only refers to Emily and Charlotte Brontë’s representations of male violence, citing Heathcliff’s fearfulness and the ‘awe’ Robert Moore elicits ‘from the women when he “speaks” through guns in quelling the Luddite rioters’.¹²⁰ These examples are contrasted by Langland to Gilbert’s assault on his future brother-in-law, which makes him ‘appear a madman’, and Huntingdon’s treatment of Helen, which ‘inspires only contempt not fear’.¹²¹ Anne Brontë ‘exhibits in her heroines no symptoms of attraction to that violence’: ‘an Anne Brontë heroine is revolted by the abuse of strength. She does not seek a master; she seeks a partner.’¹²²

Twenty years after Langland’s evaluation, Kate Beaton’s cartoon, ‘Dude Watchin’ with the Brontës’ (2009), portrays Anne Brontë as appalled by her sisters’ attraction to “brooding” men who are in fact rude “alcoholic dickbags”.¹²³ Charlotte and Emily Brontë then respond to Anne’s approbation with the insistence that nobody buys her books anyway, insinuating that they do not sell because they take a negative view of male violence and alcoholism. The subtitle of the cartoon reads: ‘Anne why are you writing books about how alcoholic losers ruin people’s lives? Don’t you see that romanticising douchey behaviour is the proper literary convention in this family! *Honestly*.’¹²⁴ As Catherine Paula Han writes, this lampoon ‘acknowledges [Anne Brontë’s]

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 57.

¹²⁰ Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, p. 57.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. Kristin A. Le Veness reiterates this point, writing: ‘Violence, in particular, holds no allure for [Anne Brontë’s] heroines.’ See ‘Anne Brontë: An Unlikely Subversive’, in *British Women’s Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury: Volume I: 1840s and 1850s*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 111–22, p. 114.

¹²³ Kate Beaton, ‘Dude Watchin’ with the Brontës’, *Hark! A Vagrant!* (2009) <<http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=202>> [Accessed 31 October 2018].

¹²⁴ Ibid.

marginalisation’ and positions her as an ‘incisive feminist’ commentator on ‘marriage, alcoholism or male volatility and violence’.¹²⁵

Edward Chitham helpfully outlines the divergences between Anne and Emily Brontë’s novels by specifically comparing their respective dealings with literary violence. For Chitham, Anne’s depiction of violence, particularly Gilbert’s attack on Lawrence, suggests she is ‘concerned to show in her novel the dangers of portraying violence in such a balladic way as in *Wuthering Heights*’.¹²⁶ In reading such a scene, Chitham believes ‘we can understand the sense of both Charlotte’s words and Anne’s own: she has forced herself to imagine and describe this scene simply because “truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it”’.¹²⁷ Aleks Sierz echoes Chitham’s comments, writing that ‘male violence in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is portrayed as sordid, stupid and unreasonable’.¹²⁸ By representing male violence in this light, Anne Brontë ‘implicitly criticises her sisters’ view of desirable men by showing how all violence is deplorable’.¹²⁹ Sierz concludes her point by returning us to the “wholesome truths” which Brontë’s novel offers ‘to counter the “soft nonsense” of her sisters’ romanticism’.¹³⁰ As Langland, Beaton, Han, Chitham, and Sierz suggest, and as the remainder of this chapter seeks to unpick, Anne Brontë’s desire to reveal the “truth” in *Wildfell Hall* appears to be tied to her representation of violence.

Seeking “Evidence” in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

¹²⁵ Catherine Paula Han, ‘The Myth of Anne Brontë’, *Brontë Studies*, 42.1 (2017), 48–59, p. 48.

¹²⁶ Edward Chitham, ‘Diverging Twins: Some Clues to *Wildfell Hall*’, in *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, eds. Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith (London: Macmillan, 1983), 91–110, p. 102.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3. See Brontë, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, p. xxxvii.

¹²⁸ Aleks Sierz, ‘Angel or Sister? Writing and Screening the Heroine of Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, in *Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide*, eds. Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye, and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 16–31, p. 20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

In a discussion of the history of domestic violence in England, James Sharpe identifies *Wildfell Hall*, with its ‘pioneering portrait of an abusive husband’, as a seminal moment in fiction.¹³¹ Paralleling the cultural impact of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* on historical and critical appraisals of Luddism, Anne Brontë’s *Wildfell Hall* is often cited in discussions of nineteenth-century domestic violence and marital abuse. As with ongoing attempts to place Anne Brontë firmly alongside her sisters in the English literary “canon”, *Wildfell Hall* has undergone something of a renaissance to position it as a radical feminist text in line with work by Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Power Cobbe, and Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill.¹³² Much of this reclamation of Brontë’s voice and narratives centres on the violences that can be implicitly and explicitly detected in her novels. As with the “Brontë myth”, in which violence takes on a paradoxical significance, as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, Brontë’s *Wildfell Hall* was initially denounced for its vulgar representations of violence; and, conversely, its literary violences are now central to the reconsideration of the text and to attempts to manoeuvre Anne Brontë out of the “shadow” of her sisters.¹³³

Much of this renewed interest in *Wildfell Hall* focuses on the legal realities which women like Helen Huntingdon had to negotiate and the class implications of the law surrounding marital abuse. Having married Arthur Huntingdon, a caddish gentleman whose only occupation involves hunting, drinking, and carousing with his equally wealthy

¹³¹ James Sharpe, *A Fiery and Furious People: A History of Violence in England* (London: Random House Books, 2016), p. 444. It should be noted that the term ‘domestic violence’ is, within discussions of the mid-nineteenth century, an anachronism. As Suzanne Rintoul points out, ‘the Oxford English Dictionary identifies the earliest use of “domestic violence” in reference to a married couple in an 1891 *Times* review of a play’ and “cruelty” was the term most often used to describe the abuse of married women by their husbands for much of the nineteenth century’. See *Intimate Violence and Victorian Print Culture: Representational Tensions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 13.

¹³² See Surridge, *Bleak Houses*, pp. 84–6.

¹³³ In 1982, Arlene Jackson writes that Anne Brontë ‘seems ready for rediscovery in this period of new interest in minor and neglected women writers’. See ‘The Question of Credibility in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *English Studies*, 63.3 (1982), 198–206, p. 198. In 2014, Marianne Thormählen wrote that Anne Brontë ‘remains “in the shade”, to quote Charlotte, and it will take time to extend her readership’. See ‘Standing Alone: Anne Brontë Out of the Shadow’, *Brontë Studies*, 39.4 (2014), 330–40, p. 333.

and directionless friends, Helen discovers that, contrary to her earlier naïve hopes, she cannot reform him. She finds herself trapped in a marriage in which she is expected to remain at home and watch while her husband descends into debauchery and tries to corrupt their young son while doing so. To save her son, and herself, from further possible violence and humiliation, Helen flees. As with Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*, as noted in Chapter One, Helen's escape to Wildfell Hall means she is literally living 'outside the law'.¹³⁴ When residents of Linden-Car discover who Helen is and why she lives such a secluded existence, their reactions reflect those of wider society and the legal system. The Reverend Michael Millward believes Helen has 'done wrong to leave her husband; it was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife [...]; and nothing short of bodily ill-usage (and that of no trifling nature) could excuse such a step – nor even that, for in such a case she ought to appeal to the laws for protection'.¹³⁵

Millward is paraphrased in a review by the *Rambler*, in which the anonymous critic remarks that Huntingdon – who after marriage 'speedily turns out a sensual brute of the most intolerable kind' – treats Helen 'with every indignity, insult, and ill-usage which can be conceived, short of actual personal violence'.¹³⁶ While the review does not suggest that Helen was wrong to leave her husband, as Millward plainly states, the notion that women must experience 'actual personal violence' or 'bodily ill-usage' in order to appeal to the courts and seek help abounded in nineteenth-century society. Even when women were physically abused or killed, protection and justice were not necessarily granted. As Hindley tells Nelly in *Wuthering Heights* before he pushes a knife into her mouth: "No law in England can hinder a man from keeping his house decent" (*WH*, 74). Wives may have had control over the household, but, in terms of property and agency, their powers were

¹³⁴ Stevie Davies, 'Introduction', in Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 1996), vii–xxx, p. xviii.

¹³⁵ Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 467. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

¹³⁶ 'Mr Bell's New Novel', *Rambler*, September 1848, p. 267.

limited, due to the legal framework of coverture, in which the woman's legal rights, her property, and even her identity were subsumed into those of her husband's upon marriage. As Ian Ward writes, even before Helen flees her husband and lives as an "outlaw", she was still 'effectively cast outside the protection of the law', mainly because the abuse she suffers is largely mental and not physical.¹³⁷ In a passage pertinent to Helen's position in *Wildfell Hall*, Ward quotes from Lord Stowell's influential and widely-cited verdict in the *Evans v. Evans* case of 1790: 'What merely wounds the mental feelings is in few cases to be admitted where they are not accompanied with bodily injury, either actual or menaced.'¹³⁸ This preoccupation with '*bodily injury*' points to the need for physical evidence of cruelty and underlines an unwillingness to acknowledge emotional and mental abuse as a legitimate form of violence. The remainder of this chapter will explore this emphasis on the evidence of violence; followed by an exploration of *Wildfell Hall* as a document bearing witness to acts of cruelty while also committing further figurative violence through its framed structure.

In *Wildfell Hall*, Helen does not – as several critics have noted – explicitly undergo physical abuse at the hands of her husband. Yet, as in *Jane Eyre*, rape is threatened twice in the novel. Helen also undergoes relentless mental abuse, as well as experiencing violations of her belongings and self which can be viewed as a symbolic rape.¹³⁹ On both occasions when assault is implied, the threats are mediated or directly given by Walter Hargrave, who asks Helen to be his mistress in a not dissimilar manner to Rochester's request. First, Hargrave is relaying to Helen a conversation between her husband and his

¹³⁷ Ian Ward, *Law and the Brontës* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 30–1.

¹³⁸ Lord Stowell (Sir William Scott), *Evans v. Evans*, 1790, quoted in Ward, *Law and the Brontës*, p. 32. Joanna Bourke notes that, in 1870, *Evans v. Evans* was overturned by *Kelly v. Kelly*, which 'broadened the definition of matrimonial cruelty from the narrow emphasis on physical injury, allowing for forms of cruelty that were more emotional and psychological in nature'. See 'Sexual Violence, Marital Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology', *Victorian Studies*, 50.3 (2008), 419–36, p. 434.

¹³⁹ Ian Ward writes that '[a]lthough she might have evaded physical beating, Helen Huntingdon was, of course, subject to systematic mental cruelty'. See 'The Case of Helen Huntingdon', *Criticism*, 49.2 (2007), 151–82, p. 159.

dissolute friends, in which Hargrave claims that Huntingdon told the men present that he has “no wife” and, if he has, he “value[s] her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome – you may, by Jove and my blessing into the bargain!” (*TWH*, 359). As Andrew Doub writes, “[e]ssentially, Arthur offers Helen up for his friends to rape”.¹⁴⁰ Hargrave takes Huntingdon’s words literally, as he seizes the opportunity to court Helen and convince her to leave her husband for himself. What follows is the second clear threat of rape in the novel. Like Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, who is on the precipice of bursting ‘an insufferable bond’, Helen notes that Hargrave ‘had fairly broken the barrier: he was completely roused, and determined to hazard all for victory’ (*TWH*, 361). Such references to ‘victory’ are reminiscent of their chess match, in which Helen feels ‘an almost superstitious dread of being beaten’ and views the game as a combative struggle (*TWH*, 300). Helen becomes a prize to be won with force if necessary.

When Hargrave later confronts Helen with a threat of violation, he tells her that he “must not be denied” and ‘seiz[es]’ her hands; when she asks him to let go, ‘he only tighten[s] his grasp’ (*TWH*, 361). Helen tells us she has never seen a man ‘so terribly excited’, as he ‘precipitate[s] himself towards [her]’ (*TWH*, 362). Helen then ‘snatche[s] up [her] palette-knife and h[olds] it against him’ (*TWH*, 362). This startles Hargrave into submission, but he only backs off when she threatens to ring the butler bell and demands that he will listen. Helen must resort to cutting words to get her point across, telling him, “if [she] were divorced from [her] husband – or if he were dead, [she] would not marry [him]” (*TWH*, 362). The sense of male entitlement mirrors that of *Jane Eyre*, but, unlike Jane, Helen chooses a physical weapon to ward off Hargrave’s threat of violation. The palette-knife symbolises her creative agency and financial independence, as her art is the

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Doub, “‘I Could Do with Less Caressing’: Sexual Abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,” *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*, 8.2 (2015), 10–18, p. 17.

only means with which she can escape Grassdale and Huntingdon.¹⁴¹ It is Helen's most powerful weapon.

The precarious nature of Helen's position in the household is revealed in this scene, as two men stake claims over her body, as well as her spirit. Hargrave frames his violent proposition in spiritual terms, again reminiscent of Rochester's desire to possess Jane's spirit and encroach upon her conscience. Hargrave tells Helen that "God has designed [him] to be [her] comfort and protector", an assertion which he surely knows is more likely than any other argument to appeal to Helen's pious sensibilities (*TWH*, 361). It backfires, however, and he goes on to frame her as his "angel" and "divinity", while he continues to position himself as her "consoler and defender" (*TWH*, 362). Most tellingly, he asks, "if your conscience upbraid you for it, say I overcame you and you could not choose but yield!" (*TWH*, 362). His words are disturbingly suggestive of rape.

What is Hargrave seeking to gain with his threats? He is certainly only interested in a form of possession and not in the welfare of Helen or her son. The question of ownership and how it corresponds with violence surfaces throughout the novel, as it does in *Jane Eyre*. In the chapter that follows Hargrave's threat, Helen recounts Huntingdon's destruction of her art materials and confiscation of her money and jewels. While Helen writes 'the above' – that is, the events in which Hargrave asks Helen to run away with him – Huntingdon 'forcibly wrest[s]' her diary from her hands and proceeds to read past entries. He reads far enough back in the diary to comprehend that Helen is planning her escape, as he asks for the keys to her "cabinet, desk, drawers, and whatever else [she] possess[es]" (*TWH*, 369). Despite Helen's attempts to hide the keys from his view, Huntingdon 'seiz[es]' them from her grasp (*TWH*, 370). He then tells her: "we must have

¹⁴¹ Deborah Denenholz Morse writes that "[Helen's] defence of her person with a tool of her art symbolises the strength and power of female art, and its ability to reconstruct civilisation out of the coarsest brutalities". See "I speak of those I do know": Witnessing as Radical Gesture in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, eds. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 103–26, p. 108.

a confiscation of property” (*TWH*, 370). He saunters into Helen’s art studio, where he ‘deliberately proceed[s] to cast [Helen’s painting materials] into the fire – the palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish’ (*TWH*, 370). He snaps the palette knives as the ‘oil and turpentine [are] sent hissing and roaring up the chimney’ (*TWH*, 370). Her paintings, canvas, easel, and stretcher are all sent away to be used as kindling. Everything of value belonging to Helen is then taken away, alongside ““a few little trifles [Huntingdon] thought it advisable to take into [his] own possession, lest [her] mercantile spirit should be tempted to turn them into gold”” (*TWH*, 371). In a stark reminder that nothing Helen owns truly belongs to her, including her young son, her weapons of defence and means of escape are all destroyed or hidden by Huntingdon, and she is rendered ‘a slave, a prisoner’ (*TWH*, 373).

Davies positions this scene as the ‘centre of violation’ in the novel, and refers to Huntingdon’s disembowelling of Helen’s belongings as a ‘spiritual rape’, echoing Maynard’s evaluation of Rochester’s threat to violate Jane’s conscience through her body.¹⁴² Due to the lack of “evidence” in the text explicitly confirming the actuality of sexual assault in any of the marriages in the novel, critics resort to symbolic interpretations of the more distressing and, indeed, abusive scenes of non-physical abuse: either as a means of gesturing to further subtextual violence; or to highlight the fact that other forms of violence can be just as harmful as the physical.¹⁴³ The preoccupation with finding evidence of physical abuse in *Wildfell Hall*, or, indeed, any of the Brontës’ novels,

¹⁴² Davies, ‘Introduction’, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. xxvii.

¹⁴³ One strand of reading physical domestic violence into *Wildfell Hall* stems from the animal abuse in the novel. Lisa Surridge has written of the conflation between abused animals and abused women in nineteenth-century fiction, pinpointing Anne Brontë’s novel as an example. In *Wildfell Hall*, Arthur throws a book at Helen’s dog; it hits the animal’s head, as well as grazing Helen’s hand in the process. Helen says to Arthur: “perhaps, [the book] was intended for me?” He replies: “No – but I see you’ve got a taste of it,” said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed’ (*TWH*, 213). While this argument is convincing and perceptive, it still relies on a process of seeking out instances of physical domestic abuse. See ‘Dogs’/Bodies, Women’s Bodies: Wives as Pets in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Domestic Violence’, *Victorian Review*, 20.1 (1994), 1–34, pp. 5–6. See also Chapter Four of this thesis for further discussion of violence against animals in Anne Brontë’s fiction.

somewhat minimises the severity and intensity of emotional violence and mental abuse directed at Helen Huntingdon, as well as numerous other (often female) characters in Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing. This thesis is also conscious of its own fixation with finding "evidence" of physical assault or force, particularly in relation to the earlier discussion of marital abuse in *Wuthering Heights*, and, now, in relation to *Wildfell Hall*. As Doub contends, '[m]aking a claim of actual physical assault would go beyond the textual evidence [Anne] Brontë provided'.¹⁴⁴ Yet, throughout his own article on sexual abuse in *Wildfell Hall*, he makes similar claims, often making leaps of interpretation that 'go beyond the textual evidence' given in the text. This tendency to "fill in the blanks" presupposes that Brontë's novel is somehow incomplete or there are gaps to fill.

Unlike reviewers, who were (as mentioned) more reticent to locate the most shocking or violent scenes in the novel, modern critics share a collective drive to pinpoint why and what aspects of *Wildfell Hall* are so troubling and disconcerting. The same can be said of *Wuthering Heights*. Anne Brontë's novel includes few explicit instances of domestic violence – in comparison to, say, Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), in which the murder of Nancy is described with disturbing vividness. In *Wildfell Hall*, instances of marital abuse are often comprised of minor violences, similar to those inflicted by Jane on Rochester as part of their "system" in *Jane Eyre*. The difference, however, is that Jane introduces these minor violences consensually. In Ralph and Milicent Hattersley's relationship, it is driven by the man, sadistically and without consent. Ralph's rough treatment of Milicent in public view is the most graphic suggestion of marital brutality in the novel. While trying to force Milicent to explain why she attempts to flee the room during one of his drunken episodes, Ralph pulls her onto his knee, shakes her, and 'remorselessly crush[es] her slight arms in the grip of his powerful fingers' (*TWH*,

¹⁴⁴ Doub, "I Could Do with Less Caressing": Sexual Abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 11.

278). She tells him: “Do let me alone Ralph! remember we are not at home” (*TWH*, 278). In trying to prevent Hattersley’s behaviour from escalating, Milicent’s plea hints at a more brutal and familiar form of violence, to which the reader does not bear witness.

Attempts to prevent such marital abuse lead to further violence, as Hargrave, Milicent’s brother, tries to ‘unclasp the ruffian’s fingers from her arm, but was suddenly driven backward and nearly laid upon the floor by a violent blow in the chest’ (*TWH*, 279). Despite the attempted intervention, Hattersley continues his behaviour and becomes increasingly violent towards Milicent, squeezing and shaking her so that she ‘dr[e]w in her breath and bit her lip to suppress a cry of pain’ (*TWH*, 279). When she refuses to speak up, he calls her an “impertinent huzzy” and ‘throw[s] her from him with such violence that she fell on her side; but she was up again before either I or her brother could come to her assistance’ (*TWH*, 279). Later, having just told Milicent he loves her, but does not “adore” her, we see Hattersley clutch ‘a handful of her light brown ringlets’ and ‘appear[s] to twist them unmercifully’ (*TWH*, 288). She smiles ‘through her tears, just putting up her hand to his, in token that he pulled *rather* too hard’ (*TWH*, 288). As with Emily Brontë’s poetry and *Wuthering Heights*, much of the physical domestic violence in *Wildfell Hall* seems to occur off the page and can only be imagined in the reader’s mind beyond the limits of the text.

The critical determination to locate unequivocal acts or moments of violence in the text echoes the positioning of a woman’s body as a site of evidence after assault, becoming, as Frances Ferguson writes, a ‘text that bespeaks not only her intention not to have consented but also the perpetrator’s intention to have overridden that refusal to consent’.¹⁴⁵ As with Isabella’s body in *Wuthering Heights*, which is read by Nelly for signs of abuse, the surface of a text can be read for signs of subtextual occurrences of violence.

¹⁴⁵ Frances Ferguson, ‘Rape and the Rise of the Novel’, *Representations*, 20 (1987), 88–112, p. 91.

Deborah Denenholz Morse extends this view into a legal framework in which the act of witnessing signifies a person who ‘provides evidence or testimony in a courtroom’, positioning the reader as the judge ‘in lieu of a society that provides no forum for legal redress when women and children suffer the domestic abuses that are chronicled in the novel’.¹⁴⁶ In *Wildfell Hall*, a similar process is undertaken by critics and readers, perhaps including the first readers of Helen’s diary, Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham.

In the early stages of their marriage, the reader is given a glimpse into the emotional cruelties inflicted on Helen by her new husband. He shows no interest in ‘what [she] most like[s] to talk about’, but takes great pleasure in recounting ‘stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband’ (*TWH*, 209). Helen’s horror and protestations against such stories reduce Huntingdon to tears of laughter, causing Helen to ‘suppress’ her feelings and ‘receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt’ (*TWH*, 209). Once he finishes reminiscing, he ‘tries to kiss and sooth’ Helen, and she tells us that ‘never were his caresses so little welcome as then’ (*TWH*, 209). Against her will, Huntingdon submits Helen to a series of painful recollections that reveal the extent of his debauchery and immorality.

Doub interprets this treatment as an explicit indication of sexual abuse, writing that, though the ‘extent of his “caresses” is not clear, [...] Arthur’s actions at least included forced kissing, physical contact, and intimate advances at inappropriate or unwanted times’, all of which ‘are signature traits of a sexual assault’.¹⁴⁷ Yet the fact that Doub admits that we do not know the ‘extent’ of Arthur’s advances shows the ambiguity of Helen’s description in terms of physical abuse. Doub himself must guess at the kind of infringements to which Arthur subjects Helen. Certainly, these instances are evidence of Arthur’s desire to impinge upon Helen’s physical and emotional boundaries, itself a

¹⁴⁶ Denenholz Morse, “I speak of those I do know”: Witnessing as Radical Gesture in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁷ Doub, “I Could Do with Less Caressing”: Sexual Abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 15.

violation. But, yet again, we see the “extent” of (physical) sexual violence as something to be guessed at; it remains a gap within the text that critics and readers have tried to fill. Even the explicit representation of emotional abuse is brought back to the physical form of violence, as though this is the most “legitimate” kind. As a result, the lack of physical abuse in the text – and accounting for that lack – becomes the central point of consideration within discussions of gender-based violence in *Wildfell Hall*.

