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# THE POWER OF SILENCE:

# THE QUESTION OF RESERVE IN FOUR VICTORIAN NOVELS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Victorian women's silence has been the subject of investigation by many feminist critics, and most have understood it as a function of repression. More recently, however, feminists have begun to recognise more productive levels of silence. This thesis examines four Victorian novels that show that silence is not a stable social sign with a clear meaning but an aspect of the Victorian convention of femininity that can mean different things and be used in different ways.

Chapter One looks at silence and choice in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South, tracing the implications of choosing reserve. Chapter Two turns to a consideration of self-silencing and sanity in Charlotte Brontë's Villette, while Chapter Three looks at secrecy and survival in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. The thesis concludes with a reading of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss in Chapter Four that concentrates on the risks of using silence as retreat into a fantasy space.

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# INTRODUCTION

Victorian women's silence has been the subject of investigation by many feminist critics. In their pioneering The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read all kinds of feminine silence, including reserve, as the product of male repression. Because they saw women as powerless and silenced, they looked at the ways Victorian women writers broke their repressive bonds. The problem, as they saw it, was that: "until quite recently the woman writer has had (if only unconsciously) to define herself as a mysterious creature who resides behind the angel or monster or angel/monster image" assigned to them by male stereotyping (17). The pressure of this binary model on women writers resulted in a fragmentation of the personality that searched for an identity not defined by either the angel or monster extremes. According to Gilbert and Gubar, the consequence of such fragmentation and repression was a pre-occupation with sickness, madness, confinement, and, ultimately, death. The four novels I examine deal with these fears and concerns, but Gilbert and Gubar failed to consider the important ways in which female protagonists may transcend their circumstances through the power of the silence the critics read only as repressive. In this way, the texts ironically achieve something of the potency of the male text, which Gilbert and Gubar define in the following way: "a literary text is not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest" (6).

The responses to Gilbert and Gubar's study have taken several different approaches. From a socio-historical perspective, Mary Poovey's Uneven Developments (1988) picks up the theme of social powerlessness, and looks at the slow development of

public economic roles for middle-class working women. She examines the stereotypes of separate public (male) and private (female) spheres, and suggests that this division arises from male anxieties about women's sexuality. These anxieties, which are displaced from the sexual to the economic realm, reinforce the need for male domination and female separation because "[i]f women were governed not by reason (like men), but by something else, then they could hardly be expected (or allowed) to participate in the economic and political fray" (11). More recently, Elizabeth Langland has countered the arguments about women's powerlessness in Nobody's Angels (1995), suggesting that Marxist feminist critics undervalue Victorian women's power and influence because they understand such power in "materialistic" terms and ignore the social power women wielded in the private "cultural" sphere (5). Their role was in fact often double, for Langland argues that although middle-class women have been "frequently interpreted only as victims of patriarchal oppression [they] were both oppressed as women and oppressors as middle-class managers" (18). Such recognition of more than one possible interpretation of women's power also permits a new interpretation of women's silence. In particular, the reserve with which middle-class working women protected their reputations and behind which they hid and controlled their sexuality, can be seen as a powerful and positive force in the battle for female autonomy.

While Poovey and Langland examine the choices available to women from an historical angle, other feminist critics have approached the issue through questions of writing and language. In Women Writing and Writing About Women (1979), for example, Mary Jacobus suggests that although women's writing necessarily worked within "male" discourse, it worked "ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be

written" (12-13). Margaret Homans takes up this line of thought in Bearing the Word (1986), where she argues for a language that strives for embodiment and tries to transcend the fixity of written language. But another way to "write what cannot be written" is to include silence in the text. Victorian women writers often make visible the issues silenced by ideology, as many feminist critics have suggested, but they also make silence itself visible. In the course of a narrative, pauses, gaps, and silences must be marked in some way; that is, the narrator must *write in* silences by drawing attention to a longer than usual pause or to a total lack of response. The efficacy of this technique is often only realised in a concrete way when the narrative is dramatised or filmed. Then the pauses and silences which must otherwise be indicated within the text fall into a natural place in the dialogue and properly indicate their impact. Silence can, after all, take many forms and serve many purposes. A pause in conversation indicates a moment of reflection, for example, creating a space for choice and possibly for resistance and disagreement. This kind of pause I call "suspended speech" to indicate a distinction between a deliberate pause and the "speaking silence" men so often attribute to women, when they choose to interpret all female silence as modesty or as favourable to their own desires (as often in courtship novels). Silence can also be reserve, that more consistent silence behind which Victorian women are encouraged to hide their desires. The striking thing in Victorian fiction is the frequency with which women writers use powerful silent figures as protagonists and mentors, showing their reserved demeanour as the positive power of reasoned self-control and as a source of female agency. This reserve is reinforced in positive ways by contrasting reserved characters with chattering females, who are depicted as weak, frivolous, and preoccupied with the material side of life. Their

reserved counterparts, on the other hand, display a power in silence, a depth in character, and an interest in moral and spiritual matters.

Chapter One, "Silence and Choice in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South," focuses on how Elizabeth Gaskell's socially engaged industrial novels complicate the proposal scene she inherits from Jane Austen and the courtship novel. The conventional interpretation of the speaking silence which follows a proposal of marriage is shown to be inadequate in Gaskell's Victorian novels, and this inadequacy opens the way for a re-reading of other kinds of silence. If the speaking silence at this important moment of choice in a woman's life can mean something more or other than simple assent, speaking silences at other moments of decision are also subject to new interpretation. Such re-interpretation also calls for a revaluation of conventional reserve, which ceases to be the silence of repression and becomes instead an acceptable choice for women. I trace the implications of choosing reserve through an analysis of Gaskell's North and South (1855), examining Margaret Hale's reticence in terms of creating a necessary space for her to grow in a new and alien environment. While she rejects a vocal public role, preferring to act within domestic convention, she uses silence to confirm the choices available to her and, within the intimacy of private relationships, she exercises those choices in a positive way to change her social environment and to benefit others. Her reserve wins her respect, but she reveals her strength and agency in moments of private crisis and thus makes apparent the role silence and reserve play in the life of a conventional heroine.