The Ethics of Bearing Witness in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

In a response to Maggie Berg’s 2010 article on violence and the structure of *Wildfell Hall*, Janina Hornosty writes that Brontë’s novel is haunted by ‘eerie and persistent violence’.¹⁴⁸ Notably, this echoes Berg’s own comments regarding *Wuthering Heights* with the ‘spectral nature’ of its violences. Comparisons can be drawn between the two novels, particularly when considering the shadowy presence of marital abuse in both texts, as noted in Chapter One in relation to Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*; and also the shared framed structure of the narratives.¹⁴⁹ As with Isabella, Helen’s narrative of abuse is mediated through her diary and then through the letter written by her second husband, Gilbert Markham, to his brother-in-law. The framing structure of *Wildfell Hall*, which resembles the layered narrative of *Wuthering Heights*, has been considered a form of violence itself. Gilbert Markham possesses the same narrative power as Lockwood, with Davies writing that the opening section of *Wildfell Hall* ‘reveals Gilbert Markham as first cousin to Emily

¹⁴⁸ Janina Hornosty, ‘Let’s Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: A Response to Maggie Berg’, *Brontë Studies*, 39.2 (2014), 130–40, p. 130.

¹⁴⁹ Lee A. Talley also writes that, ‘[a]s a bumbling misreader of women, Gilbert is Anne’s version of Emily’s Lockwood’. See ‘Anne Brontë’s Method of Social Protest in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, in *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, eds. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 127–51, p. 133. Langland also offers an overview of the ways in which ‘*Wildfell Hall* is clearly a response to *Wuthering Heights*’, namely that both ‘novels used a framed narrative’. See *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, p. 49, pp. 134–5. See also N. M. Jacobs, ‘Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’, *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16.3 (1986), 204–19.

Brontë's Lockwood – an unreliable narrator, fundamentally a decent man in a novel not rich in human decency especially amongst males, but with a little of the oaf, a little of the cad'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Berg contends that the 'assimilation of Helen's text [into Gilbert's framing letters] exhibits a certain symbolic violence which is intimately related to, perhaps symptomatic of, the actual violence portrayed in the text, particularly towards women and animals'.¹⁵¹ Considering the fact that Gilbert and Lockwood commit arguably the most violent act in the novels, this connection between the narrative structure and "symbolic violence" is intriguing, particularly in relation to the dissemination of Helen's narrative and the mediation of the violence in that narrative.

In the opening frame of *Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert takes care to convince his intended reader, Jack Halford, of the proceeding narrative's credibility. He promises to offer Halford 'a full and faithful account of certain circumstances connected with the most important event of [his] life' (*TWH*, 6). As Halford 'like[s] a long story' and is a 'stickler for particularities and circumstantial details', Gilbert will not 'spare' him, but will rely on 'a certain faded old journal' of his for the more 'minute details' of his narrative (*TWH*, 6). The frame of *Wildfell Hall* involves, then, Helen's diary within Gilbert's journal within Gilbert's letter(s). In an echo of the Luddite note in *Shirley*, Helen's account is embedded in and surrounded by Gilbert's own version of events, and, as his words suggest, this 'old world story' is relating the most important event of *Gilbert's* life, not necessarily Helen's (*TWH*, 34). Of course, in framing the text in this way, Anne Brontë is upholding suspense by only revealing the present-day identity of Gilbert and Halford at the end of the novel. Garrett Stewart helpfully points out that the use of 'a muted, neutralising frame, down through Walton's script in *Frankenstein*, to say nothing of the damage control and trauma management of Lockwood's diary in *Wuthering Heights*, is a staple of extreme melodrama

¹⁵⁰ Davies, 'Introduction', *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. xiv.

¹⁵¹ Maggie Berg, "Let me have its bowels then": Violence, Sacrificial Structure and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 21.1 (2010), 20–40, p. 21.

rather than a drain on its affect'.¹⁵² He emphasises the argument by claiming that 'the layered transmission of degenerate villainy in *Wildfell Hall* actually tends to augment rather than muffle its violence'.¹⁵³ In line with Emily and Charlotte Brontë's presentation of literary violence as an absent presence, Anne Brontë's representation of brutality is also in keeping with a wider lineage of the novel, indicating that her literary violences are not as singular as reviewers and contemporary readers initially supposed.

Yet the realism of *Wildfell Hall* – its self-professed sincere desire to reveal the 'truth', as articulated in Anne Brontë's 'Preface' – places it outside of the melodramatic and gothic genres, as a counterpoint to the sensationalised violences portrayed (or not portrayed) in such novels. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), there are no instances of fantasy, no dreams, and no supernatural occurrences in *Wildfell Hall*. It remains a story rooted in reality, told from and controlled by Gilbert's perspective, in a similar way to Lockwood's own hold on the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*. Both Gilbert and Lockwood, as well as Jane Eyre, control what goes in and what is kept out of these texts, and this includes the violences represented, both emotional and physical.

Gilbert decides to include the most graphically brutal moment in the novel, when he almost fatally assaults Helen's brother, Frederick Lawrence. Believing that Lawrence is in fact Helen's lover, Gilbert's jealousy overwhelms him when he meets his future brother-in-law while out riding. As soon as Gilbert sees Lawrence, the 'fingers of [his] whip-hand tingled' instinctively, grasping 'their charge with convulsive energy' (*TWH*, 112). Initially, he 'restrain[s] the impulse' to raise the whip against Lawrence, but, as the encounter continues, he becomes unable to check his urge to hit out (*TWH*, 112). Indeed, Gilbert even divulges that he is waiting 'for some more tangible cause of offence, before

¹⁵² Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratology of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 90.

¹⁵³ Stewart, *Novel Violence*, p. 90.

[he] open[s] the floodgates of [his] soul, and pour[s] out the dammed up fury that was foaming and swelling within' (*TWH*, 113). He hits Lawrence with the larger end of the weapon, 'impelled by some fiend at [his] elbow' to bring it down upon his head 'swift and sudden as a flash of lightning' (*TWH*, 113). Gilbert shows little remorse, even in hindsight, and even in the knowledge that he almost murdered his wife's brother. He tells us that he beholds the 'instant, deadly pallor that overspread[s] his face, and the few red drops that trickled down his forehead', as well as his fall 'backward to the ground', with a 'feeling of savage satisfaction' (*TWH*, 113). As soon as Gilbert is convinced that Lawrence is not, in fact, dead, he becomes cocky and unrepentant, writing that it 'served [Lawrence] right – it would teach him better manners in future' (*TWH*, 113). Although Gilbert does return to check up on Lawrence, he remains largely unmoved by the effects of his violence and is only interested in Lawrence's state to confirm he is not a murderer. Anne Brontë's narrative gives us very little with which to empathise here, positioning Gilbert as a dangerous, volatile male force in the text.

As SurrIDGE notes, Gilbert's attack is carried out 'when sober', implying that his capacity for violence is 'innate' and not, as with Huntingdon and his friends, largely caused by too much alcohol.¹⁵⁴ SurrIDGE goes further, writing that *Wildfell Hall* 'portrays Gilbert's passion as innately masculine, but in need of restraint in order for him to become manly'.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, she contends that Gilbert's struggle to keep his jealousy under control 'makes him an exemplar of Victorian domestic manhood as self-discipline'.¹⁵⁶ Like Rochester, Gilbert's fight to suppress his more violent impulses does not undermine his masculinity, but confirms it. Yet, unlike Rochester, Gilbert ultimately acts on his instincts and breaks the "floodgates of [his] soul". Here, Anne Brontë is perhaps showing the

¹⁵⁴ SurrIDGE, *Bleak Houses*, p. 82.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

result of men giving in to their baser instincts, while also revealing the capacity for all men, when both sober and drunk, to commit acts of violence.

Even with Helen, Gilbert's behaviour is threatening. When he believes Lawrence is her lover, he taunts Helen and, as she meets his eye 'unflinchingly', he recalls thinking: "I can crush that bold spirit," [...] But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat' (*TWH*, 123). This language of "crushing" a woman's "spirit" – and, perhaps, body – is disturbingly reminiscent of Rochester's threat of rape. Much later, during their reunion, Gilbert tells Helen that he is "as keen and passionate as ever" (*TWH*, 489). This passion reveals itself when they declare their mutual love and, although he shows kindness (compared to Huntingdon) in letting Helen's aunt remain at Staningley, there is still a hint of his overstepping a line, as Helen tells him: "Thank you, darling! you shall have a kiss for that. Good bye. There now—there Gilbert—let me go [...]" (*TWH*, 496). While this embrace is initiated by Helen, she also says this phrase – "let me go" – to both Huntingdon and Hargrave, again gesturing to the universality of male force (*TWH*, 154, 361).

What is only implied in Gilbert's interactions with Helen is fully realised in his treatment of Eliza Millward. Having courted Eliza in the early part of his narrative, Gilbert becomes cruel in his treatment of her once his attentions have been redirected to Helen. He reduces Eliza to tears with his harsh remonstrance against her gossiping about Helen, and is 'astounded, provoked, ashamed – not so much of [his] harshness as for her childish weakness' (*TWH*, 76–7). Towards the novel's close, when Eliza misinforms Gilbert of Helen's apparently impending marriage to Hargrave, he turns violent against her, 'seiz[ing] her arm and g[iv]ing] it, [he] think[s], a pretty severe squeeze, for she shrank into herself with a faint cry of pain or terror' (*TWH*, 469). As his brutality does not 'subdue' her spirit, Gilbert continues to act aggressively, causing Eliza to become 'almost frightened again, for a moment' (*TWH*, 469). His behaviour is alarming, as it reveals his

continued willingness to commit or threaten violence without remorse. He claims that, when speaking with Eliza, he makes ‘violent efforts to speak with proper dignity and composure, and to say nothing but what was coherent and sensible’ (*TWH*, 469). In terms of speech, Gilbert tries to remain calm and to embody the ideal of masculine self-control; but, when it comes to actions, he is always ready to strike out and is far less able to restrain his physical urge to harm others, both men and women alike.

The inconsistency with which Gilbert commits or threatens acts of violence reflects disturbingly on his control over the narrative. Berg, as noted, reads the framed structure of the novel as a form of ‘symbolic violence’, heightened by the fact that Gilbert is giving an ‘account’ of his own subjectivity and is, in the process, sacrificing Helen’s story to ‘shore up [his own] masculinity’.¹⁵⁷ Gilbert’s inclusion of his violent behaviour counters Berg’s interpretation, as he fails to paint himself as the stainless hero to Huntingdon’s anti-hero. If he is, indeed, interested in showing himself in a positive light, the unsettling possibility that he sees no ethical issue with his bursts of cruelty remains. His passionate impulses are positioned as something he cannot be held entirely responsible for, implicating the victim of his violences as accountable, as Rochester does with Jane Eyre.

Stewart contends that, in *Wildfell Hall*, it is the ‘undecorated and unglossed, let alone unvarnished, nature of this private transcription that explains – even years into the new couple’s subsequent marriage – why it can still seem, to dubious readers, like a heartless violation to pass the story on’.¹⁵⁸ Instead, Stewart reads Helen’s choice to give Gilbert her diary, and, subsequently, Gilbert’s use of her story as a form of male exchange, as a deliberate way to ‘*not* [...] put her body on the line, or not yet, but only her inked

¹⁵⁷ Berg, “‘Let me have its bowels then’: Violence, Sacrificial Structure and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*”, pp. 21, 36.

¹⁵⁸ Stewart, *Novel Violence*, p. 119.

words'.¹⁵⁹ He then comes, somewhat unclearly, to the conclusion that the transmission of Helen's story through Gilbert does not feel, 'in regard to the woman's story, like a molestation or a psychic rape' because, in 'fictional terms, it is the very name of the game'.¹⁶⁰ If this feels like a cop out, then it most likely is, as Stewart offers no substantive reasoning for discounting *Wildfell Hall's* structure as a 'psychic rape', having introduced the notion. Simply because the novel follows in a tradition of framed narratives in which violences are mediated and often unseen as a means of enhancing melodrama, such as Richardson's *Pamela* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, this does not negate the reality that the form can be a violation. In fact, Stewart's argument that mediation augments literary violence but that it is not in itself a form of violence because it is the 'very name of the game' is contradictory. The framing of Helen's narrative intensifies the textual violences both represented and unrepresented precisely because it is intrusive and voyeuristic. There is no indication from Gilbert that his wife of almost twenty years has consented to his use of her diary as a form of entertainment for a family member. As her husband, he legally has the right to her belongings, to use them as he wishes, as Huntingdon did before him.

This is not to say that Anne Brontë's use of the framing device is flawed. George Moore popularised this view in 1924 when he claimed that Brontë 'broke down in the middle of her story', and that 'almost any man of letters would have laid his hand upon her arm and said: [...] Your heroine must tell the young farmer her story, and an entrancing scene you will make of the telling'.¹⁶¹ Notably, Moore uses a similar image of male aggression as we saw with Gilbert and Eliza: the laying of a man's hand upon a woman. The frame of *Wildfell Hall* problematises the literary violences embedded within its narrative. Many of the brutalities described in the text are unseen, symbolic, or

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 120.

¹⁶⁰ Stewart, *Novel Violence*, p. 120.

¹⁶¹ George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 216.

threatened, but it is a pervasive presence, and no one is spared the force or infliction of violence, including the narrator. The narrative frame upholds the contradictions surrounding literary violence and reiterates what the opening chapter of this thesis initially contended: that violence is an absent presence within all of the Brontës' novels, perhaps especially when it comes to the representation of marital and sexual abuse.

What *Wildfell Hall* does make clear, however, is the difficulty in depicting sexual violences in fiction. Critics and readers, from 1848 to the present, have taken issue with the novel's representation of domestic abuse, in both its physical and emotional manifestations, arguing either that it is too explicit or, more often, sidestepping the issue through sub-textual references. Yet, if the text had been presented directly from Helen's perspective, as Moore wished, it could have been deemed unambiguously voyeuristic, as a re-inscription of trauma, and as an undoubtedly shocking and "unfeminine" account of abuse in the nineteenth century, one that may have placed more shame on the female narrator than on the male abuser. Is there any "right" or, indeed, ethical way to represent sexual violence in literature? The novel's – at times slippery and oblique, and at other times explicit and insistent – handling of sexual violence in and beyond marriage is testament to Anne Brontë's understanding of and sensitivity to both the subject matter and the novel as a form, as well as the limitations of the time in which she was writing. Brontë's novel bears witness to many forms of violence and brutality, not just its physical, more evident or evidenced forms. Through its framed structure, *Wildfell Hall* reveals the extent of emotional, linguistic, and narratorial violence – the fact that it resides not only in roguish gentlemen, but also in the seemingly innocent exchange of intimate stories between male friends.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘After the manner of Jael and Sisera’: Religion and Transformational Violence in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*

In *The Brontës and Religion* (1999), Marianne Thormählen relays a documented conversation between John Wesley and Charles Simeon, an advocate of Evangelicalism, as a means of conveying the difficulty in ‘relying too much on labels when describing the spiritual life of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’.¹ The conversation is couched in violent, threatening language, as Simeon tells Wesley that, as they are referred to respectively as an “Arminian” in Wesley’s case and a “Calvinist” in Simeon’s, they are expected “to draw daggers”.² Thormählen contends that the exchange ‘provides an excellent illustration of the dynamics that characterised religious developments in England throughout Patrick Brontë’s long life’.³ The exchange is underpinned by – crucially metaphorical and not literal – violence, figuring debates surrounding religion in the early to mid-nineteenth century as combative. As Thormählen notes, the Brontës grew up amidst this at times ferociously competitive religious jousting. Their novels, steeped in religious language and allusion, can be positioned within the context of such spiritual conflict, perhaps most especially Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), as well as Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853).

Thormählen characterises the sisters’ handling of religious issues as a form of ‘fearlessness’.⁴ She remarks that, while ‘entirely typical of and in tune with their time in

¹ Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

² Ibid, p. 14.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

their concern with religion, and in the issues they raise, they are unusual in the courage and independence of their explorations'.⁵ For Thormählen, these qualities are not 'signs of revolt, even heresy, directed against both God and society', but express 'the heroism of the pilgrim rather than the wrath of the rebel'.⁶ While the Brontës – particularly Anne and Charlotte – were not necessarily seeking to defy God and society through their handling of religion, there is a rebelliousness to the pilgrim's path. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Christian seeks deliverance despite the twists and turns of his journey; he remains on his own path, regardless of detracting voices around him.⁷ As World tells Christian: "there is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world, than is that unto which [Evangelist] hath directed thee".⁸ This focus on one's own goal can be seen in *Jane Eyre* (1847), which was influenced by Bunyan, but it is also discernible in *Villette's* narrator, Lucy Snowe, who, despite internal pain and self-sabotage, remains committed to her own inner spiritual and moral compass, dictated primarily by her reading of the Bible itself. If the Brontës are not quite out-and-out religious rebels, they are – at the very least – nonconformists. In response to critical reactions to her representation of religion in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë defiantly wrote in the preface to the second edition: 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns.'⁹

Brontë was responding to Elizabeth Rigby's now infamous critique of *Jane Eyre* for the *Quarterly Review*, in which Rigby contended that the novel was 'pre-eminently an

⁵ Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Pliable deserts Christian early on his pilgrimage: 'Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the Slow of *Dispond* alone; but still he endeavoured to struggle to that side of the Slow, that was still further from his own House'. See John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹ Charlotte Brontë, 'Preface', in *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006), 5–7, pp. 5–6.

anti-Christian composition'; and that 'the tone of the mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad [...] is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*'.¹⁰ In the *Christian Remembrancer*, the anonymous reviewer gave a more tempered response, writing that, '[t]o say that *Jane Eyre* is positively immoral or antichristian, would be to do its writer an injustice. Still it wears a questionable aspect...'.¹¹ When reviewing Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in August 1848, *Sharpe's London Magazine* noted that the book is 'in many respects eminently calculated to advance the cause of religion and right feeling, the moral of which is unimpeachable and most powerfully wrought'.¹² Yet, due to the 'profane expressions, inconceivably coarse language, and revolting scenes and descriptions by which its pages are disfigured', the novel has been 'rendered unfit for the perusal of the very class of persons to whom it should be most useful' and therefore apparently fails in its moral (though, not necessarily religious) aim.¹³

Matthew Arnold's evaluation of *Villette* focuses on what is often considered to be the novel's semi-autobiographical slant, writing that the text is 'disagreeable' because 'the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact put into her book'.¹⁴ Arnold predicts that this 'hunger, rebellion and rage' will be 'fatal to [Brontë] in the long run', a rather ominous and, indeed, violent choice of words.¹⁵ While his tone and evaluation of Brontë's novel is dismissive, Arnold also fails to identify another possible reason for the novel's painful narrative. During the writing of *Villette*, Brontë was grieving the deaths of her three siblings – Branwell, Emily, and Anne – within nine months of each other. As John Hughes writes, 'it is hard to separate

¹⁰ Elizabeth Rigby, from an unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 105–12, pp. 109–10.

¹¹ From an unsigned review, *Christian Remembrancer*, April 1848, in Allott 88–92, p. 91.

¹² From an unsigned review, *Sharpe's London Magazine*, August 1848, in Allott, 263–5, p. 265.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Matthew Arnold to Mrs Forster, 14 April 1853, in Allott, p. 201.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the world of the text from Brontë's own experience at the time of writing the novel', as her life had been 'overturned' by the recent deaths of her sisters and brother, which in turn 'repeated the childhood losses of her mother and sisters'.¹⁶

While it is in many ways reductive to conflate Brontë's personal experiences with her writing, Hughes's analysis is pertinent to the trajectory of this chapter, as he contends that Brontë's writing would become a 'medium for the release and contemplation of passions that would transcend mere chronology'.¹⁷ This notion of releasing pain and excessive emotion will be considered in the second part of this chapter, within a broader discussion of the violent representations of pain and self-violence through the co-opting and reworking of biblical narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Although comparing Brontë's life with the inner world of Lucy Snowe is not advocated by this thesis, the intensity and significance of *feeling* pain is central to *Villette* and the following discussion of that text.

In *Villette*, as we shall see, Lucy Snowe's religiously inflected release through suffering differs from Charlotte Brontë's articulation of Anne Brontë's apparently morbid religiosity, which, according to Charlotte, offered Anne very little earthly relief. In 'Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell', which prefaced selected poems by her sisters and was included in the 1850 reissue of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, she writes that some readers, 'perhaps, would rejoice over [Anne Brontë's] tokens of sincere though sorrowing piety'.¹⁸ For Charlotte, however, 'they seem sad, as if [Anne's] whole innocent life had been passed under the martyrdom of an unconfessed physical pain'.¹⁹ The consolation for such witnessed suffering was that, 'in her last

¹⁶ John Hughes, 'The Affective World of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 40.4 (2000), 711–26, p. 725.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Charlotte Brontë, 'Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell', in Ellis and Acton Bell, *Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey'*, ed. Currer Bell (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1850), 471–504, p. 490.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

moments this tyranny of a too tender conscience was overcome; this pomp of terrors broke up, and, passing away, left [Anne's] dying hour unclouded'.²⁰ As noted previously, Charlotte moulded her sisters' legacies after their deaths and, when it came to preserving the 'literary remains' of her youngest sister, she emphasised Anne's piety. In the 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' (1850), Charlotte writes that Anne 'was a very sincere and practical Christian, but the tinge of religious melancholy communicated a sad shade to her brief, blameless life'.²¹ Charlotte continues that Anne had 'a sort of nun-like veil' covering her mind and feelings 'which was rarely lifted'.²²

In the preface to the 'Selection from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell', Charlotte reinforces the image of Anne as peculiarly pious, likening her 'religious feeling' to that of William Cowper, who reportedly suffered from 'religious melancholy' due to a fear of damnation.²³ In her poem 'A Prayer' (dated 13 October 1844), Anne Brontë gestures to Cowper's poetry and faith, particularly 'The Castaway' (1799): 'Unless Thou hasten to relieve, / Thy suppliant is a castaway' (ll. 7–8).²⁴ And, in her poem, 'To Cowper' (dated 10 November 1842), she explicitly aligns her thoughts and experiences with his own: 'The language of my inmost heart / I traced in every line; / *My* sins, *my* sorrows, hopes, and fears, / Were there—and only mine' (ll. 5–8).²⁵

Charlotte Brontë's evaluation of both Anne Brontë's life and her work – however patronising – is not inaccurate. In one of her final poems, 'Self-Communion' (dated 17 April 1848, but begun in November 1847), Anne explores this notion of 'unconfessed physical', as well as emotional, pain, which is – somewhat ironically, considering

²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, 'Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell', p. 491.

²¹ Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), xliii–xlix, p. xlvi.

²² *Ibid.*, p. xlix.

²³ Charlotte Brontë, 'Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell', p. 490. For a discussion of Cowper's 'religious melancholy', see Diane Buie, 'William Cowper: A Religious Melancholic?', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36.1 (2013), 103–19.

²⁴ Anne Brontë, 'A Prayer', in *The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë*, ed. Clement Shorter (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), p. 56.

²⁵ Anne Brontë, 'To Cowper', in *The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë*, 28–30, p. 28 [emphasis in original].

Charlotte's tone in these lines – also evident in *Villette* and will be examined later in this chapter. 'Self-Communion' details a dialogue between two inner voices: one lamenting the need to "check, or nurse apart, / Full many an impulse of the heart" (ll. 190–1); and the other emphasising that "Life was for labour, not for joy" (l. 272), as "[t]here is a rest beyond the grave, / A lasting rest from pain and sin" (ll. 304–5).²⁶ The need to "bear / A colder heart within my breast; / To share such thoughts as [one] could share, / And calmly keep the rest" (ll. 200–3) was also outlined in *Agnes Grey*, in which Agnes tells her reader: 'I was a close and resolute dissembler [...]. My prayers, my tears, my wishes, fears, and lamentations, were witnessed by myself and Heaven alone.'²⁷ As Charlotte Brontë noted, there is a strong sense of martyrdom running throughout Anne's poetry and prose, one of self-inflicted suffering and pain which only the ascent to Heaven will allay.

'Self-Communion' is often read as an insight into Anne Brontë's personal experiences and religious thought processes, with Edward Chitham referring to the poem as 'autobiographical'; he states that 'we are able to use a number of lines from 'Self-Communion' to illuminate Anne's experience during these years [late 1820s and early 1830s]'.²⁸ In critical appraisals of *Agnes Grey*, the experiences, beliefs, and even the personality of the novel's eponymous character are also repeatedly conflated with Anne Brontë's own. James R. Simmons, Jr., in a discussion of the role of the governess in *Agnes Grey*, writes: 'The question is, however, were Anne Brontë's experiences, and by extension Agnes', typical of the experiences of governesses during the nineteenth century?'²⁹ While Brontë's 'personal experience' as a governess does allow her to 'write authoritatively' on the subject, the simplistic equating of Agnes with Brontë reduces the

²⁶ Anne Brontë, 'Self-Communion', in *The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë*, 131–44, pp. 138, 141, 143.

²⁷ Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*, ed. Angeline Goreau (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 142. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

²⁸ Edward Chitham, *The Life of Anne Brontë* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 18, 31.

²⁹ James R. Simmons, Jr., 'Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualising the Governess in *Agnes Grey*', in *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, eds. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 25–43, p. 27.

latter's artistry.³⁰ It also hinders a reading of *Agnes Grey* which complicates its apparently unquestioning promotion of Agnes's – at times almost sanctimonious – piety. As Elizabeth Langland notes: 'Too often, *Agnes Grey* has been read primarily to learn about Anne.'³¹

Yet there are possible advantages to reading Anne Brontë through her first novel, particularly regarding its representations of violence. If – as Charlotte Brontë remarked to W. S. Williams – '*Agnes Grey* is the mirror of the mind of the writer', is it possible that Anne Brontë was especially interested in exploring the parameters of morally and religiously "legitimate" violence?³² And what might these parameters and their significance consist of? This chapter will consider these questions to suggest that, through her portrayal of Agnes Grey's religiosity and violence, Anne Brontë was raising far more searching and controversial issues surrounding the intersections between religion and violence than critics have hitherto fully noted or appreciated. This will involve an in-depth close reading of Agnes's crushing of the nestlings with a focus on her religious legitimisation of such violence, and with a view to situating the scene within contemporary conversations on educational practices and perceptions of morality. The chapter also aims to complicate the notion that Anne Brontë's apparent 'religious melancholy' impeded or dampened her engagement with the moral ambiguities of (representing) violent behaviour. On the contrary, her own preoccupation with challenging, often combative questions of faith and doubt – as expressed most explicitly in poems such as 'Self-Communion' (1848), 'The Narrow Way' (1848), 'Despondency' (1841), and 'To Cowper' (1842) – make her well-placed to articulate deliberations of religious or religiously justified violence.

³⁰ Simmons, Jr., 'Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualising the Governess in *Agnes Grey*', p. 27.

³¹ Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1989), p. 97.

³² Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, 21 December 1847, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume I: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 580–1, p. 580.

Impurity and Contaminating Forces in *Agnes Grey*

The most memorable, and often framed as the most shocking, instance of violence represented in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) is the moment Agnes crushes 'a brood of little callow nestlings' with a stone to prevent her ward Tom from tormenting the birds further (AG, 45). Having discovered that Tom has stolen the animals from their nesting place, and plans to torture and kill them, Agnes gives Tom an ultimatum: "[the birds] must either be killed at once, or carried back to the place you took them from, that the old birds may continue to feed them" (AG, 46). When Tom refuses to return the birds and then recites 'with fiendish glee' a 'list of torments' to which he will submit the nestlings, Agnes 'drop[s] the stone upon his intended victims, and crush[es] them flat beneath it' (AG, 46). When confronted by Tom's mother, regarding why she killed the birds, Agnes quotes from Matthew 5: 7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (AG, 47). Mrs Bloomfield contends that this "refers to our conduct towards each other", not animals (AG, 48). Agnes retaliates with further biblical language: "The merciful man shews mercy to his beast" (AG, 48). This phrase, although not directly taken from scripture, is reminiscent of Proverbs 12: 10, which reads: 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.'³³

Agnes's "merciful" treatment of the birds positions her as righteous in opposition to the wicked, cruel Bloomfield family. Mrs Bloomfield counters Agnes's reasoning by telling her that she has not shown "much mercy [...] killing the poor birds by wholesale, in that shocking manner, and putting the dear boy to such misery, for a mere whim!" (AG, 48). Judging it 'prudent to say no more', Agnes lets Mrs Bloomfield have the last word, a recurring theme throughout the novel in which Agnes remains largely silent on

³³ Proverbs 12: 10, in *The Bible: Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha*, eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 732.

issues of brutality and violence in the household (*AG*, 48). Considering her silence and passivity, Agnes's call to action in this instance marks out the scene as singular.

In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), Elizabeth Gaskell recalls asking Charlotte Brontë about *Agnes Grey*, 'alluding more particularly to the account of the stoning of the little nestlings in the presence of the parent birds'.³⁴ Considering Gaskell's particular focus on this scene, it is possible that other readers felt similarly unsettled by Agnes's actions. Charlotte Brontë replied to Gaskell that:

none but those who had been in the position of a governess could ever realise the dark side of "respectable" human nature; under no great temptation to crime, but daily giving way to selfishness and ill-temper, till its conduct towards those dependents on it sometimes amounts to a tyranny of which one would rather be the victim than the inflicter.³⁵

Jill L. Matus gives an astute reading of this anecdote, noting that, while Gaskell 'makes it clear that the dark side of respectability belongs to the employers', it remains unspoken what becomes 'of the dark side of respectable nature belonging to the governess herself'.³⁶ The following section of this chapter seeks to consider this 'dark side of the respectable nature' of *Agnes Grey*, both the character and novel, in relation to violence justified through religious language. Throughout, the discussion will be underpinned by the question: why does Agnes react so violently in this moment and then use religion as a means of legitimising such violence?

Samantha Ellis, who wrote a recent biography of Anne Brontë, notes in an article for the *Guardian* that this 'brutal mercy killing is almost too violent to read'.³⁷ Ellis's words notably echo nineteenth-century reviews of *Wildfell Hall*, which often complained that the

³⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 186.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Jill L. Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 99.

³⁷ Samantha Ellis, 'Anne Brontë: the sister who got there first', *The Guardian*, 6 January 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/06/anne-bronte-agnes-grey-jane-eyre-charlotte?CMP=twt_gu> [Accessed 9 November 2018].

novel was unfit to be perused by certain (primarily female) readers.³⁸ Through representing such merciful brutality, Ellis argues:

[Anne Brontë] wanted to show that Tom's cruelty was sanctioned, even encouraged, by his family [...] Tom's cruelty is all of a piece; whether he is torturing birds, hitting his sisters or kicking his governess, he wants to "persecute the lower creation", because he sees women, girls and defenceless animals as his to exploit, abuse and oppress.³⁹

Meanwhile, Sara Lodge also highlights Anne Brontë's depiction of 'the male child's wilfulness and dominance over weaker creatures (birds, badgers, servants, the female sex) being naturalised and rewarded, by men and women, so that he is inclined to feel that in the exercise of violent power he is most himself'.⁴⁰

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, discussions of animal cruelty and its connection to domestic violence in the Brontës' novels, particularly *Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights*, have proliferated in recent years. These studies often include considerations of masculinity, as the violence committed against animals – and women – in Anne and Emily Brontë's work is predominantly enacted by male characters. Hilary Newman writes that 'the moral purpose of [*Agnes Grey*] is largely treated through the characters' treatment of animals'.⁴¹ Maggie Berg agrees, arguing that the 'representation of animals in *Agnes Grey* – as exploited and abused – is indistinguishable from its analysis of the objectification and exploitation of women' by men and society.⁴² For Berg, when Agnes 'frees the birds from Tom's violence, she discovers a measure of power (along with anger)' intensified by her own dejection and mistreatment at the hands of her

³⁸ Due to the apparently 'revolting', 'coarse', and 'disgusting' scenes and language in *Wildfell Hall*, *Sharpe's London Magazine* wished to 'warn [their] readers, and more especially [their] lady readers, against being induced to peruse it, either by the powerful interest of the story, or the talent with which it is written'. From an unsigned review, *Sharpe's London Magazine*, August 1848, in Allott, 263–5 p. 263.

³⁹ Ellis, 'Anne Brontë: the sister who got there first', *The Guardian*.

⁴⁰ Sara Lodge, 'Masculinity, Power and Play in the Work of the Brontës', in *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity*, ed. Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–30, p. 26.

⁴¹ Hilary Newman, 'Animals in *Agnes Grey*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 21.6 (1996), 237–42, p. 242.

⁴² Maggie Berg, "'Hapless Dependents": Women and Animals in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*', *Studies in the Novel*, 34.2 (2002), 177–97, pp. 177–8.

employers and their children.⁴³ There are links between violence, religion, and masculinity in all of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's novels, particularly in the figures of Mr Brocklehurst and St John Rivers in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mr Helstone in *Shirley* (1849), Reverend Millward in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and Joseph in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). These links will be explored throughout this section in relation to *Agnes Grey*, as well as early to mid-nineteenth-century understandings of childrearing, through an in-depth consideration of Agnes's mercy killing and the brutality in the Bloomfield household more broadly, to ascertain why Agnes commits such an act of violence and why it is so rarely commented upon by readers and critics.

In the case of Agnes crushing the nestlings, the religious framework through which she explains her actions is often overlooked or taken for granted in critical appraisals. Thormählen does place the novel's representation of animal cruelty in its wider religious context, noting that Legh Richmond's 1801 sermon, 'On the Sin of Cruelty towards the Brute Creation', which was subsequently published, warned parents against allowing their sons to 'torture birds or rifle their nests'.⁴⁴ She goes on to view Agnes's mercy killing of the birds as an attempt to 'counteract an inclination which could harm the boy's moral character for life'.⁴⁵ Yet this consideration is not followed up with a more sustained analysis of Agnes's use of violence to teach morality to a seven-year-old nor her decision to justify such action through scripture.

Berg views Agnes's invocation of 'two Biblical teachings about mercy' as 'an attempt to lend weight to her argument against cruelty', suggesting that the religious framework which Agnes invokes strengthens but does not necessarily underpin her 'argument'.⁴⁶ Berg primarily positions Agnes's actions in relation to 'Romantic

⁴³ Berg, "Hapless Dependents": Women and Animals in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, p. 186.

⁴⁴ Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p. 168.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Berg, "Hapless Dependents": Women and Animals in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, p. 188.

vegetarians’, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley, and in opposition to speciesism, thereby aligning *Agnes Grey* with wider debates in the early nineteenth century regarding meat-eating and animal welfare.⁴⁷ Later in her article, Berg also considers Anne Brontë’s novel in line with the anti-vivisection movement, stating that, as Frances Power Cobbe would do later in the century, Brontë ‘similarly espouses an egalitarian morality which would extend to animals’.⁴⁸ This involves a dismissal of the hierarchy of speciesism imposed on humans and animals, through which the abuse of the latter is justified by the former on the grounds of their supposed moral superiority. As Berg rightly notes, Agnes consistently counters this perspective held by her employers and charges, who believe that ‘the creatures were all created for [humans’] convenience’ and that animals such as birds are no more than ‘soulless brutes’ (*AG*, 47). While this section of the chapter is indebted to such studies of animal cruelty in *Agnes Grey*, it wishes to extend these debates with a focus on the possible causes of Agnes’s violent outburst, emphasising the discourses of contamination and impurity that pervade her story.

In resisting the narrative of speciesism, Agnes suggests that it is the Bloomfields who are the true ‘soulless brutes’. As Susan Meyer notes, those of ‘high social rank in *Agnes Grey* [...] acquire a sense of superiority by envisioning themselves as civilised and Christian in relation to the ignorant “savages” beneath them’, including governesses and animals.⁴⁹ Mr Bloomfield is heard referring to his cooks as “savages” for cutting meat “wrong” (*AG*, 25); and his mother questions Agnes’s personhood when she witnesses the governess’s lack of control over the Bloomfield children’s unruliness, asking her daughter-in-law whether Agnes is “a *proper person*” (*AG*, 37, emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ Berg, “Hapless Dependents”: Women and Animals in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*, p. 188.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁹ Susan Meyer, ‘Words on “Great Vulgar Sheets”: Writing and Social Resistance in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847)’, in *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*, eds. Barbara Leah Harman and Susan Meyer (New York: Garland, 1999), 3–16, p. 9.

A similar narrative on the sub-humanity of governesses appears in *Jane Eyre*, voiced by the Ingram family. Blanche – Jane’s beautiful, haughty rival for Rochester’s affections – remarks that she and her siblings had ““a dozen [governesses] at least in [their] day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi””.⁵⁰ She recalls the ““raging passions”” of one governess and the fact that ““no blow took effect”” on another, indicating that violent behaviour from both sides was a normal, or at least unexceptional, part of governessing (*JE*, 206). Blanche’s mother, Baroness Ingram, claims to have ““suffered a martyrdom from [the governesses] incompetency and caprice”” and that Jane’s ““physiognomy”” reveals ““all the faults of her class”” (*JE*, 205). Jane Eyre archly refers to the Baroness as a ‘pious lady’, highlighting the fact that her, and her daughter’s, dismissive and cruel treatment of women like Jane undermines any religious superiority they claim to possess (*JE*, 205).

This moral self-aggrandisement of the wealthier classes is also undercut by Agnes Grey in her detailing of their simultaneous indifference to and encouragement of violence against animals and, implicitly by extension, other “lower” sections of society. Indeed, as Mr Bloomfield calls his staff ““savages””, Agnes herself aligns families such as the Bloomfields and Murrays with ‘intractable savages’ and fears that, through extended contact with such a group, she will become less ‘civilised’ and ‘become [...] a barbarian’ herself (*AG*, 97). Agnes worries that the ‘gross vapours of earth’ will contaminate her ‘inward heaven’ (*AG*, 97), itself an echo of Jane Eyre’s sense of her own ““inward treasure”” (*JE*, 233), and an adumbration of Anne Brontë’s reference to an ““inward spirit”” in ‘Self-Communion’ (l. 27).⁵¹ By introducing the possibility of being morally, and indeed spiritually, polluted by these “uncivilised” households, Agnes subtly provides the reader with another justification for her own more brutal behaviour, while also gesturing

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 205. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁵¹ Anne Brontë, ‘Self-Communion’, in *The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë*, 131–44, p. 132.

to a wider perception of violence as something contagious, as discussed in Chapter One, in regard to Lockwood, and in Chapter Two, in relation to the contaminating effect of political violence. Agnes Grey's language also reinforces her desire to be distinct from families like the Bloomfields, while still indulging (subconsciously or otherwise) in violent colonial narratives normally utilised by the oppressor. This double standard will be considered in more depth as this section develops, particularly regarding Agnes's killing of the nestlings and her use of religion as a means of justification.

The notion of violence as polluting is revisited in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Tracing the overlaps between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and James's horror story, Patsy Stoneman writes: "The extreme tension of *The Turn of the Screw* [...] derives from the governess's simultaneous compulsion and reluctance to abandon the Victorian notion of infant purity and with it, the idea of pure womanhood as a kind of extended infancy."⁵² Upon learning of Miles's dismissal from school, the Governess interrogates Mrs Grose regarding his character. Mrs Grose remarks that she had – "thank God!" – known Miles to be "bad"⁵³ The Governess reiterates the point, stating that she also "like[s] them with the spirit to be naughty [...] But not to the degree to contaminate" (*TS*, 130). Mrs Grose gives an 'odd laugh' and asks: "Are you afraid he'll corrupt *you*?" (*TS*, 130). The Governess dismisses her earlier fears of such 'contamination', convincing herself that Miles 'was only too fine and fair for the little horrid unclean school-world, and he had paid a price for it' (*TS*, 140). The school itself becomes the polluting influence, tarnishing Miles's purity. As the Governess muses: if Miles 'had been wicked he would have "caught" it, and I should have caught it by the rebound – I should have found the

⁵² Patsy Stoneman, *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996), p. 50.

⁵³ Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw", in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*, ed. T. J. Lustig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 113–236, p. 130. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

trace, should have felt the wound and the dishonour' (*TS*, 140–1). The novella's 'tension' revolves around, as Stoneman notes, this almost feverish fear of contamination.

This sensitivity to impurity and corrupting forces, as well as the tension between the 'compulsion and reluctance' to reject ideas of 'pure womanhood' and childhood, can also be delineated in *Agnes Grey*. One possible reading of Agnes's actions is that she has already been contaminated by the household's violences. Her killing of the nestlings is certainly a response to an accumulation of violent acts committed against animals (both animate and inanimate) by Tom. During their first meeting, Tom monopolises Agnes's attention, forcing her to watch as he 'manfully' uses his 'whip and spurs' on his rocking-horse and threatens to treat a 'real pony' in the same 'shocking' manner (*AG*, 19). He keeps traps for birds dotted around his part of the garden, at times giving the birds "to the cat" or "cut[ting] them to pieces"; his next plan is to "roast [them] alive" (*AG*, 20). He recounts being given a 'nest full of young sparrows' by his father, who watched while he "pull[ed] off their legs and wings, and heads, and never said anything" (*AG*, 20). This behaviour is enabled and even praised by his family, with his uncle even calling him a "fine boy" for his treatment of birds (*AG*, 20) and his mother being largely indifferent to the suffering of "naughty sparrows" (*AG*, 21). In the face of this cruelty and abuse, Agnes considers retaliating with further violence through a 'few sound boxes on the ear'; yet she recognises the futility of such action, knowing that Mrs Bloomfield has 'such unshaken faith in [her son's] veracity' as to take his side in most matters, including against Agnes's word (*AG*, 26–7). Within the context of this sustained violence, Agnes's mercy killing becomes less arbitrary. Having remained silent about Tom's abusive behaviour, she breaks out not with strong words, but through violent actions which she then justifies through religious language.

Yet Agnes also divulges her own capacity for violence throughout her time as a governess, positioning her killing of the birds as the culmination of a pattern of violent

behaviour. When considering beating Tom for his misconduct, Agnes ‘determine[s] to refrain from striking him, even in self-defence’, instead choosing ‘to throw him on his back and hold his hands and feet till [his] frenzy was somewhat abated’ (*AG*, 27). The thought of using ‘a good birch rod’ is appealing to Agnes, but she claims her ‘powers were so limited, [she] must make the best use of what [she] had’ (*AG*, 27). Short of a rod, the ‘only weapons’ available to her are ‘Patience, Firmness, and Perseverance’ (*AG*, 27). Religion is also at hand, as Agnes reminds the children ‘of the sins of the past day’ when they ‘said their prayers at night, and asked for pardon for their offences’ (*AG*, 27). She continues: ‘penitential hymns should be said by the naughty, cheerful ones by the comparatively good’ (*AG*, 27). This milder form of discipline – used as an alternative to violence – is still a punishment, as it connects the children’s insolence with the possibility of their damnation or, at least, their losing favour with God.

The phrase ‘only weapons’ suggests Agnes refrains from using violent force because no other appropriate tools were at hand, leaving her to fall back on alternative defences which necessitate her own self-control while being largely unsuccessful in controlling the children themselves. Having one day been visited unexpectedly in the school-room by Mr Bloomfield, Agnes is reprimanded for allowing the children to grind egg-shells on the carpet. Bloomfield tells Agnes: “‘Just look at that carpet, and see – was there ever anything like it in a Christian house before?’” (*AG*, 41). Bloomfield’s invocation of Christianity is jarring, particularly considering his ambivalence to Tom’s cruel treatment of nestlings. Religion becomes something to be appropriated at will; and the otherwise impious, oath-swearing Bloomfield can take the upper-hand by referring to his household’s Christian façade. As Agnes notes, she cannot win in the Bloomfield home: if she remains quiet, she is accused of ‘conniving at [the children’s] disorderly conduct’; and if she ‘happen[s] to be exalting [her] voice to enforce order’, she is reproached for ‘using undue violence, and setting the girls a bad example by such

ungentleness of tone and language' (*AG*, 40). In this instance, as a means of 'easing [her] irritation' once Bloomfield has left the school-room, Agnes 'seiz[es] the poker' and 'dashe[s] it repeatedly into the cinders, [...] stirr[ing] them up with unwonted energy' (*AG*, 42). Instead of voicing her frustration, she finds physical relief for her rage, one which reveals the struggle she undergoes to maintain a veneer of civility and self-control.

In the case of Tom's sister, however, Agnes admits to losing her temper in the face of the little girl's obstinacy, by 'shak[ing] her violently by the shoulder, or pull[ing] her long hair, or put[ting] her in the corner' (*AG*, 30). Notably, Agnes feels more able to harm Mary Ann than Tom, possibly in unspoken acceptance of his ultimate possession of the house and everything in it through primogeniture. This reflects Anne Brontë's later depictions of adult relationships in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in which men like Huntingdon and Hattersley repeatedly get away with behaving abhorrently, while women like Helen and Milicent are kept in check by both their husbands and their own sense of morality. In these configurations, it is – as in *Agnes Grey* – the female characters who uphold the importance of faith or are punished for stepping out of line, while the men continue to "sin" without fear of the consequences.

Helen herself articulates the double standard when it comes to educating and raising boys and girls during the early nineteenth century, though in different terms to Agnes Grey's treatment of Mary Ann and Tom. Helen tells Gilbert that, while he believes boys and girls "are *both* weak and prone to err", his reasoning also suggests that "the slightest error, the merest shadow of pollution will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished".⁵⁴ This fear of being 'polluted' by temptation, or indeed violence, remains with young women like Agnes Grey and the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*. Indeed, Agnes and the Governess's own fears of

⁵⁴ Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 30.

contamination seem to confirm Gilbert's perspective, although both also fear for the purity of their male charges. Yet there is the sense that Agnes's use of scripture as a means of justifying her violence circumvents this perception of her as polluted and weak because, in revealing her capacity for brutality and then legitimising it through religious language, she is differentiating herself from the Bloomfields and arguably showing a moral "strength" beyond that of her employers and their children.

Education and "Legitimate" Discipline in *Agnes Grey*

Agnes's invocation of scripture following her killing of the nestlings is the only explicit way in which she attempts to justify her actions. Agnes is clear in her moral 'duty' and this responsibility is framed as a religious one (*AG*, 46). She justifies her rather brutal and, what may appear to be, rash decision through religious narratives, while simultaneously denouncing Tom's intended violences with the same means. By invoking the Bible, Agnes gains the upper-hand over Mrs Bloomfield – or, at least, the reader is encouraged to side with Agnes's perspective here, rather than the morally bankrupt Bloomfield clan.

Sally Howgate, however, complicates this view of Anne Brontë's novel, arguing that she 'intended' for Agnes to come across as somewhat frustratingly pious.⁵⁵ Unlike Charlotte Brontë's narrator of *Villette*, Lucy Snowe, whom readers 'accept [...] as an unattractive, repressed and nervous persona', 'there is an unspoken assumption that the narratorial voice [in *Agnes Grey*] is the "simple piece" of uncomplicated goodness and truth personified'.⁵⁶ For Howgate, the art of Brontë's novel stems from her creation of 'an enduring impression of the heroine as quiet, simple and passive through the

⁵⁵ Sally Howgate, "I chose to keep silence": Textual Self-Effacement in *Agnes Grey*, *Brontë Studies*, 36.3 (2011), 213–23, p. 219.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

presentation of a reserve which actually hides the passion and conflict inside her'.⁵⁷ Matus agrees, writing that, if Agnes were to 'appear out of control, or given, like her charges, to vent her feelings violently, she would forfeit her precarious claim to self-discipline and regulation'.⁵⁸ Much like her vigorous dashing of the cinders (though this time with consequences), Agnes's crushing of the nestlings is an eruption of that underlying 'passion and conflict' which her usual self-control masks. Scripture becomes the only acceptable means through which she can justify and express these buried emotions without jeopardising her employment and veneer of self-discipline.

Agnes acts as a moral arbiter throughout the text, guiding the reader's own evaluation of other characters. When Agnes is later working for the Murray family, Mrs Murray misquotes the Bible when she tells Agnes the family's former governesses lacked "that meek and quiet spirit which St Matthew, or some of them, says is better than the putting on of apparel" (*AG*, 62). She believes Agnes will "know the passage to which [she] allude[s], for [she is] a clergyman's daughter" (*AG*, 62). As Angeline Goreau clarifies, the 'meek and quiet spirit' quotation is from the First Epistle of Peter.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Mrs Bloomfield's mother-in-law also has a woolly grasp of scripture, as she 'misquoted, or misapplied' several passages, and makes 'religious exclamations so redolent of the ludicrous [...] that [Agnes] decline[s] repeating them' (*AG*, 39). She is insistent in calling herself "one of the pious ones", an irony emphasised by the narrator's interjections of her mannerisms: "And, thank Heaven, I always was" (another nod) "and I glory in it!" (an emphatic clasping of the hands and shaking of the head) (*AG*, 39). The exchange leaves Agnes 'hoping that, after all, she was rather weak than wicked' (*AG*, 39). Following the mercy killing of the birds, Mrs Bloomfield's own reading of Matthew 5: 7 is, as noted above, positioned as a *misreading*.

⁵⁷ Howgate, "I chose to keep silence": Textual Self-Effacement in *Agnes Grey*, p. 218.

⁵⁸ Matus, *Unstable Bodies*, pp. 97–8.

⁵⁹ Angeline Goreau, n. 8, Chapter VII, *Agnes Grey*, p. 212.

These encounters with characters who misremember biblical passages place Agnes as the authority on religious verse and its judgement on violence throughout the novel. The picking and choosing of scripture to serve one's own purposes also appears most notably in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Mr Brocklehurst is revealed to use biblical allusion to strengthen his hypocritical worldview. Having ordered for a young girl's curls to be cut off, despite his own daughters' 'elaborately curled hair' with 'a false front of French curls', Brocklehurst justifies his command by paraphrasing Christ's response to Pilate in John 19: 36: "I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh"⁶⁰ (*JE*, 76).⁶⁰ Of Joseph's 'ransack[ing]' of the Bible in *Wuthering Heights* to 'rake the promises to himself, and fling curses on his neighbours',⁶¹ Berg writes that, by 'using religious texts as instruments of oppression, [he] does violence to the text and to others'.⁶² Berg explicitly figures the misreading and misuse of the Bible as a form of violence in itself, again raising the inherent connection between language and violence. This idea of the (mis)appropriation of biblical narratives as a form of violence will be returned to in the final sections of this chapter.

The curbing of the children's propensity to lash out, as well as Agnes's own general avoidance of violence as a method of regulation, align with contemporary conversations concerning the education of children in the late-eighteenth and early- to mid-nineteenth centuries. Bettina L. Knapp views Mrs Bloomfield's lax childrearing practices as a misreading of Rousseau's theories outlined in his influential treatise *Emile, or An Education* (1762), writing that the 'uninformed Mrs Bloomfield, understanding only that she must spare the rod, forbade Agnes to reprimand, punish, or curtail her children's

⁶⁰ In John 19: 36, it reads: 'Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world'. Brocklehurst embellishes scripture for his own ends, by including the pointed reference to "girls". See 'The Books of the New Testament', *The Bible*, p. 142.

⁶¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 42.

⁶² Maggie Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin* (London: Prentice Hall, c.1996), p. 45.

freedom in any way'.⁶³ Rousseau discouraged the use of punishment – physical or otherwise – as a means of disciplining children, believing that the ‘more they are held in check under [the adult’s] eyes, the more turbulent the moment they get away’.⁶⁴ For Rousseau, the child’s actions are ‘[d]evoid of all morality’ and therefore ‘he can do nothing which is morally bad and which merits either punishment or reprimand’.⁶⁵ Contrary to popular belief, Rousseau does not view childhood as ‘the time to correct man’s bad inclinations’.⁶⁶ In a passage that resonates strikingly with *Agnes Grey*, Rousseau contends that before ‘the age of reason we do good and bad without knowing it [...] A child wants to upset everything he sees [...] He grabs a bird as he would grab a stone, and he strangles it without knowing what he does.’⁶⁷ Tom’s handling of the birds is not presented to the reader as innocent, however. When he plans to torture the birds, and details his intentions to Agnes, he knows exactly what he is doing, as does his admiring Uncle Robson. Agnes considers it her responsibility to intervene, partly in a bid to save the nestlings from further misery, but also to “correct” Tom’s ‘bad inclinations’.

While Mrs Bloomfield’s potential misinterpretation of Rousseau comes as little surprise considering her misreading of the Bible, Agnes herself is not a follower of Rousseau either. She continuously tries to keep the Bloomfield children in check by reprimanding their misbehaviour and keeping them inside until they finish their lessons. She views their disobedience in moral terms, feeling it her duty to divert the children from an immoral path of blasphemy and brutality to a more docile and, indeed, religious one. Anja Müller deflates the influence of Rousseau on England’s middle- to upper-class

⁶³ Bettina L. Knapp, ‘Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*: The Feminist; “I must stand alone”’, in *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, eds. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 63–73, p. 66.

⁶⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or An Education*, ed. and trans. Allan Bloom (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 92.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

families in the early nineteenth century, contending that his ‘voice was all but drowned out by the stricture of evangelicals, like Hannah More (1745 – 1833), who believed as much as their puritan forebears that children were corrupt and that to spare the rod was to spoil the child’.⁶⁸ Anthony Fletcher echoes Müller, emphasising that, in England, ‘the evangelical tradition was still alive and in fact vigorously reborn’ in this period, meaning the ‘English gentry and middle class believed it to be their duty, through instruction, to perpetuate social and gender order and to create moral adults’.⁶⁹ Hannah More, unlike Rousseau, believed it to be a ‘fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings’, instead maintaining they ‘bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil disposition which it should be the great end of education to rectify’.⁷⁰ Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre* is, again, an example of such extreme Evangelicalism. While Agnes is by no means as cruel as Brocklehurst, particularly as she does not necessarily believe children are born wicked, there is a touch of the evangelical in her pedagogical approach, particularly as she feels it is her duty to mould the Bloomfield children into ‘moral adults’.

When Agnes dreams of possessing a birch rod with which to discipline the Bloomfield children, John Wesley’s sermon, ‘On Obedience to Parents’ (1784), also comes to mind. In comparison to Rousseau’s treatise, it offers a far more severe, though perhaps no less extreme, method of educating children, much like More’s approach:

“This [...] I cannot but earnestly repeat,—Break their wills betimes; begin this great work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, or perhaps speak at all [...] break the will, if you would not damn the child [...] (1.) Let a child, from a year old, be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly. In order to this, (2.) Let him have nothing he cries for;

⁶⁸ Anja Müller, ‘Children and Physical Cruelty – The Lockean and Rousseauvian Revolution’, in *Childhood and Violence in the Western Tradition*, eds. Laurence Brockliss and Heather Montgomery (Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2010), 129–35, p. 133.

⁶⁹ Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600–1914* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 8–9.

⁷⁰ Hannah More, ‘Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education’, in *The Works of Hannah More* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846), 311–415, p. 323.

absolutely nothing, great or small; else you undo your own work. (3.)
At all events, from that age, make him do as he is bid, if you whip him
ten times running to effect it. Let none persuade you it is cruelty to do
this; it is cruelty not to do it. Break his will now, and his soul will live,
and he will probably bless you to all eternity.”⁷¹

While Anne Brontë was not a Wesleyan Methodist, her Aunt Branwell was, and several critics have outlined the apparent impact of Elizabeth Branwell’s religion on Anne Brontë’s faith and, particularly, what Charlotte took to be, her ‘religious melancholy’. Winifred Gérin writes that, unlike Wesley himself, ‘Miss Branwell’s most potent weapon was not the rod’; but, while ‘she is not ever reported to have used violence on her nieces’, she did rule ‘by a tyranny of the spirit’.⁷² Gérin goes on to emphasise that the ‘influence of Aunt Branwell on Anne cannot be overrated’, particularly regarding the question of redemption for all or only the Elect, one which stemmed from divisions between Wesleyan and Calvinist Methodists.⁷³ Yet Thormählen counters this heavy influence, writing that the ‘meagre scraps of indirect evidence’ are ‘nullified by the astounding mental and spiritual liberty which the Brontës demonstrably enjoyed in their religious development’.⁷⁴

Agnes does not seek to “break the will” of the Bloomfield children, but neither does she follow a Rousseauvian approach. Her pedagogical practices sit somewhere in the middle, swivelling between an inclination to use physical force and an acknowledgement that the rod is not the best method of discipline. Indeed, Agnes’s failure to ultimately discipline and moralise the Bloomfield children not only points to an acceptance of her lack of agency, but their inherent sinfulness, as something unalterable, whether through mild or more extreme forms of punishment.

⁷¹ John Wesley, ‘Sermon XCVI: On Obedience to Parents’, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley: Volume VII: Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: John Mason, 1829), 98–108, p. 104.

⁷² Winifred Gérin, *Anne Brontë* (London; New York: Nelson, 1959), pp. 34–5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 40. See also Gérin’s full discussion of Methodism, pp. 32–9.

⁷⁴ Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p. 16.

Earlier in the novel, Agnes explicitly aligns Tom's mistreatment of birds with wickedness, as she tells him: "But don't you know it is extremely wicked to do such things? [...] you have heard where wicked people go to when they die; and if they don't leave off torturing innocent birds, remember, you will have to go there, and suffer just what you have made them suffer" (*AG*, 20). The violent acts committed by Tom, as well as his Uncle Robson, are judged in terms of religious morality. While Tom's acts of torture are condemned by Agnes, her violence against the birds is sanctioned according to her own spiritual sense of morality. Notably, in *Jane Eyre*, the threatening of children with hell also appears, only, in this instance, the roles are reversed. Brocklehurst, a hypocritical 'black pillar' of the Church (*JE*, 38), interrogates Jane's faith to ascertain whether she has a "wicked heart" (*JE*, 40). Brocklehurst asks Jane a markedly similar question to the one posed to Tom by Agnes: "Do you know where the wicked go after death?" (*JE*, 39). Jane responds with the 'ready and orthodox answer': "to hell" (*JE*, 39).

In the case of *Agnes Grey*, however, the adult upbraiding the child with warnings of fiery hell is positioned as morally justified. Whereas Brocklehurst is figured as a hypocrite who uses biblical teachings to endorse his own self-interests and to instil fear in young girls, Agnes's account of her struggles against families like the Bloomfields vindicates her stern warning to the young boy. This view is strengthened by Tom's continuously violent behaviour against his sisters, his governess, and the animals he captures, as well as by the cruel ambivalence of Mr and Mrs Bloomfield and Uncle Robson. The accumulative humiliations and exasperations experienced by Agnes go some way to explaining why her apparently sudden outburst of brutality does not completely alter readers' responses to her story.

Yet it remains an unsettling moment in the novel that raises questions of how biblical language might be used to justify acts of brutality. Whether Anne Brontë wished to highlight the possibility that, when placed under emotional strain, we are all capable of

committing violence remains unclear. This feels too simplistic, however, for such a morally complex incident. If there is violence in the households in which Agnes works, there is also the capacity and a willingness to commit violence already present in the governess herself, that ‘dark side of respectable nature belonging to’ Agnes. The scene certainly reveals the intensity of Agnes’s faith both in her own reading of the Bible and the guiding principles she gains from that reading. It also reveals an underlying belief that certain forms of force can be sanctified. As we see in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, when Helen Huntingdon “poisons” her son with alcohol to prevent his becoming an addict like his father, Anne Brontë’s novels raise questions regarding the line between the legitimacy and illegitimacy of violence. When accompanied with biblical justifications, and when committed by an otherwise pious individual, acts of violence can be elevated to a higher meaning, something almost noble and sacrificial. Maggie Nelson gestures to this conclusion in *The Art of Cruelty* (2012), in which she writes that ‘violence need not remain simply violence; it can be changed, via faith, into suffering’.⁷⁵ She goes on to note that ‘what looks like meaningful, divine suffering to one person often looks like brutal, preventable violence to another’.⁷⁶

Through scripture, Agnes transforms her act of violence into a moral statement, one which Brontë positions as set apart from the seemingly mindless and meaningless brutality inflicted on the birds by Tom Bloomfield. Violence – and perhaps religious violence in particular – is transformational: it transforms, in that it irreparably alters people, environments, and situations; but it can also be transformed, through scripture, from something senseless to something meaningful, however contentious that meaning may be.

⁷⁵ Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2012), p. 176.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 176–7.

Transforming Pain in *Villette*

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) also engages with transformational violence, often through Lucy Snowe's re-imagining of scripture and its connection to her experiences of pain. The novel is, by Lucy's own admission, a 'heretic narrative'.⁷⁷ This is not to say that Lucy's beliefs are necessarily unorthodox. As an unaccompanied woman seeking employment, she exists outside of conventional social parameters, particularly in the Catholic kingdom of Labassecour, modelled on Belgium. As a Protestant in *Villette*, Lucy is the object of suspicion, with even her pupils 'tutored to report in Catholic ears whatever the Protestant teacher said' (*V*, 116). However, the novel is far more "heretical" in its reworking of biblical stories and allusions for a psychological, and secular, purpose. As John Maynard writes, *Villette* is 'often the work of recycling traditional religious mythic language into a language to describe not existence and metaphysics, the outside world, but psychology, the inside world'.⁷⁸

Nelson's formulation of violence being transformed into suffering through faith, as cited above, is fundamental to *Villette*. During her torturous, lonely vacation at Madame Beck's pensionnat, Lucy considers whether 'Fate was [her] permanent foe, never to be conciliated' (*V*, 220). She is careful not to 'arraign the mercy or justice of God for this', however, concluding that it is 'a part of his great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of his number, I was one' (*V*, 220). There is pleasure to be gained from such suffering; and much of the violence within *Villette* revolves around similar images of self-harm and masochism, often inflected with heightened religious language. These instances of self-inflicted violence and repression occur primarily within Lucy's own head, through the re-imagining and co-opting of

⁷⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 228. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition.

⁷⁸ John Maynard, 'The Brontës and Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192–213, p. 210.

biblical narratives, such as the Old Testament story of Jael and Sisera (Judges 4). It is these episodes of self-inflicted, religiously inflected violence within *Villette*, and their intersections with psychological pain and suffering, which the remainder of this chapter will explore.

For much of the novel, Lucy exists in a state of living death, writing that, when thinking ‘about the future – such a future as [hers] – [it was better] to be dead’ (*V*, 151). By living in ‘catalepsy and a dead trance’, she ‘studiously held the quick of [her] nature’, suppressing feelings which threaten to disturb her outwardly calm exterior (*V*, 152). It is only when describing a particularly wild storm at the pensionnat that she reveals her chosen method of self-repression. For Lucy, ‘certain accidents of weather’ awoke ‘the being [she] was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry [she] could not satisfy’ (*V*, 152). On this occasion, unlike the Catholics in the dormitory, who rise ‘in panic and prayed to their saints’, the thunderstorm ‘oblige[s]’ Lucy ‘to live’ (*V*, 152). Something within Lucy connects with the ‘terribly glorious [...] spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts’ (*V*, 152). This unnamed something – the being she is always lulling – is itself of a violent nature, one which must be kept in a trance or forcibly diminished through a constant internal battle. Notably, the being is both awoken by the tyrannical forces of a tempest and, once awakened, can only be suppressed by further (this time, self-inflicted) violent ‘tyranny’, establishing a cyclical reliance on violence (*V*, 152).

After these intense episodes, of which the reader is led to believe there are several,⁷⁹ Lucy longs for ‘something to fetch [her] out of [her] present existence, and lead [her] upwards and onwards’ (*V*, 152). What she longs for is an early death and swift

⁷⁹ Lucy states that, at that time, ‘whatever could excite – certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by [her]’ (*V*, 152). And, when describing her inner Siseras, she writes that these longings would ‘at intervals [...] turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench’ (*V*, 152). The pluralisation of ‘accidents’ and ‘incidents’ suggests that the ‘being [she] was always lulling’ has often been awakened by the weather and, therefore, her Siseras have often pushed back against the torture inflicted upon them.

ascension. Yet she recognises that '[t]his longing, and all of a similar kind' have to be 'knock[ed] on the head' (*V*, 152). She continues:

which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core. (*V*, 152)

One self-destructive fantasy – Lucy's premature death – is tamed by and replaced with another more violent scene which acts, strangely, as a form of self-preservation. Meg Dobbins considers Lucy's burying of Graham Bretton's letters in the ancient pear-tree as 'an act of self-preserving self-violence'.⁸⁰ Lucy intends to 'not only [...] hide a treasure', but also 'to bury a grief' (*V*, 424). The appropriation of the biblical Jael and Sisera episode can also be seen in this light, as 'self-preserving self-violence'. Yet the act of burying the letters, and with it her grief, is less forceful, and much less bloody, than the biblical narrative reworked to reflect Lucy's inner psyche.

This underlying desire for self-preservation is complicated by Lucy's reworking of the biblical narrative, altering the story so that, '[u]nlike Sisera', her longings 'did not die' (*V*, 152). However, on this occasion, she informs us she 'was not so mutinous, nor so miserable' (*V*, 152):

My Sisera lay quiet in the tent, slumbering; and if his pain ached through his slumbers, something like an angel – the Ideal – knelt near, dropping balm on the soothed temples, holding before the sealed eyes a magic glass, of which the sweet, solemn visions were repeated in dreams [...] Jael, the stern woman, sat apart, relenting somewhat over her captive; but more prone to dwell on the faithful expectation of Heber coming home. By which words I mean that the cool peace and dewy sweetness of the night filled me with a mood of hope: not hope on any definite

⁸⁰ Meg Dobbins, "'What Did You Cut It Off For, Then?': Self-Harming Heroines in *Villette*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*", *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 13.1 (2017), paras. 1–37, para. 15 <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue131/dobbins.htm>> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

point, but a general sense of encouragement and heart's-ease. (*V*, 152–3)

In the Bible, the moment when Jael ‘smote the nail into [Sisera’s] temples’ is quick and decisive (Judges 4: 21). She ‘fasten[s] [the nail] into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died’ (Judges 4: 21). Brontë extends the violence of the biblical story by keeping Sisera in a limbo between life and death; and she then extends it further to slightly undo the forcefulness of the scene, alleviating and even downplaying its previously overt violence. Just as her inner ‘something’ is awoken and quelled by violence, Lucy is herself both the perpetrator of violence and the sufferer. The passage eludes clarity, keeping the reader at a distance from Lucy’s pain while simultaneously offering us a distressingly violent representation of her inner suffering. As Marit Fimland asks: ‘What, indeed, is going on here?’⁸¹

The scene becomes so convoluted that Lucy feels it necessary to translate the reference into apparently simpler terms, to provide another way of expressing the violence of her sensations: ‘By which words I mean [...]’. In the process, however, she only distances the reader further from her experience. Her final remark relating to the Jael and Sisera scene is, somewhat jarringly, one of optimism; unlike other evenings, she is filled with a ‘mood of hope’. Instead of simply stating this optimism, however, she provides an ameliorated picture of the previously represented violence. Her Sisera is still in pain, but, on this hopeful evening, he has the aid of ‘something like an angel – the Ideal’ soothing his temples with balm and placing a mirror in front of his closed eyes. The undisclosed ‘sweet, solemn visions’ reflected in the glass replace Sisera’s reflection and appear in his dreams. Notably, Sisera does not see himself in the glass. Instead, he relies on the images portrayed to soothe his suffering, in a similar way to Lucy’s own reliance on the

⁸¹ Marit Fimland, ‘On the Margins of the Acceptable: Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*’, *Literature and Theology*, 10.2 (1996), 148–59, p. 152.

imagination for both the infliction and appeasement of her pain. Even in a state of ‘heart’s-ease’, Lucy’s inner Jael oversees the administering of balm to her wounded prisoner’s temples. In this light, the hopefulness which she claims she feels is decidedly hollow, as the cycle of Sisera’s suffering presumably begins anew once the ‘rude Real burst[s] coarsely in – all evil, grovelling, and repellent as she too often is’ (*V*, 153). Like Jael, Reason violently polices Lucy’s dreams, preventing any hope, however hopeless, from lingering too long.⁸²

Lucy’s reaching for an alternative interpretation of her mood (‘By which words I mean’) suggests the passage is self-consciously complex and potentially unfathomable. While this may reflect the difficulty, if not the impossibility, as Elaine Scarry contends, of representing pain, it also distances the reader from Lucy’s psyche.⁸³ What is felt by Lucy in these moments, and what she wishes to convey to the reader, remains – for all its intensity and specificity – somewhat incomprehensible, as evidenced by her own acknowledgement of the necessity of translation. Rachel Ablow pinpoints this persistent clouding of experience in *Villette*, particularly during moments which describe Lucy’s suffering: ‘what is contended with ultimately seems of less significance than the contention itself: the violence is described, although the subject of the grief is not’.⁸⁴ According to Ablow, the violence itself is of significance rather than its catalyst. Yet, in choosing to describe an immaterial experience through physically violent imagery that later requires a simplified translation, Lucy distances her reader from her suffering. The question of whether detailed, gruesome representations of violence in fact prevent readers from

⁸² As noted earlier, Anne Brontë’s ‘Self-Communion’ shares similarities with *Villette* in this regard, as the poem’s more “rational” speaker says: “‘Bless God for that divine decree!— / That hardness comes with misery, / And suffering deadens pain; / [...] Reason, with conscience by her side, / But gathers strength from toil and truth”” (ll. 143–53). See ‘Self-Communion’, in *The Complete Poems of Anne Brontë*, pp. 136–7.

⁸³ Elaine Scarry notes that violent imagery is often used in representations of pain; however, the ‘sign of a weapon in a spoken sentence, a written paragraph, or a visual image [...] does not mean that there has been any attempt to present pain and, on the contrary, often means that the nature of pain has just been pushed into deeper obscurity’. See *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 18.

⁸⁴ Rachel Ablow, *Victorian Pain* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 87.

engaging with and understanding the narrative is pertinent here. What is the significance of representing violence if such representations often switch readers off, shut down understanding, destroy comprehension (and therefore meaning), as Scarry's formulation of expressing pain indicates?

The premise of the Jael and Sisera scene – that of 'self-preserving self-violence' – recurs throughout *Villette*, and the many instances in which Lucy recounts her pain are tinged with religiosity. Before the burial of Graham's letters, Lucy has the sudden realisation that she will no longer receive letters from him, causing her distress: 'Though stoical, I was not quite a stoic [...] I wept one sultry shower, heavy and brief' (*V*, 421). She reminds herself, however, that: 'The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome' (*V*, 421). While no overt biblical language is adopted here, the description of Hope dying a lingering but necessary death is reminiscent of the torture inflicted on her many Siseras. The 'long pain' she has endured psychologically 'made patience a habit' for Lucy (*V*, 421). While the suffering is unpleasant, it is self-sustaining and, as we shall see, self-mortifying.

Just before this realisation regarding Graham's billets, Lucy actively avoids the 'postman's ring' to spare herself 'the thrill which some particular nerve or nerves, almost gnawed through with the unremitting tooth of a fixed idea, were becoming wholly unfit to support' (*V*, 388). She feels the 'terror of the torturing clang', as it reminds her of Graham's waning interest in writing to her (*V*, 388). Later, when it becomes apparent that Graham only has 'light raillery for Lucy', she tries to 'keep down the unreasonable pain which thrilled [her] heart' (*V*, 452). These 'thrills' of the nerves and of the heart are reminiscent of the 'thrill' experienced when her inner Siseras 'turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench' (*V*, 152). It is also, notably, connected to the 'thrill' Lucy feels 'in the certainty' of being amongst God's number who 'must deeply suffer while they live' (*V*,

220). Steven Bruhm contends that, in ‘literary representations of pain at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries’, ‘the boundary between pain-as-pleasure and pain-as-numbness must be maintained at the same time that it is being obscured’.⁸⁵ In order to ‘maintain’ this boundary, these texts ‘turn on a binarism of sensibility/insensibility or feeling/numbness that is constantly being established and at the same time threatened by the dynamics of pain’.⁸⁶ The ‘thrill’ felt by Lucy oscillates precariously between this binary of ‘pain-as-pleasure’ and ‘pain-as-numbness’, further obscuring the clarity of such representations of intense self-harm.⁸⁷ The suffering felt during these ‘thrilling’ moments returns the reader to the Jael and Sisera passage, which also involves an odd mix of extremity and serenity, thereby suggesting a link between these longed for but loathed feelings experienced while awaiting Graham’s letters.

Towards the end of the novel, there is another link back to the Jael and Sisera scene, when Lucy wanders through the evening festival under the influence of a narcotic administered by Madame Beck. While she awaits a final farewell from M. Paul before he leaves for Guadeloupe, Lucy describes her anguish as something beyond the physical: ‘But what bodily illness was ever like this pain?’ (*V*, 649). Before being given the ‘strong opiate’, Lucy is to be found ‘untamed, tortured, again pacing a solitary room in an unalterable passion of silent desolation’ (*V*, 649–50). Instead of subduing her, the drug enlivens her senses; unable to sleep, she roams the city and finally comes to the festal park. The urgency of her condition is reiterated to the reader when she voyeuristically overhears Graham and Mrs Bretton lamenting her absence, speaking of herself in the third person to emphasise

⁸⁵ Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ It would be remiss not to mention the erotic potential of Lucy’s ‘pleasure-in-pain’. The latent eroticism of Brontë’s religious allusions has been noted by critics including: Katherine Bond Stockton, *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Irene Taylor, *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); and Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market* (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 2003).

her detachment from their lives, as well as from herself: ‘Little knew they the rack of pain which had driven Lucy almost into fever, and brought her out, guideless and reckless, urged and drugged to the brink of frenzy’ (*V*, 660).

It is in this state that Lucy witnesses M. Paul ‘tend[ing], watch[ing], and cherish[ing]’ his ward, Justine Marie (*V*, 675). From this display of apparent affection, Lucy becomes convinced of their being engaged, a “revelation” which brings forth another instance of internally self-inflicted self-violence. She ‘invoked Conviction to nail upon [her] the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well [her] soul, [she] stood up, as [she] thought renovated’ (*V*, 676–7).⁸⁸ The “TRUTH” which Lucy is so quick to acknowledge is, in fact, untrue. M. Paul is not engaged to Justine Marie and he later asks Lucy to be his ‘dearest, first on earth’ (*V*, 709). Yet her suffering, and the extension of that suffering through further self-harm, has become so habitual that her immediate response to witnessing M. Paul’s interaction with Justine Marie is to pre-empt and prolong pain by enacting violence on herself. Pain acts as a kind of reward for Lucy, which once again has biblical precedence. Paul, whose sermons often focus on suffering, captures the desire to recreate the resurrection, as well as the crucifixion: ‘I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead’

⁸⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar connect this moment to the earlier Jael and Sisera scene, writing that Lucy is here ‘advocating repression, although it requires her to reenact the conflict between Jael and Sisera, the pain of self-crucifixion’. See *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT.; London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 435. This re-enactment echoes Christ’s crucifixion, particularly as Lucy feels rejuvenated, almost resurrected, by the pain. As Fimland writes: ‘In *Villette* there is a connection between Christ’s suffering and Lucy’s suffering.’ See ‘On the Margins of the Acceptable: Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*’, p. 155. Christ teaches his disciples that he ‘must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again’ (Mark 8: 31). See ‘The Books of the New Testament’, *The Bible*, p. 56. Lucy frames her narrative in similar ways, suffering much and feeling – and often ensuring that she remains – an outcast in Villette. Christ’s resurrection ‘hath begotten us again unto a lively hope’ (1 Peter 1: 3), which further resonates with Lucy’s epiphany in the park. While hers is not a particularly promising hope, as the reader has come to expect, her sense of rejuvenation suggests a rebirth, a fresh start however hopeless. See ‘The Books of the New Testament’, *The Bible*, p. 285.

(Philippians 3: 10–1). Lucy's suffering is not overtly concerned with *imitatio Christi*, but it does position her within a lineage of spiritualised pain.

The idea of pain as reward returns throughout Charlotte Brontë's adult writings. In *Jane Eyre*, St John Rivers ends the novel with a hopeful yet violent desire to meet his Maker through physical exertion and emotional repression. The novel concludes with Jane's assurance of St John's reaching his 'sure reward, his incorruptible crown' (*JE*, 521). Suffering in life offers the promise of a heavenly prize for St John. The implication of this for Jane, who has chosen an earthly reward of a life with Rochester, is that her sacrifice is yet to come. In *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone reconciles herself to agonising unrequited love through biblical allusion (Luke 11: 12): 'You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion'.⁸⁹ As the narrator relates, Caroline must train herself to show 'no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm'; 'in time [...] the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob' (*S*, 102). Caroline's self-repression almost leads to her death, as she is bedridden under the strain of such self-repression and the prospect of a loveless, as well as directionless, future. Erika Kvistad outlines the differences between Caroline Helstone and Lucy Snowe in their respective self-mutilation, writing that 'frustration gives [Lucy] a kind of complicated pleasure', whereas Caroline endures her pain because 'her gender role requires a passive, submissive reaction'.⁹⁰ For St John Rivers, there is a clear reward for his earthly suffering and sacrifice of a loving (physical) relationship, one that is notably not of this world. His suffering has, however, been a form of physical self-mortification, as he 'labours for his race', 'hews down [...] the prejudices of creed and caste', and endures physical 'toil' for his ultimate reward (*JE*, 521). Yet, for Caroline and

⁸⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley: A Tale*, ed. Jessica Cox (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 102. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition. In Luke 11: 12, it reads: 'Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?' See 'The Books of the New Testament', *The Bible*, p. 90.

⁹⁰ Erika Kvistad, 'Scenes of Unveiling: Reading Sex Writing in Charlotte Brontë', *Writing from Below*, 1.2 (2013), 31–8, p. 32.

Lucy, their suffering is more often felt internally, manifesting outwardly as emotional coldness and physical, as well as psychological, illness, but expressed inwardly as something violent which must be tamed by more violence.

Lucy psychologically self-harms to numb her pain, to relieve it, but also strangely to intensify it, to feel alive, and ultimately to replace one form of pain with another. In a letter to his future wife, Annabella Milbanke, Byron encapsulates what he calls ‘this “craving void”’: “The great object of life is Sensation—to feel that we exist—even though in pain.”⁹¹ Lucy’s own ““craving void””, the inner “being” she must constantly subdue with self-violence, seeks a similar kind of sensation, one that reminds her she is still alive. The difference between Lucy’s two types of pain is that the source of her initial suffering is often external and cannot be entirely controlled; she is at the mercy of not only her unspoken longings, but those of the individuals she desires, such as Graham Bretton. The other form of suffering, however, is self-willed and therefore self-controlled. This shift from being subjected to suffering by external factors to subjecting *oneself* to suffering accounts for the strange cyclical releasing and increasing of pain within *Villette*. Yet it also further complicates the religious approach to pain both in the period and in the novel. If Lucy accepts (as she claims to) her own suffering as God-given, the question remains: why does she feel it necessary to alter and extend such suffering? There are layers of pain within her narrative, but these layers are often self-imposed, part of the self-inflicted self-violence which Lucy is constantly enacting.

The pain felt by the reader is itself another layer of pain. This is something Ablow recognises, writing that, ‘when Lucy suffers, that suffering seems to proliferate into multiple registers and modes of representation’.⁹² For Ablow, it is through these ‘registers

⁹¹ Lord Byron to Annabella Milbanke, 6 September 1813, in Lord Byron, *Selected Letters and Journals, in One Volume from the Unexpurgated Twelve Volume Edition*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: J. Murray, 1982), 65–7, p. 66.

⁹² Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, p. 72.

and modes of representation' that readers 'are made to feel something, and that feeling has some relation to whatever happened to Lucy'.⁹³ Harriet Martineau's review of *Villette* in February 1853 taps into this transmission of pain, as she contends that 'the book is almost intolerably painful' and that an 'atmosphere of pain hangs about the whole'.⁹⁴ In Lucy's case, physical pain – or psychological pain which often manifests itself as something embodied – does not have a single, unequivocal meaning. However, neither does the text's representations of suffering confirm Scarry's view that 'pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it'.⁹⁵ As subsequent scholars of the history of pain contend, while pain may be difficult to pinpoint in non-metaphorical terms, there are linguistic possibilities available to convey the sensory experience of pain to those who are not suffering.⁹⁶ As noted previously, Lucy admits that her use of the Jael and Sisera biblical story may baffle some readers, as she offers a translation ('By which words I mean [...]'). Yet the meticulousness with which she represents her torturous 'mood of hope' suggests that language is not destroyed by pain; it is rather enlivened and extended by it, in the same way that Lucy herself is awakened by the intensification of suffering (*V*, 153). The biblical narrative may 'spin dizzily out of control', as Ablow contends, but it does give the reader a vivid insight into the excesses – and perplexities – of Lucy's suffering, both in experiencing and representing it.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, p. 73.

⁹⁴ Harriet Martineau, from an unsigned review, *Daily News*, 3 February 1853, in Allott, 171–4, p. 172.

⁹⁵ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 4.

⁹⁶ For example, Joanna Bourke writes that 'Scarry has fallen into the trap of treating metaphoric ways of conceiving of suffering [...] as descriptions of an actual entity'. See *The Story of Pain: from Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 5. See also Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, pp. 5–6.

⁹⁷ Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, p. 84.

Spiritual Suffering in *Villette*

Building on the idea of rejuvenating pain, the spiritual significance of suffering and pain is central to a clearer historical understanding of Lucy Snowe's representations of her inner turmoil. It is through suffering, and often through Lucy's masochistic revelling in such suffering, that violence and religion converge within the text. As Stuart Carroll notes, the 'world as a school of pain and suffering, necessary for spiritual rebirth, is central to Christian teaching'.⁹⁸ This resonates with Lucy's own spiritual "renovation", which occurs after intense, often self-inflicted, psychological pain. Jeremy Davies contends that 'Romantic-period views of pain remained to some extent within the cultural nexus elaborated in late medieval culture: Christ was still the exemplary sufferer of pain in the popular imagination'.⁹⁹ Lucy Bending agrees, writing that early nineteenth-century Christian theology took 'the Bible as the direct Word of God' and ascribed a 'single meaning – albeit mysterious [...] to physical pain: it was the Hand of the Lord at work, and as such was unquestionable'.¹⁰⁰ In her *Life in the Sick-Room* essays (1844), Martineau, Brontë's contemporary, articulated pain as something sanctified: 'pain is the chastisement of a Father; or, at least, that it is, in some way or other, ordained for, or instrumental to good'.¹⁰¹ Martineau goes on to suggest that the pain, now departed, has left her with 'new knowledge and power, all the teachings from on high'.¹⁰²

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, understandings of pain underwent a shift. As Bending notes, '[p]ain, which had been seen as an expression of God's justice, became by the end of the century the expression of God's injustice'.¹⁰³ Even Martineau

⁹⁸ Stuart Carroll, 'Introduction', in *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Stuart Carroll (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–46, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Jeremy Davies, *Bodily Pain in Romantic Literature* (New York; London: Routledge, 2014), p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Lucy Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 50.

¹⁰¹ Harriet Martineau, 'The Transient and the Permanent in the Sick-Room', in *Life in the Sick-Room. Essays by an Invalid* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), 1–10, p. 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain*, p. 28.

herself – writing in her autobiography, which was published posthumously in 1877 – changed her mind on the subject of pain, writing that she is ‘aware that the religious world, proud of its Christian faith as the “Worship of Sorrow,” thinks it a duty and a privilege to dwell on the morbid conditions of human life; but [her] experience of wide extremes of health and sickness [...] leads [her] to a very different conclusion.’¹⁰⁴ She continues: ‘every book, tract, and narrative which sets forth a sick-room as a condition of honour, blessing and moral safety, helps to sustain a delusion and corruption which have already cost the world too dear’.¹⁰⁵

Published in the middle of the century, *Villette* embodies these shifting perceptions of pain. As noted previously, Lucy attempts to justify her suffering as God-given, thereby aligning herself with religious readings of pain. Yet the novel extends this pain in a way that obscures its purely religious origins and interpretation. Not only does Lucy alter and intensify the violence of the biblical narrative referred to, she also adds to her own suffering. Rather than simply accepting that the pain bestowed on her is part of God’s ‘great plan’, Lucy inflicts more violence upon herself, thereby complicating the notion of the pain being God-given (*V*, 220). Perhaps this is where the narrative becomes ‘heretical’. As Maynard writes, the ‘sentiment and language [of *Villette*] is religious, biblical and Bunyanesque; the story ultimately, even with the pledge of faith, a secular one: to endure suffering and deprivation, to keep to her path of perhaps hopeless hope’.¹⁰⁶ In similar terms to Agnes’s justification of her violence, Lucy couches her self-inflicted violence in religious terms as a form of legitimisation, framing it as a kind of spiritual – and spiritually sanctioned – release and renovation. Lucy diverges from God’s ‘plan’ by adding to the pain visited on her and, in the process, she asserts some level of control over her existence,

¹⁰⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography: with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman: Volume II* (London: Smith, Elder, 1877), pp. 147–8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁶ Maynard, ‘The Brontës and Religion’, p. 210.

even if such control is predicated on intense psychological self-harm. There are several moments in which Lucy feels ‘a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly’, suggesting a desire for her suffering to cease, too (*V*, 218). Yet even these meditations on death are followed by an awareness of what ‘[r]eligious reader[s]’, as well as the ‘moralist’, the ‘stern sage’, the ‘stoic’, ‘cynic’, and ‘epicure’, will think (*V*, 219). Lucy’s narrative is self-aware in that she – and, indeed, as the final section of this chapter will consider, Charlotte Brontë herself – is always conscious of her readership, an important aspect of the text and its representation of religiously inflected violence.

Part of the difficulty in interpreting Lucy’s representations of her suffering lies in their position as simultaneously incorporeal and embodied. The excessively violent episodes in which Sisera is kept in a state of living death and Conviction nails itself to Lucy’s mind, as well as the drowning and shipwreck scenes, are all played out within her imagination, either in the moment or retrospectively. Yet these moments are so vivid as to almost blur the line between reality and fantasy. As Sally Shuttleworth writes, Lucy describes these instances of psychological pain ‘with a precision of detail unmatched in the descriptions of the external scenes of her life’.¹⁰⁷ In a revealing moment prior to her “revelation” regarding M. Paul and Justine Marie’s apparent betrothal, Lucy candidly acknowledges the excesses of her own imagination, as well as its penchant for religious inflection: ‘Ah! when imagination once runs riot where do we stop? What winter tree so bare and branchless [...] that Fancy, a passing cloud, and a struggling moonbeam, will not clothe it in spirituality, and make of it a phantom?’ (*V*, 671). As shown in the Jael and Sisera scene, Lucy’s imagination does indeed ‘clothe’ certain painful sensations or experiences ‘in spirituality’. This word choice is revealing, as it offers more physicality to the image through the tangibility of the garments, itself adumbrating the later literalisation

¹⁰⁷ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 241.

of this image through the nun. While spirituality is, in many ways, ephemeral, in *Villette*, these instances of intense imagination involve a heightened emphasis on embodiment, which can be traced to Lucy's conflicted encounters with Catholicism.

Beth Torgerson considers Lucy's psychological decline as a 'return to the physical body', a process which gives her 'the opportunity to analyse the cultural constraints [...] placed upon her'.¹⁰⁸ Part of these constraints are religious, particularly as 'Protestantism and Catholicism are the primary ideological systems in conflict' in the novel.¹⁰⁹ Torgerson writes that, 'under extreme conditions, Protestant self-control is, in fact, unhealthy'.¹¹⁰ While Torgerson points out that '[n]either ideology [Protestantism nor Catholicism] accounts for Lucy's desires to live actively in the world', she does articulate the differences between the two religions, namely 'people's openness to emotion, excess, and the body' within Catholicism.¹¹¹ This emphasis on excess and embodiment both 'attracts and repels' Lucy, although it is 'a war of ideologies [that] takes place primarily inside Lucy's own head'.¹¹² Carmen M. Mangion writes: 'Catholic understandings of suffering were based on the belief that Jesus, as the incarnation of God, came to earth in human form. [...] Thus, in Catholic teaching, Jesus's pain and suffering gave human pain a specific meaning.'¹¹³ Not only was Catholic pain underpinned by thoughts of the resurrection, 'corporeal pain' in particular 'functioned as a means of both reinforcing Catholic beliefs in the utility of pain and of coping with pain'.¹¹⁴ Christina Crosby further notes the conflict between materiality and spirituality within *Villette*, as played out in the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism. She argues that, within the text, "Romanism" is fully

¹⁰⁸ Beth Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire, and the Constraints of Culture* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Carmen M. Mangion, "Why, would you have me live upon a gridiron?": Pain, Identity, and Emotional Communities in Nineteenth-Century English Convent Culture', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 15 (2012), 1–16, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

identified with the Old Economy, entirely of the carnal and earthly’, representing ‘a deadening of the spirit’, while Protestantism reflects ‘its wakening to life’.¹¹⁵ This split is too neat, particularly as Lucy’s revelling in pain is figured as both enlivening and deadening. Yet it underlines the violent division inherent in Lucy’s selfhood, as she seeks alternative means of expression while still trying to uphold the external veneer of self-control.

While Lucy’s pain is not literally corporeal, though it is felt as something physical and ever-present, the intensely embodied enactments of suffering described to the reader show an inclination towards Catholic representations of the crucifixion and the spiritual “usefulness” of bodily pain, all the while maintaining an external veneer of Protestant forbearance and self-restraint.¹¹⁶ This outward self-control slips towards the end of the novel, most violently when Lucy discovers the nun’s garments laid out on her bed. Here, as Mary Jacobus notes, the ‘empty garments [...] signal “the resurrection of the flesh”’.¹¹⁷ In a frenzied outburst which literalises Lucy’s inner violent fantasies, and her desire to ‘clothe it in spirituality, and make of it a phantom’, she ‘tore [the nun] up [...] held her on high [...] shook her loose [...] And down she fell – down all round [Lucy] – down in shreds and fragments – and [Lucy] trode upon her’ (*V*, 681). This time, rather than relying on the disembodied yet strangely animate figures of Jael, Sisera, and Conviction, Lucy admits ‘all the movement was [hers], so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force’ (*V*, 681). Having achieved a sense of religious renovation through imagined self-harm while watching M. Paul and others in the park, Lucy is emboldened to enact her own physical vengeance on the no-longer-spectral nun. Of course, the nun remains

¹¹⁵ Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and the “Woman Question”* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 130.

¹¹⁶ Tom Winnifrith writes, in relation to Charlotte Brontë, that a ‘possible explanation for Charlotte’s hostility to Roman Catholicism is her dislike of the elaborate ritual mingled with a secret hankering after it’. See *The Brontës and Their Background: Romance and Reality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 49.

¹¹⁷ Mary Jacobus, ‘The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in *Villette*’, in *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm; Totowa: Barnes & Noble, c.1979), 42–60, p. 53.

largely imaginary; the habit is not filled with a body. Yet it feels like a transition for Lucy, from imagined yet vivid meditations on self-violence to a physical performance of aggression directed at an object external to (though still arguably aligned with) Lucy's psyche.¹¹⁸

Following the nun's destruction, Lucy finally voices her feelings for M. Paul, as she is '[p]ierced deeper than [she] could endure' and 'made [...] to feel what defied suppression' (*V*, 695). This time, she cannot turn the screw on the temple of her longings; the pain is so acute, she is forced to speak out. As with her destruction of the nun, Lucy can finally express herself outwardly, rather than sealing her emotions within herself through force. She tells M. Paul that, if he should obey Madame Beck's request for him to leave Lucy's presence, her "heart will break" (*V*, 695). Once M. Paul reassures her of his devotion, she weeps 'with thrilling, with icy shiver, with strong trembling, and yet with relief' (*V*, 695). Again, Lucy experiences the thrill of release, but the pleasure of this relief will endure far longer than the brief pleasure gained from self-mutilation. She admits that 'nearly *all* the torture' felt during M. Paul's three-year absence in Guadeloupe was merely from the initial 'anticipatory crunch' of his leaving (*V*, 711). Almost coyly, Lucy divulges that these three years 'were the three happiest of [her] life' (*V*, 711). She lives an independent, integrated life, with the promise of love awaiting her upon M. Paul's return. The novel's final flourish – in refusing to reveal M. Paul's fate – ends on a characteristically ambiguous note, as Lucy tells the reader to 'conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return' (*V*, 715). With the aid of Lucy's vivid renderings of her self-violence, the reader is perhaps now better equipped to imagine the joy that emerges out of terror and the rapturous relief felt at the promise of salvation.

¹¹⁸ Jacobus writes: 'The wardrobe mockingly bequeathed to Lucy by the eloped Ginevra and de Hamal labels her as the nun of the Rue Fossette.' Lucy may therefore be rejecting this label by destroying the outfit. See 'The Buried Letter', p. 54.

Yet, for Lucy, there is little hope of such joy born out of the ‘great terror’ of her previous suffering. She allows the reader, especially those with ‘sunny imaginations’, to ‘picture union and a happy succeeding life’, but does not confirm the reality of this for herself (*V*, 715). Even when she mentions ‘a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores’, she does not explicitly include herself in their number (*V*, 715). She is, again, relying on the blurred line between reality and imagination, refusing – in this final moment – to detail and, even, admit to any personal pain or its source. Instead, it is as though she has finally acknowledged the incomprehensibility of her suffering and the pleasure which she takes in it. She is no longer inviting the reader into her pain, but this does not mean she is not experiencing a masochistic ‘thrill’ in the darkness of M. Paul’s fate and the cyclical storms of her narrative.

The Violence of Biblical Appropriation in *Villette*

Contemporary reviewers of *Villette* often took issue with both the figurative episodes of the text and its handling of religion. Several critics directly highlighted the Jael and Sisera scene as particularly overwrought in its depiction of Lucy Snowe’s turmoil; and even those who did not mention it explicitly still referred to the ‘highly figurative language’ used to convey ‘the violent emotions of [Lucy’s] heart’.¹¹⁹ The *Spectator* felt these instances were done at ‘such length’ and ‘with so much obscurity from straining after figure and allusion, as to become tedious and to induce skipping’.¹²⁰ This reaction to Brontë’s extended metaphors returns us to the issue of representing violent emotions, which so often seem to alienate, rather than gaining empathy from, the reader. The estrangement of the reader from Lucy’s psychological torment and, by extension, from the narrative itself can be

¹¹⁹ From an unsigned review, *Spectator*, 12 February 1853, in Allott, 181–4, p. 183.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.

figured as a form of violence. Seeking to articulate why reviewers, critics, and readers continue to find *Villette* and its representations of pain so alienating and impenetrable, and building on the previous section's discussion of biblical misappropriation in *Agnes Grey*, the final section of this chapter considers the violences committed *by* a text on the reader and on other, appropriated sources such as the Bible.

When *Villette* was published, Charlotte Brontë was most affected by the *Christian Remembrancer's* review, particularly its assertion that the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* was 'an alien, it might seem, from society, and amenable to none of its laws'.¹²¹ It took Brontë three months to fully digest this review, choosing to respond in July 1853 with a letter to the editor. She asks the editor to show her note to the reviewer, in which Brontë explains her reasons for social seclusion.¹²² Margaret Smith notes that the letter ends 'with the violent image of a poisoned shaft wounding the hunter's prey – echoing the recurrent images of torture, fate, and pursuing furies, paralysing "chill and passion" in *Villette*'.¹²³ The image is notably a religious one, as Brontë encourages the critic, when 'again tempted to take aim at other prey [... to] refrain his hand a moment till he has considered consequences to the wounded, and recalled the "golden rule"'.¹²⁴ In other words: 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them' (Matthew 7: 12).¹²⁵

The *Leeds Intelligencer* 'like[d] the book', for 'there is *heart* in it' and the characters are 'real flesh and blood'.¹²⁶ The only 'objection' the reviewer wished to raise was 'the

¹²¹ Anne Mozley, from an unsigned review, *Christian Remembrancer*, April 1853, in Allott, 202–8, p. 203.

¹²² Brontë informs the reviewer that, while not being an 'alien' from society, she was raised 'in the seclusion of a country parsonage' on a 'limited income'. She continues to explain her position as the 'only survivor' of her siblings, as well as the delicate state of her father's health which means her 'place consequently is at home'. See Charlotte Brontë to the Editor of the *Christian Remembrancer*, 18 July 1853, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume III: 1852–1855*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 187–8, p. 187.

¹²³ Margaret Smith, 'Introduction', in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume III*, xv–xxvi, p. xx.

¹²⁴ Charlotte Brontë to the Editor of the *Christian Remembrancer*, 18 July 1853, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume III*, p. 187.

¹²⁵ Matthew 7: 12, in 'The Books of the New Testament', *The Bible*, p. 10.

¹²⁶ From an unsigned review, 'Literary Notices', *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 February 1853, CI. 5162 (Leeds), p. 3.

constant employment of Scripture imagery and Scripture language’, remarking: ‘Surely the sacred text is not to be thus trifled with.’¹²⁷ The review highlights the Jael and Sisera passage as an example of such ‘trifling’. Having quoted almost a whole paragraph from the scene, the reviewer remarks: ‘Now we take this to be about the finest specimen of bad taste to be found anywhere.’¹²⁸ It continues that, in Yorkshire schools, ‘they talk of knocking ideas *into* the heads of refractory pupils, but it seems that ideas may be knocked on their heads, and handled very roughly indeed without being settled after all – only “stunned” for a while’.¹²⁹ The critic, like Fimland, emphasises the confused nature of the passage, asking ‘whether any unaided mortal could find his way out of this labyrinth of absurdities?’¹³⁰ For the *Leeds Intelligencer* reviewer, the Jael and Sisera episode is so convoluted and confusing that it feels devoid of meaning. This critique raises the question of whether the passage is meant to be clear and readily understood, especially with Lucy’s explicit translation of the scene in mind. Yet the reviewer also introduces the issue of why the passage feels so confusing with its ‘labyrinth of absurdities’. Is it the enhanced violence which introduces this level of absurdity? Or is it the blatant alteration of a biblical narrative?

Of the Jael and Sisera passage in *Villette*, Crosby writes that it ‘becomes a strange little allegorical narrative which entirely displaces the original reference to Judges on which the metaphor was predicated’.¹³¹ In regards to such textual ‘displacement’, Julie Sanders makes a clear distinction between adaptation and appropriation, writing that the latter ‘carries out the same sustained engagement of adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, overt commentary and even sometimes assault or attack’.¹³² Sanders

¹²⁷ ‘Literary Notices’, *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 February 1853, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Crosby, *The Ends of History*, pp. 136–7.

¹³² Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 6.

suggests that appropriation involves a form of violence, namely one committed against the original source material. Through Lucy Snowe, Brontë is straying dangerously close to the ‘ransacking’ of the Bible of which Nelly accuses Joseph in *Wuthering Heights*. While Lucy is not, as Maggie Berg writes in relation to Joseph, ‘using religious texts as instruments of oppression’, she still ‘does violence to the text’ and to herself.¹³³ Notably, however, both Joseph and Lucy voice their devotion to the Bible, with Lucy telling M. Paul that her ‘own last appeal, the guide to which [she] looked, and the teacher which [she] owned, must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect, of whatever name or nation’ (V, 607).

Textual appropriation as a form of violence is addressed by Sigmund Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), in which he effectively rewrites the heritage of Moses. In arguing that Moses was in fact Egyptian by birth, Freud contends that the Book of Moses underwent a ‘distortion’ in which ‘certain transformations got to work on it, falsifying the text in accord with secret tendencies, maiming and extending it until it was turned into its opposite’.¹³⁴ For Freud, the ‘distortion of a text is not unlike a murder’.¹³⁵ Distortion ‘should mean not only “to change the appearance of,” but also “to wrench apart,” “to put in another place.”’¹³⁶ While Freud is attempting a repatriation of the “true origins” of Moses through a recovery of the latent traces of Moses’s heritage hidden within the “distorted” text, he is himself distorting the Bible. By changing the appearance of or – in his figuration – uncovering the seemingly hidden buried text, Freud is himself committing ‘murder’.

¹³³ Even the idea of Lucy not using ‘religious texts as instruments of oppression’ is debatable, particularly as the object of her oppression is herself. See Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*, p. 45.

¹³⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (Letchworth, Hertfordshire: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 70.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

While Freud's *Moses* is not otherwise connected to *Villette*, or, indeed, to *Agnes Grey*, his likening of textual distortion to murder has a bearing on Charlotte Brontë's use of the Bible in her novel. Not only does Brontë include within her text particularly violent events from the Old Testament, indicating an interest – conscious or otherwise – in the more brutal biblical stories; she also reworks these incidents and often enhances their violence.¹³⁷ Brontë's appropriation of biblical narratives is a form of legitimisation through both typology and rebellion. Typology is the 'search for parallels between one's life and the well-established models for righteousness outlined in the biblical stories', providing 'the devout a means for legitimating their own life patterns'.¹³⁸ Keith A. Jenkins articulates this view when he writes that Brontë's 'appropriating to herself the voice of biblical authority' enabled her 'to script a life for herself that transcended the possibilities available to her in the external, predominantly masculine world'.¹³⁹ Jenkins goes on to assert that Brontë is taking 'the scriptures in hand and interpret[ing] them in ways that are personally meaningful, even if that means altering or abandoning the conventionally "male" interpretations of that precedent tradition'.¹⁴⁰ Crosby writes that, through typology, Brontë 'positions Lucy in universal history', so that she is 'no longer marginal and eccentric in the violence of her emotions, but typical'.¹⁴¹ While Brontë does use typology as a means of legitimising Lucy's psychological conflict, the excessiveness and relative indecipherability of her metaphors pushes these types to their limits, so that Lucy's violent emotions still exist – to use Fimland's phrase – on the 'margins of the acceptable', borne out by reviewers' responses to the strangeness of the text and its lengthy biblically inspired passages of pain.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Crosby makes a similar point, remarking that *Villette* is full of brutal images 'frequently developed in conjunction with a specific citation of the Old Testament'. See *The Ends of History*, p. 127.

¹³⁸ Keith A. Jenkins, *Charlotte Brontë's Atypical Typology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ Crosby, *The Ends of History*, p. 130.

¹⁴² Fimland, 'On the Margins of the Acceptable: Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*', p. 157.

As noted in Chapter One, J. Hillis Miller refers to the fact that *Wuthering Heights* ‘exerts great power over its reader in its own violence’.¹⁴³ Contemporary reviewers of Emily Brontë’s novel noted a similarly violent phenomenon, that the book ‘seizes upon us with an iron grasp’ and that we ‘are made subject to [its] immense power’.¹⁴⁴ Despite ‘the disgusting coarseness of much of the dialogue, [...] we cannot chuse but read’.¹⁴⁵ G. W. Peck also refers to the ‘sad bruises and tumbles’ acquired throughout the journey of reading *Wuthering Heights*.¹⁴⁶ The psychological violence represented in *Villette* is deemed by reviewers to be overwrought and exaggerated, but rarely do critics talk of the reading experience in violent terms. More often, however, readers and critics note, as George Eliot did in February 1853, that there ‘is something almost preternatural in its power’, the strange feeling with which *Villette* leaves you.¹⁴⁷ This is perhaps because of the novel’s resistance to literary expectations. Hughes writes that the novel ‘refuses the reader the uplifting effects of nineteenth-century fictional conventions’, instead following ‘bewildering, perverse, or obscure antinarrative principles that raise the shock and intensity of narrative alienation or disappointment to a new level’.¹⁴⁸

Part of the contradiction inherent both in *Villette* as a novel and in the literary representation of violence more broadly is the fluctuation between immediacy/intensity and detachment. The intensity of the violence described by Lucy Snowe in her vivid internal self-mutilations embroils the reader in her experience, giving us an almost tangible insight into her psychological pain. That almost-tangibility is crucial, partly because it is of course never physical, both within the text and because of it being within a text. Yet it is also almost tangible because the very intensity of the violence depicted by

¹⁴³ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 42.

¹⁴⁴ From an unsigned review, *Literary World*, April 1848, in Allott, p. 233.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ G. W. Peck, from an unsigned review, *American Review*, June 1848, in Allott, 235–42, pp. 235–6.

¹⁴⁷ George Eliot to Caroline Bray, 15 February 1853, in Allott, p. 192.

¹⁴⁸ Hughes, ‘The Affective World of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*’, p. 716.

Lucy alienates the reader from her experience. This returns us to the beginning of this thesis and its initial considerations of the difficulty of representing linguistically something innately corporeal and often wordless. Is it ever possible for readers to fully understand the violences committed against and by characters in texts? In asking ourselves, as critics and critical readers, 'what is going on' during Lucy's representations of self-violence, what is it we want? What do readers and critics want from Lucy Snowe? When it comes to representations of violence in *Villette*, it is often either too much in its melodramatic extremity or not enough in its refusal to disclose fully the source of that violence.

AFTERWORD

Brontë Afterlives and the Legacies of Violence

In a review of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998), which, in its 2016 National Theatre production by Katie Mitchell, saw five audience members faint and forty walk out due to its graphic violence, Sarah Burton asks: 'do we expect women's work to shy away from subjects of violence, sex, the grotesque, the dark? Do we still, on some level, expect their work to be pretty and palatable and contained? And if so, why?'¹ The questions raised by Burton are tied to the questions posed in the Introduction of this thesis, in that both revolve around issues of violence, creativity, respectability, and womanhood. Burton frames the fainting and the walk-outs as a sign that the audience members of *Cleansed* could not handle such violent content having been written and directed by women. Lyn Gardner, a theatre critic for *The Guardian*, is quoted by Burton as believing "'there's a tendency to react to women addressing extreme violence that is to do with how we expect women to be [...] You know, sugar and spice and all things nice.'"²

Burton's inclusion of 'still' returns the reader to a time when it was, presumably, more acceptable and appropriate to judge a woman's work in terms of its 'prettiness' and 'palatability'. The piece's title – 'Why do plays about sex and violence written by women still shock?' – gestures, for this thesis's purposes, back to the nineteenth-century reviews of the Brontës' novels, which were shocked and disgusted by (though still willing to admit the power and originality of) their representations of coarseness, passion, and violence.

¹ Sarah Burton, 'Why do plays about sex and violence written by women still shock?', *The Guardian*, 27 February 2016

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/feb/27/why-do-plays-about-sex-and-violence-written-by-women-still-shock-sarah-kane-cleansed>> [Accessed 9 July 2018].

² Ibid.

Indeed, Burton even references *Jane Eyre* (1847), writing that, when ‘female writers tackle subjects of rage, frustration or violence, they are often invested in a character of a “monstrous woman” – Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, for instance’.³ Burton’s reference to “monstrous women” is a testament to the ongoing cultural transmission of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and their analysis of ‘female monsters’.⁴ Gilbert and Gubar trace the ways in which women writers ‘who did *not* apologise for their literary efforts were defined as mad and monstrous: freakish because “unsexed” or freakish because sexually “fallen”’.⁵ As the literal ‘madwoman in the attic’, Bertha Mason comes to symbolise not only Jane’s darker, more passionate side, but also the psychological division inherent in women writers torn between a masculine tradition and their own (female) creative voice.

Codifying the violence of Brontë’s novel in terms of the “monstrous woman” is reductive and exemplifies the paradox at the heart of this thesis. Burton’s comment is another instance of the casual, presumptive ways in which the Brontës have become associated with fictional violence. In reaching for an example of a woman writer depicting female rage and brutality, Burton seizes upon *Jane Eyre*. Yet her disparaging tone, the way she dismisses Brontë’s representation of ‘rage, frustration or violence’ as (insinuatingly) unsophisticated and crude, underlines the assumptions that still cling to the Brontës’ work: they may engage with challenging, violent subjects, but not convincingly. Within the context of Burton’s piece, there is also the underlying suggestion that representations of violence like Charlotte Brontë’s do not go far enough. The more obvious instances of gendered violence in Brontë’s novel are noted, but the complex ways in which Charlotte

³ Burton, ‘Why do plays about sex and violence written by women still shock?’. Burton’s formulation of ‘rage, frustration or violence’ is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold’s comment on *Villette*, that it is full of ‘nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage’. See Matthew Arnold to Mrs Forster, 14 April 1853, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 201.

⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT.; London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63 [emphasis in original].

Brontë, as well as Anne and Emily Brontë, were dealing with and depicting literary violences – as outlined throughout this thesis – go unremarked.

One of the crucial differences between Kane's *Cleansed*, as well as her other plays, and the Brontës' writings – other than chronology – is detail.⁶ Kane's play, as well as other works in her oeuvre, depict violence explicitly.⁷ This intensity is heightened by the immediacy and physicality of a play: audience members cannot simply close the page; they are engaging with embodied human beings simulating extreme cruelty in real time. As this thesis shows, Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's work is often much less direct in its numerous representations of and references to violence, partly due to the language and the narrative techniques employed to convey such violence. All three were innovative imaginers who could conjure evocative scenes of violence which seem explicit but are, in fact, often hazily delineated. Yet in recent years, adaptations and re-imaginings of the Brontës' novels, as well as their lives, have often enhanced and added to the violences depicted in their work. This Afterword therefore reflects on the previous chapters and the questions raised throughout this thesis, while also looking forwards and outwards to the afterlives of the Brontës' literary violences. As Burton's comments reveal, controversy still surrounds women who creatively represent violence; and there remains a complex association between brutality and the Brontës, one that in many ways returns us to initial mid-nineteenth-century responses to the sisters' novels.

The following section begins with a consideration of the 1996 BBC adaptation of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, directed by Mike Barker and written by David Nokes and Janet Barron, with a specific emphasis on the scenes of almost-rape added to the narrative

⁶ Notably, Rainer Emig has identified *Jane Eyre* as an intertext of Kane's *Blasted* (1995). He outlines the overlaps between the texts often in terms of their representations of '[r]acism, authority wrongfully asserted through violence, and the exploitation to which they are connected'. See 'Blasting Jane: *Jane Eyre* as an Intertext of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*', in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of 'Jane Eyre'*, eds. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 391–404, p. 399.

⁷ For example, Carl's tongue is cut out by Tinker. See Sarah Kane, 'Cleansed', in *Complete Plays*, intro. David Greig (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2001), 105–51, p. 118.

which do not feature in Anne Brontë's novel. A discussion of Andrea Arnold's 2011 film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* follows, focusing on its inclusion of explicit necrophilia and why it contains such unflinching depictions of violence against both people and animals. Stories from the recent *I Am Heathcliff: Stories Inspired by 'Wuthering Heights'* (2018) will also be considered, in relation to shifting perceptions of Heathcliff. Notably, the recent emphasis on violence in adaptations and re-imaginings of the Brontës' writing has, as this Afterword suggests, more strongly centred on Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).⁸ This is partly due to Charlotte Brontë's control over interpretations of her sisters' (as well as her own) work, including her dismissal of Anne Brontë's *Wildfell Hall* and its 'choice of subject' as 'an entire mistake'.⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), as will be discussed later in this Afterword, had an impact on perceptions of Emily Brontë, particularly through its reiteration of her apparent violent streak. For these reasons – and as significant space has already been dedicated to Charlotte Brontë's work and its literary violences in the preceding sections – this Afterword will primarily focus on the legacy of violence in Anne and Emily Brontë's literary afterlives.

As discussed in the Introduction, violence is central to the formation and sustenance of the "Brontë myth", along with the notion that the three sisters were detached from society. The "myth" was instigated partly as a rebuttal to the accusations of coarseness and brutality levelled at the sisters' novels by contemporary reviewers, with

⁸ To mark the bicentenary of Emily Brontë in 2018, illustrators Adam Frost, Jim Kynvin, and Jamie Lenman created charts which quantified different aspects of Emily Brontë's life and work. The sixth and seventh charts respectively provide the numbers of documented acts of violence (with Heathcliff perpetrating eighteen acts of brutality) and the number of times a violent word (such as 'fist', 'kick', and 'damn') appears in comparison to *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey*. Notably, when enumerated, *Wuthering Heights* appears to be a far more linguistically violent novel than Charlotte or Anne Brontë's texts. See 'Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* – in charts', *The Guardian*, 30 July 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/gallery/2018/jul/30/emily-brontes-wuthering-heights-in-charts>> [Accessed 29 August 2018].

⁹ Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), xliii–xlix, p. xlvii.

Gaskell's *Life* accounting for the apparent cruelties depicted by the Brontës through a depiction of the violence of Haworth. More recently, as critics attempt to dismantle the “myth”, violence has emerged as an effective means of de-romanticising the sisters’ image.

This is evident from Sally Wainwright’s recent BBC Brontë biopic, *To Walk Invisible* (2016), in which the sisters’ publishing ambitions are traced alongside the decline of Branwell Brontë.¹⁰ The reinstatement of Branwell as a focal point in the Brontës’ literary and personal lives raises certain issues, particularly as it comes in the midst of the family’s bicentenaries which involves their legacies being celebrated but also re-evaluated. The foregrounding of Branwell as a major influence on the Brontës as authors, while accurate in relation to their juvenilia, is reminiscent of the rumours propagated throughout the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries that the “true author” of *Wuthering Heights* was, in fact, the forgotten Brontë brother.¹¹ Wainwright’s biopic rightly highlights the difficulties faced by Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë while writing and publishing their novels, but, in doing so, the telefilm also dramatises the influence of their brother, as though his alcoholism, affairs, and (crucially) violences acted as a direct, unmediated inspiration behind the sisters’ works. Here again we find the voices of nineteenth-century critics lingering in the legacy of the Brontës. Their disbelief that three young women could have written texts like *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is, as we shall see, quashed by *To Walk Invisible* through the same tools used by Gaskell in the *Life*. On one level, the biopic, deliberately or not, seems to ask: where did the Brontës’ literary violences come from, if

¹⁰ *To Walk Invisible*, dir. and screenplay by Sally Wainwright (BBC Cymru Wales: 2016).

¹¹ Irene Cooper Willis gives an account – and a detailed refutation – of the original claim that Branwell had written *Wuthering Heights* made by Branwell’s friend, William Dearden, in 1867. See Irene Cooper Willis, ‘The Authorship of *Wuthering Heights*’, *The Trollopian*, 2.3 (1947), 157–68. The claim continues to linger, however, as shown by the publication of Chris Firth’s *Branwell Brontë’s Barber’s Tale: Who Wrote ‘Wuthering Heights’?* in 2004, in which Firth claims Branwell, not Emily, wrote the novel.

not from their brutal, “backwards” surroundings and the debauched antics of their brother?

There is an ongoing fascination with violence and the Brontës, one that can be traced from the earliest contemporary reviews to the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century adaptations and biopics of their lives and work. As this thesis argues, violence has always been central to the Brontë legacy, but not necessarily in the ways often expected or assumed. Instead, this thesis has problematised readings of the Brontës’ literary violences, which are often (at varying moments) mediated, unseen, retold, untold, imagined, and re-imagined. The violences of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë’s texts are inevitably rendered visible and more immediate through film and television adaptations. This visualisation and elaboration of the violence in their novels – as we shall see – reinscribes the perception of the Brontës as “violent writers”. The legacy of the Brontës’ literary violences comes full circle, then, in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century adaptations and re-imaginings of their work and lives. The central questions of this Afterword therefore are: why do the Brontës continue to court narratives of violence? And why do we want to “brutalise” and “de-romanticise” the Brontës?

Violence and Voyeurism in Brontë Adaptations

In an essay on the BBC’s 1996 adaptation of Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Aleks Sierz states that, if ‘culture is to mutate rather than stagnate, the violence of adaptation is not a luxury but a necessity’.¹² Sierz identifies the point ‘when the spectator realises the profound, unmistakable difference between an original and its translation’ as

¹² Aleks Sierz, ‘Angel or Sister? Writing and Screening the Heroine of Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in *Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide*, eds. Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye, and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 16–31, p. 27.

a ‘moment of violence’.¹³ This can be a moment of either ‘closure or of opportunity’, as it offers the viewer a chance to return to the novel and ‘ask what the original really means, which of its meanings change, and why’.¹⁴ For Sierz, the violence of adaptation is twofold: the first is committed against the source material; and the second is felt by the viewer upon recognising the blatant departures from that source. These violences are necessary components of adaptation as a genre. In relation to adaptations of nineteenth-century novels, particularly by the Brontës, there is a third form of violence which this Afterword analyses: the addition of scenes of brutality and sexual abuse which were not in the original text.¹⁵

The 1996 *Wildfell Hall* reframes the violences in the novel as more explicit than in Anne Brontë’s original narrative. There are, for example, two instances of almost-rape included in the series which do not appear in the novel, both committed by Arthur Huntingdon against Helen Huntingdon. In the first episode, while walking through the marketplace near Wildfell Hall with her son Arthur, overhearing women comment on her respectability, Helen sees a Punch and Judy show.¹⁶ As Punch beats Judy with a stick, the audience – including young Arthur – laugh and jeer. The sight of the Punch and Judy show triggers a different response in Helen, who experiences a flashback to when she was almost raped by her husband. By placing the two instances of marital abuse side-by-side, the series suggests a link between the violence of Victorian entertainment and the behaviour of men like Huntingdon. Rosalind Crone notes that, in the first half of the

¹³ Sierz, ‘Angel or Sister?’, p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Such language is admittedly reminiscent of the contested discourse of ‘fidelity’ in adaptation studies, through which adaptations are – as Thomas Leitch writes – classified ‘as more or less faithful to their putative sources’. As Leitch notes, ‘the field is still haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible sourcetexts’. While the current discussion does consider whether an adaptation differs in its depictions and use of violence from the ‘putative source’, this is not to offer a ‘value judgement’ on the adaptations or to question their creative validity, but to explore the reasons for and implications of the inclusion and enhancement of scenes of violence, specifically in relation to the cultural legacy of violence within both the Brontës’ novels and the subsequent adaptations of the source-texts. See Thomas Leitch, ‘Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads’, *Adaptation*, 1.1 (2008), 63–77, p. 64.

¹⁶ *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, dir. Mike Barker, screenplay by David Nokes and Janet Barron (BBC, 1996).

nineteenth century, audiences understood the ‘irony’ of the Punch and Judy shows’ performative brutality, as its ‘extreme presentation overrode any explicit sanctioning of violence in the domestic sphere’.¹⁷ Yet, while this more complex reception of Punch and Judy is lost in the series, its inclusion of the puppet show implicates wider nineteenth-century society in the domestic abuse experienced by Helen.

In Helen’s flashback, Huntingdon grasps her by the throat and pushes her against a wall. He then flings her to the floor and, as she lies on her front, he begins to pull up her skirts, suggesting the imminence of rape. The scene cuts again to Helen lying on her back, as Huntingdon leaves the room. If sexual violence has occurred, it remains unseen, residing in the gap between each scene. This editing is redolent of Anne Brontë’s own veiled references to domestic abuse and marital rape, as well as the moment of violence residing in the literal and figurative gaps of Emily Brontë’s poetry and prose. The withholding of knowledge from the viewer gestures to the common nineteenth-century literary practice of placing gendered violence on the margins of the text, as something hinted at rather than explicitly or unambiguously shown.¹⁸ Suzanne Rintoul nuances this by stating that, when depicting violence against women, there were ‘two contradictory impulses in Victorian print culture: an urgent move to discuss and depict what was understood as a uniquely private form of abuse; and an equally imperative mandate to keep it private and thus outside of public discourse’.¹⁹

There is an element of this ‘representational competition’, as Rintoul defines it, in Barker’s adaptation.²⁰ The 1996 series appears to be playing with such ideas of Victorian

¹⁷ Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 58.

¹⁸ This is, as Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky note, especially true in the case of violence against bourgeois women (like Helen), which ‘is rarely exposed to public view; rather, a certain invisibility and silence is attached to the violated bodies of these women and to the space in which the violations occur’. See *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 7.

¹⁹ Suzanne Rintoul, *Intimate Violence and Victorian Print Culture: Representational Tensions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

editing, forcing the audience into imagining ‘the worst’, just as Judith E. Pike argues Emily Brontë does in her representation of domestic abuse in Isabella and Heathcliff’s relationship.²¹ At this point in the television series, the viewer does not know whether Huntingdon has raped Helen or not. The event is only replayed to us in the second episode, this time with more context, as Helen confronts Huntingdon about his affair with Annabella Lowborough and threatens to leave him, taking their son with her. This threat incites Huntingdon’s violence, as he grabs Helen and drags her across the room by her neck, pinning her to the wall and saying: “With my body, I thee worship.” He then flings her to the floor, begins to lift her skirts, strokes her leg, and then abruptly stops. The moment of potential rape stalls; Huntingdon goes no further.

The other scene of threatened sexual assault occurs when Helen is pregnant during the second episode. As she lies on the sofa, clearly in physical discomfort and emotional distress induced by her husband’s antics and absences, Huntingdon again begins to caress her body before lifting her nightdress. He becomes increasingly forceful as she struggles and tells him: “Don’t, don’t, please, the baby.” As in the other almost-rape scene, Huntingdon does control himself, reflecting the mid-nineteenth-century masculine “ideal”, outlined by Pike, of being able to ‘refrain from the abuse of masculine power over weaker creatures, especially women and children’.²² The scenes are disturbing not only because of how explicit they are in representing marital abuse and the threat of rape, but also because Huntingdon manages to bring himself back from the brink of violence. Rather than revealing any drunken lack of control, his actions expose his ability to use the threat of violence as a means of wielding power over Helen. Twentieth-century viewers are reminded that, if he wanted to, Huntingdon could take possession of Helen’s

²¹ Judith E. Pike, “My Name Was Isabella Linton”: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs Heathcliff’s Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.3 (2009), 347–83, p. 374.

²² Judith E. Pike, ‘Rochester’s Bronze Scrag and Pearl Necklace: Bronzed Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and Charlotte Brontë’s *Juvenilia*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.2 (2013), 261–81, p. 276.

body however and whenever he liked, a fact underlined by his recitation of the wedding vows mid-attack. Much like the viewer being kept in limbo between knowing and not knowing whether Huntingdon rapes Helen, Huntingdon keeps Helen unsure of his next move and fully aware of her physical and legal powerlessness in the face of his threats.²³

Liora Brosch writes that, in the 1996 *Wildfell Hall*, the ‘much more subtle oppressions implicit in nineteenth-century novels were translated for audiences unfamiliar with the marriage and property laws of the time into a visual language of sexual violence’.²⁴ With only three hours to convey the intricacies of Anne Brontë’s 1848 novel, the adaptation uses violent scenes as a kind of language to reveal the many incremental abuses suffered by Helen in the text. Rather than searching for evidence of physical assault in her diary, the viewer bears witness to the violence so that there is no ambiguity as to the nature of Helen’s ordeal. This is further heightened by the removal of the overarching narrative frame, in which Gilbert Markham sends Helen’s diary to his brother-in-law. In the 1996 *Wildfell Hall*, Helen tells her own story without mediation, including the violence inflicted upon her, all of which is far more graphic than in the novel. Brosch notes that, in nineteenth-century novels such as *Wildfell Hall* and Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859–60), ‘women’s stories, their voices, are constantly invaded and usurped’.²⁵ Through the narratorial frame, the reader is ‘implicated in what both novels represent as a form of rape, an invasion of a woman’s private self’.²⁶ The alteration made by the 1996 *Wildfell Hall* seems to remove this symbolic rape, then, as Gilbert does not offer up Helen’s private world to another man without her consent.

²³ As Elizabeth Foyster writes: ‘Until the 1857 Divorce Act, [...] for women with violent husbands, a marriage separation was the only formal and legally sanctioned way in which they could end cohabitation. Yet [...] even marriage separation brought significant disadvantages for women. Their husbands retained all income from their real estate, could seize their personal property and return to claim their future earnings, and until 1839, had the right to the custody of their children.’ See *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 18.

²⁴ Liora Brosch, *Screening Novel Women: From British Domestic Fiction to Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Instead, the viewer is given Helen's story unmediated, from her own perspective, and on her own terms. The symbolic violences of Brontë's text become literal through visual representation.

This switch from symbolic to visual brings with it the hint of voyeurism throughout the series. The adaptation trades one form of 'symbolic rape', by removing the framed narrator, for actual instances of sexual assault. By representing the abuse directly from Helen's perspective, the 1996 *Wildfell Hall* grapples with the line between female agency and voyeurism. On the one hand, the series gives Helen control over how her narrative is represented and received. Notably, and unlike in the novel, she writes her account retrospectively so that it becomes more like a memoir. As with Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Helen regulates what goes in and what is kept out of the narrative from a substantial distance from actual events. This narrative control gives her agency, but there is the danger that the viewing and, in Gilbert's case, reading of Helen's testimony can verge on voyeurism. Sierz identifies this possibility in regard to the adaptation's 'sexual strand', which involves sex scenes being 'shot in a way that invades Helen's privacy, turning her into a defenceless object of a prying gaze'.²⁷ For Sierz, 'the violence [in the 1996 *Wildfell Hall*] is confined to the film's sexual strand and to its portrayal of the heroine'.²⁸ If the adaptation's 'sexual strand' is voyeuristic, and if its violence is part of its 'sexual strand', then the conclusion must be that its representations of almost-rape are voyeuristic, too.

Jacqueline Rose perceptively pinpoints the double-edged nature of representing and reading/watching gendered violence, as both raising awareness and nurturing voyeurism.²⁹ This contradiction is partly why, as this thesis maintains, it is often so challenging to write (about) violence and why it can be so difficult to pinpoint in a text.

²⁷ Sierz, 'Angel or Sister?', p. 25.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 27–8.

²⁹ Jacqueline Rose, 'I am a knife', *London Review of Books*, 40.4 (2018)
<<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n04/jacqueline-rose/i-am-a-knife>> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

In a discussion of modern movements like ‘Time’s Up’ and #MeToo, in which sexual assault and harassment survivors speak out against their abusers, Rose remarks that recent reports of institutional abuse are often accompanied with photos of the ‘female targets [...] to grant the voyeur his pleasure’.³⁰ Rose writes: ‘while attention to violence against women may be sparked by anger and a desire for redress, it might also be feeding vicariously off the forms of perversion that fuel the violence in the first place’.³¹ Adaptations may be responding to – and potentially fuelling – the ongoing “trend” of representing explicit scenes of violence against women in the media.³² As Brosch notes, audiences of the 1990s ‘had become more familiar’ with the ‘visual language of sexual violence’, rather than the mediated absent presence of gendered violence with which nineteenth-century readers were arguably more acquainted.³³ Yet it is notable that, as with Rintoul’s recognition of the ‘representational competition’ in Victorian depictions of intimate abuse, Rose identifies the same tension in modern day representations of violence: it is attempting to raise awareness, while also providing entertainment and voyeuristic pleasure to audiences.

It is here that Sierz’s identification of the violence of adaptation becomes especially pertinent in relation to the 1996 *Wildfell Hall* adaptation, as well as Andrea Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights* (2011). What happens when a text is altered for the screen and when those alterations rely on the addition and enhancement of violent scenes? Is there a violence involved in the process of transference? And, if so, what is the implication of this on how we perceive and receive the Brontës’ writing?

³⁰ Rose, ‘I am a knife’.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The “trend” of depicting violence against women in film, literature, and on television has become so ubiquitous as to have warranted the launch in early 2018 of the Staunch Book Prize, which will be awarded to ‘the author of a novel in the thriller genre in which no woman is beaten, stalked, sexually exploited, raped or murdered’. The prize’s *raison d’être* is to look for ‘stories in which female characters don’t have to be raped before they can be empowered, or become casual collateral to pump up the plot’. See ‘About’, *Staunch Book Prize* <<http://staunchbookprize.com/about-2/>> [Accessed 16 August 2018].

³³ Brosch, *Screening Novel Women*, p. 124.

De-Romanticising the Brontës

In a piece titled ‘Can “Wuthering Heights” Work On-Screen?’, Joshua Rothman claims: ‘People love “Wuthering Heights” not just for its romance but also for its strangeness, its intensity, and its violence. [...] Unfortunately those are precisely the qualities that adaptations tend to cut out.’³⁴ In Andrea Arnold’s 2011 reimagining of Emily Brontë’s novel, scenes such as Lockwood’s violent dream of cutting Cathy’s wrist on a broken window are, indeed, ‘cut out’, but other scenes of violence are enhanced and added, often in dialogue with wider critical concerns about such issues as necrophilia.³⁵ Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights* – much like the text which inspired it – begins at the end. Yet, unlike Emily Brontë’s novel, there is no Lockwood and therefore no framed narrative through which the scenes of violence are filtered. The adaptation opens with Heathcliff (whose perspective the viewer follows throughout the film), his face bruised and bloodied, as he propels himself against the wall of his and Cathy’s childhood bedroom.³⁶ This self-violence introduces the audience to Heathcliff wordlessly, underscoring the physicality of the film and the sparsity of its script.

The reviewer Francine Prose contends that ‘the film involves more violence than any previous English-language version’.³⁷ At times, the casual brutality of the film feels

³⁴ Joshua Rothman, ‘Can “Wuthering Heights” Work On-Screen?’, *The New Yorker*, 10 October 2012 <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/can-wuthering-heights-work-onscreen>> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

³⁵ In dialogue with both Brontë’s novel and subsequent critical appraisals, Arnold casts a black actor, James Howson, as Heathcliff, bringing his heritage to the fore of the film. In the novel, Heathcliff is described, varyingly, as ‘a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect’ and “‘as dark almost as if it came from the devil’”. See Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 5, 36. All subsequent in-text references are taken from this edition. There is a wealth of criticism on Heathcliff’s ethnicity and origins. For further critical discussions around this topic, as well as explorations of Irish identities and colonialism in the Brontës’ fiction, see Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester, and Racial Difference’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 25.2 (1992), 125–40; Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995); Maja-Lisa von Sneidern, ‘Wuthering Heights and the Liverpool Slave Trade’, *ELH*, 62.1 (1995), 171–96; and Reginald Watson, ‘Images of Blackness in the Works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë’, *CLA Journal*, 44.4 (2001), 451–70.

³⁶ *Wuthering Heights*, dir. Andrea Arnold, screenplay by Andrea Arnold and Olivia Hetreed (Ecosse Films and Film4, 2011).

³⁷ Francine Prose, ‘The Taming of *Wuthering Heights*’, *The New York Review of Books*, 24 October 2012 <<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/10/24/taming-wuthering-heights/>> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

relentless. The hanging of Isabella's dog is shown in one unflinching shot, as Heathcliff hangs it on a gate by its collar; we watch the dog wriggle and whine to be set free. Unlike in the text, in which Nelly finds the dog 'nearly at its last gasp' and rescues it (*WH*, 129), there is no sense of release for the dog or the audience; the dog is never seen again, alive or dead. Later, young Hareton is seen hanging puppies from branches, while Heathcliff watches. Instead of intervening, he simply walks away, while the dog tries to squirm free. As with Isabella's dog, there is no indication that the puppies are rescued, emphasising the carelessness with which life is treated at the Heights. In the text, the scene is less explicit, as Isabella runs past 'Hareton, who was hanging a litter of puppies from a chair back in the doorway' (*WH*, 183). Isabella does not turn back to save the animals. Her narrative cuts away from the details and aftermath of Hareton's cruelty.

There is, in comparison to Brontë's text, an immediacy to the violence in Arnold's film, as the camera closes in on the animals' faces and holds its gaze over the dogs' visible distress. Unlike in Brontë's novel, there is no mediating presence distancing the audience from the violence on screen. This shift from the often implicit, always mediated violence of Brontë's text to the explicit, unmediated brutality of Arnold's film has implications for the cultural legacy of *Wuthering Heights* and the role of violence within that legacy. While this can be ascribed to the difference in form between literary and visual representations of violence, the removal of mediating narrators and of any distance from brutality somewhat simplifies the complexities of Brontë's literary violences. Through adaptations like Arnold's film, violence becomes an unambiguous part of *Wuthering Heights* and, therefore, of Emily Brontë's legacy.

Arnold's inclusion of an explicit scene of necrophilia underlines her emphasis on violent taboos in *Wuthering Heights*. Following Cathy's death, Heathcliff is shown taking possession of Cathy's body, as, in Arnold's film, his desire for Cathy revolves around

access to her body, rather than her soul.³⁸ In this way, the film undercuts Heathcliff's pop culture role as a "heartthrob" and the idealisation of his and Catherine's love, instead focusing on violent physicality rather than emotional or verbal connection.³⁹

In the novel, Heathcliff's interactions with Cathy's corpse can be, and have been, read erotically.⁴⁰ While digging to reach her body, Heathcliff hears "'sigh[s], close at [his] ear'" and is convinced that he "'felt that Cathy was there, not under [him], but on the earth'" (*WH*, 290). Having felt this, a "'sudden sense of relief flowed, from [his] heart, through every limb'" (*WH*, 290). This description conjures an image of sexual release, but Heathcliff does not physically hold Cathy's corpse. Rather than possessing her body, he is satisfied by merely feeling her presence, thereby suggesting that his connection with Cathy transcends the corporeal. Following Edgar Linton's death, Heathcliff does see Cathy's corpse, by bribing the sexton as he dug Linton's grave (*WH*, 288). Yet, even in this instance, there is no suggestion of Heathcliff holding Cathy, let alone committing necrophilia. Earlier in the novel, however, Nelly discloses that, following Cathy's death, she left the window open for Heathcliff, 'to give him a chance of bestowing on the fading image of his idol one final adieu' (*WH*, 170). She remarks that he 'did not omit to avail himself of the opportunity, cautiously and briefly', a visit which results in 'the disarrangement of the drapery about the corpse's face' (*WH*, 170).

It is this moment in the novel which Arnold expands upon in her adaptation. Yet Arnold's less ambiguous depiction may also be in dialogue, and arguably in competition,

³⁸ Patsy Stoneman writes that 'Emily Brontë's early Victorian novel draws on a rhetoric in which consummation is a matter of souls, not bodies'. See *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996), p. 131.

³⁹ In Arnold's film, for example, Catherine's famous declaration in the novel – "I am Heathcliff" – is never heard by the viewer. Regarding Heathcliff's role as a "heartthrob", Samantha Ellis writes that she is a 'recovering Heathcliff addict' and refers to the 'literary bad boy' as 'perfect'. See Samantha Ellis, 'How Heathcliff Ruined My Love Life', *The Telegraph*, 20 July 2018 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/heathcliff-ruined-love-life/>> [Accessed 31 August 2018].

⁴⁰ Kathryn B. McGuire writes: 'Heathcliff manifested the symptoms of necrophilia immediately after Cathy's death. Necrophilia is another sexual aberration which, like vampirism, arises from incestuous desires and guilt.' See 'The Incest Taboo in *Wuthering Heights*: A Modern Appraisal', *American Imago*, 45.2 (1988), 217–24, p. 220.

with previous adaptations. In the 2009 ITV adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, directed by Coky Giedroyc, Tom Hardy's Heathcliff goes further than in the novel by entering Cathy's coffin and lying beside her.⁴¹ The scene splits between reality, which sees Heathcliff on top of a skeleton, and Heathcliff's imagination, which sees him stroking the face of a still in-tact Cathy (Charlotte Riley). The 2009 *Wuthering Heights* does not insinuate that any necrophilia occurs, but it is an erotically charged moment. As Hila Shachar notes, an 'adaptation is not simply an obvious example of intertextuality, it is also a decided engagement with a particular text and its ongoing cultural history'.⁴² Through the intensification of the insinuation of necrophilia in Brontë's novel, Arnold is engaging with the critical legacy of the text and harking back to previous visual renderings of the scene. She takes these interpretations a step further, however, pushing the subtleties of the text to their limits and creating an indisputably violent moment.⁴³

This is perhaps aligned with recent de-romanticisations of Heathcliff as a character, which often focus on his violence. Louisa Young's contribution to the short story collection, *I Am Heathcliff*, gives an overview of the Heathcliff-like men her character has encountered. 'Heathcliffs I Have Known' considers male violence, sexual assault, and women's powerlessness in the face of such danger, ending with Young's nameless narrator remarking: 'When I read *Wuthering Heights*, I wished afterwards I had taken notes and just added up [Heathcliff's] crimes. I wanted to draw up his charge sheet. Assault, assault, assault. [...] Assault, assault.'⁴⁴ Young's protagonist rejects the common

⁴¹ *Wuthering Heights*, dir. Coky Giedroyc, screenplay by Peter Bowker (ITV and Mammoth Screen Production, 2009).

⁴² Hila Shachar, *Cultural Afterlives and Screen Adaptations of Classic Literature: 'Wuthering Heights' and Company* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 4.

⁴³ In the new short story collection published in honour of Emily Brontë's bicentenary, Erin Kelly's 'Thicker Than Blood' modernises the story of *Wuthering Heights*, setting it in the present day, and includes a scene in which the character Heath digs up Cat's grave: then, as one 'hand teased out the soft length of her hair, [...] the other worked at his zipper'. His attempts to have sex with Cat's corpse are foiled by the police and Heath ends up in a psychiatric hospital. See Erin Kelly, 'Thicker Than Blood', in *I Am Heathcliff: Stories Inspired by 'Wuthering Heights'*, ed. Kate Mosse (London: The Borough Press, 2018), 57–69, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Louisa Young, 'Heathcliffs I Have Known', in *I Am Heathcliff*, 173–88, p. 187.

connection made between love and Heathcliff's abusive behaviour, wryly writing that he is 'a violent controlling drunk, a bully, a narcissist, psychotic, but it's OK because he's in love'.⁴⁵ In a recent biography of Emily Brontë, Claire O'Callaghan writes in a similar vein regarding the disturbing cultural adoption of Heathcliff as a 'romantic figure', remembering that, when she first read *Wuthering Heights*, she 'felt the level of violence Heathcliff perpetrates was hugely troubling'.⁴⁶ These unromantic readings of Heathcliff chime with early reviews of the novel, particularly one featured in the *Examiner*, in which the anonymous author wrote: 'The hardness, selfishness, and cruelty of Heathcliff are in our opinion inconsistent with the romantic love that he is stated to have felt for Catherine Earnshaw.'⁴⁷

As with mid-nineteenth-century responses, such representations of Heathcliff's propensity for violence are not clear cut. Sarah E. Fanning notes that, in the 2009 ITV adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, the 'externalised violence traditionally associated with Heathcliff's character in prior adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* is here rewritten into acts of masochism'.⁴⁸ Even in Arnold's 2011, in which Heathcliff's violence is coded as sadistic, the viewer is still encouraged to empathise (or, at least, engage) with his perspective, as the story is told through his eyes. In both readings of Heathcliff – as more vulnerable and masochistic or as more vengeful and sadistic – violence remains a prominent force, as an embedded element of both his characterisation and of viewers' expectations of his character. Yet these readings remain binary in their approach, flattening out the complexities of represented violence in relation to the Brontës' writing.

⁴⁵ Young, 'Heathcliffs I Have Known', p. 187.

⁴⁶ Claire O'Callaghan, *Emily Brontë Reappraised: A View from the Twenty-First Century* (Manchester: Saraband, 2018), p. 6.

⁴⁷ From an unsigned review, *Examiner*, January 1848, in Allott, 220–2, p. 221.

⁴⁸ Sarah E. Fanning, "'A Soul Worth Saving': Post-Feminist Masculinities in Twenty-First-Century Televised Adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*", *Adaptations*, 10.1 (2017), 73–92, p. 86.

Far from being binary in nature, this thesis has revealed the contested, multifaceted presence of violence in Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing.

Perhaps this is where the – what Sierz calls – ‘moment of violence’ within adaptation lies: in the expectations of viewers and critics for Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's literary violences (as well as their novels and cultural afterlives more broadly) to fit into neat categories, rather than encompassing multifarious, diverse, often contradictory interpretations. As the remainder of this Afterword will demonstrate, this impulse continues to shape interpretations of the Brontës' lives and work, as the perception of violence in their legacy has undergone a shift, from central yet damaging to their personas as authors and women, to something almost celebratory.

Reconfiguring Violence in the Brontë Legacy

What these adaptations and re-imaginings of *Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights* attest to is the reframing of violence within the Brontë legacy. As noted in the Introduction of this thesis, violence has shifted from an integral but negative, almost shameful aspect of the Brontë sisters' writing – initially due to depictions of Haworth in Gaskell's *Life* – to something which should be reconsidered and even reclaimed as a creative force.

Sally Wainwright's BBC biopic, *To Walk Invisible*, offers another reinterpretation of violence within the Brontë legacy, one that centres on ideas of authenticity. Tracking the three years leading up to the publication of the Brontë sisters' novels in late 1847 and mid-1848, the biopic ends with Branwell Brontë's death in September 1848. It opens, however, with a heated argument between father and son, following Branwell's dismissal from the Robinson family home. During the argument, Branwell shouts, repeatedly bangs

a chair on the floor, and tells his father to “stop asking [him] fucking questions”.⁴⁹ Although he is only directing his aggression against objects, Branwell’s actions here gesture to his explosive and unpredictable capacity for violence, as revealed throughout the biopic. Later on, Charlotte Brontë (played by Finn Atkins) is seen taking letters from the postman, while a letter she wrote to Ellen Nussey on 17 June 1846 is narrated over the scene: ‘to papa [Branwell] allows rest neither day nor night – and [...] he is continually screwing money out of him sometimes threatening that he will kill himself if it is withheld from him’.⁵⁰ As the letter is being narrated, the raised voices of Branwell and Patrick can also be heard from the study. The former is imploring the latter for money, asking “where it is”, to which Patrick replies: “There is no money, Branwell, not for you.” Meanwhile, she is also opening the post, which includes one of the favourable reviews of her, Anne, and Emily’s poetry collection. She rushes to tell Emily of the news, but they are interrupted by Branwell who storms out of the house, highlighting his disruptive effect on the sisters’ creative plans.

Yet there is also the insinuation that Branwell’s violent behaviour has a generative quality, acting as a catalyst for their publishing endeavours. As he leaves the parsonage, Emily confronts him about his treatment of Patrick. They square up to each other, both on the brink of a violent eruption. Emily tells Branwell: “Yeah, go on, have a go, see what happens.” When physical violence is avoided, due to Branwell’s skulking off, Emily and Charlotte retreat to the house in search of their father. As soon as they enter his study, he tells them “it’s nothing”, as they find him with a bloodied cheek, prompting Emily to ask: “Did [Branwell] hit you?” Patrick does not answer, only telling her to not “make a fuss”. Emily is visibly shocked by the realisation that her brother is indeed capable of

⁴⁹ *To Walk Invisible*, dir. Sally Wainwright, screenplay by Sally Wainwright (BBC, 2016).

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 17 June 1846, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume I: 1829–1847*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 477–9, p. 477.

assaulting their father. After leaving their father's study, Emily takes Charlotte aside and confirms her willingness to send their novels to a publisher.

In being directly preceded by the discovery of familial abuse, as well as the arrival of critical praise, the framing of this moment is noteworthy. As Shachar writes, 'Branwell's downfall [...] highlight[s] the economic impetus for the sisters' desire to get published, thereby de-romanticising the myths which surround the three sisters'.⁵¹ It is specifically Branwell's violence which confirms his disintegration, shattering any sense of his financial reliability; and it also reiterates Patrick's vulnerability, alongside his blindness and his family's fears for his health. Together with the positive reviews of their poetry, which offer a creative impetus, Wainwright uses Branwell's violence to show the economic necessity of publication for the Brontës. Violence is therefore figured as a catalysing force behind their literary output, once again positioned as central to their creativity and legacy.

Branwell's hitting his father can only be alluded to because there is no evidence in the Brontë letters that he did in fact use violence against his family. Wainwright's production has read between the lines of Charlotte's letters, such as the one narrated while Branwell and Patrick argue behind the closed door of the study. As with Barker's *Wildfell Hall*, this partial concealment of violence reflects nineteenth-century literary practices of representing brutality. After Branwell breaks out with violence, and before leaving for Manchester with Charlotte for his cataract operation, Patrick confirms with Emily that she "knows where the gun is". As Patrick and Charlotte leave on the cart, Emily comforts Anne with the knowledge that Branwell, however, does not know where the pistol is kept; and she goes on to tell her younger sister that: "he won't hit you; and if he hits me, I'll hit him back – harder." Although not without its literary and biographical

⁵¹ Hila Shachar, 'Walking New Myths: Sally Wainwright's Brontë Biopic', *Journal of Victorian Culture Online*, 6 January 2017 <<http://jvc.oup.com/2017/01/06/hila-shachar-walking-new-myths-sally-wainwrights-bronte-biopic/>> [Accessed 12 September 2018].

precedents, this characterisation of Emily Brontë once again re-inscribes her position as a “violent writer” and, indeed, violent individual.⁵²

As the Introduction of this thesis argued, violence is still connected to the everyday lives of the Brontës in Haworth, not straying too far from Gaskell’s attempts to explain away the “coarseness” of the sisters’ work. Instead of seeing such violences as something shocking, as the nineteenth-century critics did, there is now an attempt to reposition the role of violence within the Brontë legacy as evidence of how “real” these writers were, in direct opposition to the ethereal, disconnected “myth”. Faith Penhale, the Executive Producer of *To Walk Invisible*, confirms that one of the aims for Wainwright was authenticity: ‘I think from the start, Sally wanted to tell the true story of the Brontë sisters [...] She’s never felt the story’s been told faithfully, properly before, and she wanted to bust some of those myths around the Brontë sisters.’⁵³ As Wainwright herself remarks: ‘As with all my work, I want it to feel real. I wanted people, when they watch it, to really feel that they’re transported back in time, that it’s not a chocolate box world.’⁵⁴ This brings *To Walk Invisible* into the discourse of fidelity, which remains a central and contested concern within adaptation studies. Yet, as Siv Jansson – who acted as literary advisor to Wainwright – notes, when it comes to onscreen biography, ‘there is no single written text’ and, therefore, ‘the issue becomes fidelity to what or whose text, whose version of the biographical subject’.⁵⁵ As the remainder of this Afterword will contend, the “version” presented by Wainwright reconfigures, rather than rejects, initial representations of the sisters’ lives, including the use of violence.

⁵² According to Gaskell, in *Shirley* (1849), Charlotte Brontë ‘tried to depict her character in Shirley Keeldar, as what Emily Brontë would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity’ (*Life*, 379). See Chapter Two of this thesis for further discussion of Shirley’s gun-wielding and violent visions. John Greenwood, the stationer in Haworth, also wrote that ‘[Mr Brontë] resolved to learn her to shoot’. From John Greenwood’s diary, quoted in Dudley Green, *Patrick Brontë: Father of Genius* (Stroud, Glos.: History Press, 2008), p. 133.

⁵³ ‘Sally’s Vision’, in ‘Bonus’, *To Walk Invisible* (DVD, 2017).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Siv Jansson, ““Their Name Was Brontë””: Brontë Biography on Screen’, *Brontë Studies*, 43.1 (2018), 32–40, p. 33.

In *To Walk Invisible*, violence is a central part of the authentication process. In the ‘Bonus’ section of the DVD, released only a few days after the biopic was originally screened, ‘Sally’s Vision’ provides an insight into Wainwright’s motivations for creating the film. She says: ‘I was worried that there would be a preconception that the Brontë sisters were a little bit like Jane Austen, or a little bit like Louisa M. Alcott, these little ladies who wrote nice novels.’⁵⁶ Apart from disclosing a disdainful attitude towards women writers such as Austen and Alcott, her comments also seek to distance the Brontës from the common perception of their novels as ‘primarily [...] love stories’, as well as from the heritage films associated with adaptations of Austen’s novels.⁵⁷ For Wainwright, equating the Brontës with ‘little ladies who wrote nice novels’ is, in fact, a *misreading* of them as authors and, through her biopic, she wishes to offer a more “authentic” insight, one that carves the sisters out as different both to other nineteenth-century women writers and to viewers’ apparent preconceptions.

Notably, in the next sentence, Wainwright remarks that she wanted to ‘reclaim [the Brontë sisters] for the North, make it clear that they were Yorkshire people’.⁵⁸ This returns us to Gaskell’s *Life*, as well as to early responses to the Brontës’ novels, which offered disparaging depictions of Yorkshire and its people. In an anonymous review of *Shirley* from 1850, George Henry Lewes advised Charlotte Brontë ‘to sacrifice a little of her Yorkshire roughness to the demands of good taste’.⁵⁹ Another unsigned review of *Shirley* from the *Spectator* echoes Lewes’s sentiments, writing rather scathingly of Yorkshire: ‘the generality of the characters have so strong a dash of the repelling, as well as of a literal provincial coarseness, that the attractive effect is partly marred by the ill-

⁵⁶ ‘Sally’s Vision’, *To Walk Invisible*.

⁵⁷ Patsy Stoneman, ‘The Brontë Myth’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 214–41, p. 231.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ G. H. Lewes, from an unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1850, in Allott, 160–70, p. 165.

conditioned nature of the persons, whether it be the author's fault or Yorkshire's'.⁶⁰ During the mid-nineteenth century, the North of England was stigmatised as backwards and "uncivilised", reflected in Gaskell's description of Haworth's 'wild, rough population' with their 'blunt and harsh' accents, which pandered to southern English perceptions of the North (*Life*, 61).⁶¹

Wainwright's portrayal of Haworth is, unlike these reviews, not reductive. Her vision of the village includes the skyline full of mill chimneys, the muddied, bustling Main Street, and the tree-less surroundings of the parsonage, all of which are in keeping with the now accepted reality, rather than the fantasy, of Haworth.⁶² Rather than blaming Yorkshire for the production of such "coarse" books, Wainwright seeks to reinstate the Brontës' "Northernness" as positive and generative. Yet, in seeking to 'bust some of those myths' and to 'reclaim' the Brontës for the North, *To Walk Invisible* inverts the initial representation of 'Yorkshire roughness' and its associations with violence, sticking more closely to early perceptions of the family than Wainwright's comments suggest.

Gaskell portrayed Haworth's history as full of 'tales of positive violence and crime', as a means of explaining and justifying the apparent violence and coarseness of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontës's writing (*Life*, 68). Considered in relation to Wainwright's focus on the sisters' home life and their literary endeavours leading up to September 1848, Gaskell's words are prescient:

The year 1848 opened with sad domestic distress. [...] It is well that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontës in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the long agony

⁶⁰ From an unsigned review, *Spectator*, 3 November 1849, in Allott, 130–2, p. 131.

⁶¹ Katie Wales notes that 'to sensitive Victorians the ugliness of the industrial North was mirrored in the uncouthness of the language'. See *Northern English: A Cultural and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 115.

⁶² As Juliet Barker writes: "'Isolated", "solitary", "lonely" are the epithets on every page [of Gaskell's *Life*]. But in reality, Haworth was a busy, industrial township not some remote rural village of *Brigadoon*-style fantasy.' See *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p. 92.

they suffered. It is well, too, that they who have objected to the representation of coarseness and shrank from it with repugnance, as if such conception arose out of the writers should learn that, not from the imagination – not from internal conception – but from the hard cruel facts, pressed down, by external life, upon their very senses, for long months and years together, did they write out what they saw, obeying the stern dictates of their consciences. (*Life*, 335)

As with the depiction of Haworth, *To Walk Invisible* does not fall into the trap of suggesting Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's novels emerged only from 'what they saw'. Yet it is notable that Gaskell is here figuring coarseness, cruelty, and pain as creative catalysts for the Brontës' texts. As noted previously, Wainwright also positions violence as a stimulus behind the publication of their novels, as Branwell's brutality convinces the sisters (in particular, Emily) to seek a publisher. In Gaskell's *Life* and the early reviews, as well as in Wainwright's biopic, violence acts, then, as a generative force.

The difference, however, hinges on the nature of the writer's "vision". For Gaskell, her conception of coarseness and violence was a form of justification, an *apologia*, in line with Charlotte Brontë's own damage control in her 'Preface' and 'Biographical Notice' for the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* (1847). For Wainwright, there is no need for any form of apology because she wants her "vision" to be considered the most authentic, the closest to the "truth". In this sense, there is something in Juliet Barker's belief that, '[u]nlike their contemporaries, we can value their work without being outraged or even surprised by the directness of the language and the brutality of the characters'.⁶³ Perhaps, finally, we can now 'recognise [the Brontës] for who and what they really were', violence and all – or, at least, we believe we can.⁶⁴

To Walk Invisible reconfigures what violence means within the Brontë legacy; and this reconfiguration of violence within their lives and work is borne out in other recent

⁶³ Barker, *The Brontës*, p. xx.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Brontë adaptations and re-imaginings. From the mid-nineteenth century to the present, violence has flipped from a negative to a positive presence in how we perceive the Brontës' lives and works. Initially, it was positioned – primarily by Gaskell, but also by Charlotte Brontë herself – as an integral force in the formation of the sisters' work, but one from which they should be distanced. It has now become, as indicated by *To Walk Invisible* and other recent creative responses, central to the depiction of “authentic” retellings of the Brontës' lives and work. This modern focalisation of violence within narratives surrounding the Brontës perhaps tells us more about the differences between Victorian and twenty-first-century approaches to literary and visual violences, rather than the Brontës' representations of brutality in themselves. Yet it does indicate the centrality of violence within the Brontë legacy, as something foundational within ongoing understandings, perceptions, and reconsiderations of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing and biographies.

The Brontës – “Violent Writers”?

The consideration of Gaskell's *Life* as an ongoing source-text for the violence within the Brontës' writing and cultural afterlives returns this thesis to where it began, as it opened with an exploration of the ways in which violence was embedded in the “Brontë myth” from its beginnings. It also echoes what John Bowen refers to as the ‘cycles of violence’ present in *Wuthering Heights*, as well as Charlotte Brontë's repeated returning to the same scene of political violence in her juvenilia and later work.⁶⁵ The recurring presence of violence, its cyclical nature, in the Brontë sisters' work, in turn, reflects the repeated and

⁶⁵ John Bowen, ‘*Wuthering Heights*: Violence and Cruelty’, *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*, 6 June 2014 <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/wuthering-heights-violence-and-cruelty>> [Accessed 17 September 2018].

ongoing reference by critics, readers, and respondents to the brutal, cruel, coarse aspects of their writing. In the process of examining and analysing such a cyclical phenomenon, this thesis has provided an in-depth, extensive consideration of the nature and significance of violence in Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing and lives.

This thesis has addressed a lacuna in Brontë studies, revealing the ways in which violence is integral to Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's work and their legacies. It has engaged with and contributed to a range of interdisciplinary fields, including violence studies, nineteenth-century studies, religion and theology, politics, and linguistics, as well as ongoing conversations surrounding terrorism, domestic abuse, psychological self-harm, and the ethics of writing (about) violence. It has also positioned Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë within wider early to mid-nineteenth-century discussions around violence, seeking to ascertain whether they were as unique in their depictions of brutality as early reviewers and subsequent critics often assume. In the process, it showed the myriad ways in which the Brontës actively, as well as implicitly, were in dialogue with contemporary perceptions and depictions of violence, from the influence of Byron's poetry and newspaper reports, to competing conversations on pain, sexual violence, education, class, and regionality.

Opening with a meditation on Claire Harman's insistence, through Charlotte Brontë, on the violence and impiety of *Wuthering Heights*, this thesis highlights the ways in which – when it comes to the Brontës – violence continues to trouble, baffle, and often elude critics, biographers, and readers. This is partly because of the multiplicity of violences contained in the novels and poetry of the three sisters, as reflected by the “subsections” of violence explored in each chapter. Chapter One considered the language of violence in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and selected poems, locating violence in the embodied and intangible gaps of her narratives, and thereby demonstrating the ways in which violence is present even (and, at times, especially) when it remains unwitnessed

and undescribed. The absent presence of violence identified in Chapter One can be traced throughout this thesis, indicating a collective language of violence shared by Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë, though used in divergent ways and for differing ends. Chapter Two explored Charlotte Brontë's practice of embedding violence in language through her representations of political violence in her juvenilia and second published novel, *Shirley* (1849), in which she engaged with contemporary understandings of terrorism, crowds, and uprisings. The chapter noted the omission of the moment of violence itself in these texts, while also revealing the contaminating effect political violence has on characters, landscape, and narrative. It also highlighted another strand running throughout this thesis: the transformational capacity of literary violence. The note sent by the Luddites in *Shirley* transformed their unseen physical acts of violence into a textual expression, thereby transmuting a seemingly unreasonable event into something legible and arguably legitimate.

Chapter Three considered the literary strategies and silences adopted by Charlotte and Anne Brontë when representing gendered and sexual violence in their respective novels, *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Although these texts differ in formal techniques and in their depiction of relationships, both reveal the power of symbolic violence and figurative abuse. While neither text explicitly represents sexual violence, both novels gesture to the hidden reality and possibility of rape and physical abuse, engaging with contemporary discourses around masculinity, women's rights in society, and the law. Anne Brontë's novel in particular raises ethical issues inherent in representing and discussing domestic abuse, once more highlighting the ongoing complexities and contestations involved when writing violence.

Chapter Four further explored Anne Brontë's writing, focusing on her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, and examining its recourse to religion when justifying and attempting to tame violence. Intersecting with mid-nineteenth-century considerations of animal cruelty,

childrearing, and governesses, *Agnes Grey* further confirms literary violence's ability to transform events and to be itself transformed from irrational and impious to religiously sanctioned and even sacred. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) also uses biblical narrative to transform the layers of psychological pain endured by Lucy Snowe into an enlivening force, one which also imposes itself on the reader and on the appropriated biblical text to create further layers of transformational violence. These layers of literary violence have been further explored in this Afterword, which considered the violence of adaptation in its many forms. What these chapters reveal is that violence is not simply aligned with physicality and embodiment; it also exists in the margins, off the page, unseen – and it is ineluctably embedded in Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's narratives.

This thesis has combined the close reading of literary sources with an historicist approach, to view the Brontës' literary violences through the eyes of their first readers and respondents. Yet it has also been informed by its author's own twenty-first-century perspective and the ongoing fascination with violence represented in books and onscreen, as well as attempts and strategies to tackle abuse, brutality, and war. J. Carter Wood writes that 'violence was addressed in new ways, being, so to speak, "put into words" in the nineteenth century'.⁶⁶ Conversations surrounding violence have not ceased. Indeed, such discussions have proliferated and remain as pressing as they were when the Brontës published their novels, even if we are, as Steven Pinker claims, 'living in the most peaceable era in our species' existence'.⁶⁷ In 2002, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published their *World Report on Violence and Health*, in which violence was outlined as a public health matter, something that can 'be prevented and its impact reduced, in the same way that public health efforts have prevented and reduced pregnancy-related

⁶⁶ J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 29.

⁶⁷ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. xix.

complications, workplace injuries, [and] infectious diseases'.⁶⁸ It was in the early part of the nineteenth century that this idea of violence as 'eradicable' emerged, becoming, 'as never before, a "problem" to be solved'.⁶⁹ As Carter Wood writes, the 'modern multiplicity of the meanings of violence is a product of [...] nineteenth-century narrative efforts to define and differentiate it as a phenomenon'.⁷⁰ This thesis is therefore timely, in the same way that an in-depth consideration of the Brontës' representations of violence is overdue.

This thesis has found that, while Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë were not necessarily writing outside of normative cultural and literary portrayals of violence, they were perceived to be. As this thesis has progressed, the question of whether the Brontës were "violent writers" has itself evolved: why are they so frequently and often unambiguously deemed to be so? Such a question feels somewhat unwieldy, but it has been this thesis's aim to offer insights into this query. As the opening of this Afterword suggests, the "woman question" is still pertinent, as writers like Sarah Kane remain the target of suspicion when representing violence. The contemporary and current response to the Brontës' literary violences is therefore undoubtedly affected by their gender. Above all, this thesis has revealed the slippery, contested, often contradictory nature of violence within all three sisters' work.

One aspect unifying Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's representations of violence is the recurring notion of its transformational properties. Whether the moment of violence is transmuted into a dash, captured in a word like 'frenzy', translated into a legible note and voice, or reconfigured in the "Brontë myth", it is always mutable, an unfixed point of narrative oscillation. In Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë's writing, as

⁶⁸ *World Report on Violence and Health*, eds. Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi, and Rafael Lozano (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2002), p. 3.

⁶⁹ J. Carter Wood, 'A Useful Savagery: The Invention of Violence in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9.1 (2004), 22–42, p. 26.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

well as in perceptions of their lives, violence can be generative, acting as a creative force; but it also often eludes straightforward interpretation and frequently defies comprehension. This paradox is central to any understanding of violence in relation to the Brontës, and it is the hope of this thesis that future considerations of this rich, expansive topic will recognise the full significance of these three writers' representations of violence in its many transformations.

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