While reserve is a productive way to protect autonomy and to generate a space for making choices in a conventional heroine like Margaret Hale, it is insufficient for an

unconventional heroine like Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe. Reserve in itself is not adequate to preserve sanity, and the novel explores the ability of the individual to adopt self-silencing techniques that allow for the expression of feelings, especially passion, without disturbing reserve. This is the subject of Chapter Two, "Self-silencing and Sanity in Charlotte Brontë's Villette." Such techniques include the displacement of feelings in sympathetic resonance with the suffering of others, the private expression of passion in letters (sent or unsent), in diaries and in art, and the public acknowledgement of reciprocated feelings. Self-silencing is a necessary form of self-control for middle-class working women in particular since they are obliged to maintain outward decorum and a reserved demeanour in order to keep their access to the public realm of paid employment. For a middle-class working woman whose life is lived in the public space of an institution rather than the more private domestic space of a family, self-control and self-silencing require access to physical as well as mental space to be alone. This withdrawal is productive so long as it is temporary and so long as the time spent in withdrawal is used responsibly to acknowledge and deal with feelings, not wasted in fantasising. Lucy Snowe provides an exemplary case for an examination of the connection between self-silencing and sanity because she is passionate by nature, but both her suffering and her professional situation as a teacher lead her to be reticent about her private life. In Villette (1853), Brontë explores in detail how a professional woman is able to resist too overt an expression of her feelings, guarding both her independence and her sanity.

Chapter Three, "Secrecy and Survival in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," turns to a more deliberate form of silence than either reserve or self-silencing.

Secrecy is primarily concerned with the protection of identity to ensure a survival that is threatened by external moral and legal pressures. While the feelings controlled by self-silencing are often not transgressive in nature, although they may be too intense to reveal openly, secrets more frequently conceal illegalities and transgressive behaviour linked to fallen women. For women who have achieved respectability in society despite the ambiguity of their past, secrecy is a necessary tool in their efforts to survive. Exposure destroys reputations and threatens autonomy even if it cannot overthrow character. Character is rooted in a consistent demeanour, often of reserve, but identity is less easily protected and requires either a complete honesty not always possible (as the necessity of suppressing the existence of Margaret Hale's brother Frederick in North and South indicates) or a carefully guarded secrecy. For Helen Huntingdon and her son in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848), secrecy about her true identity is the price she must pay for leaving an abusive marriage. Secrecy protects more than identity, however, and the chapter also examines the destructive consequences of Arthur Huntingdon's secret affair with Annabella Lowborough and the manipulation of their transgression by Arthur and his friends in what I have called the "open secret," whose permeability distinguishes it from the self-protective silence Helen uses to hide her identity and location from her husband. In such extreme circumstances, physical withdrawal is seen as a protective and productive use of silence, even though the necessity for secrecy has damaging effects on Helen's spontaneous character.

If Margaret Hale's reserve represents the ideal of feminine obedience in a domestic situation, Maggie Tulliver's rejection of feminine obedience in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860) represents an opposite extreme of female silence. In

Chapter Four, "Withdrawal and Reflection in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss," I examine the risks of using silence as a retreat from the reality of the world into a fantasy space of imagination and illusion. Although Maggie uses physical withdrawal in ways that appear similar to Lucy Snowe's search for privacy in Villette, what happens in times of retreat is less productive in the case of Maggie. Instead of acknowledging her passionate feelings and dealing with them, she represses them and creates an illusory response to her circumstances by constructing an unrealistic self-image. This unproductive use of silence places her in a cycle of failure and denial that is slowly broken by her maturing responses to the tragedy of her father's financial failure and death. Eliot shows this process as a move from self-absorption to the capacity to make reflective decisions, but reflection is delayed until the final section of the novel, suggesting the impossibility of adapting quickly to the demands of harsh reality when childhood has been spent in distancing the self from that reality.

These novels show that silence is not a stable social sign with a clear meaning but an aspect of the Victorian convention of femininity that can mean different things and be used in different ways. Silence cannot be understood as simple or single, but must be approached as a shifting space in which Victorian women writers could explore some of the implications of convention, and find ways of turning it to their own purposes.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Silence and Choice in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South

The wise remain silent until the right moment

–Sirach 20:7a*

In an age of rapid and disconcerting changes, conventions can be useful in providing a buffer between society and the individual. For respectable Victorian women that buffer was often the silence of reserve, the convention that kept them on the periphery of the public sphere and protected their domestic reputations. Such silence is often understood as a self-protective device, as in Lucy Snowe's silence in Villette, where silence is linked not simply to gender but to Lucy's status as a working woman as well. In order to survive in the male-dominated world, as Mary Poovey and others have shown, middle-class working women like Lucy had to create a careful image of reserve and decorum.[1] As both Anne and Charlotte Brontë themselves learned, governesses (like teachers) had to cultivate a silent and efficient demeanour, and their experience shapes the presentation of governess life in Agnes Grey (1848) and Jane Eyre (1847). Victorian novels also make clear that the importance of reserve was not restricted to women of genteel background but extended to all women who sought respectability. In Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth (1853), for instance, Ruth's quiet and reserved demeanour enables her to earn a living and gain the community's trust. When her status as fallen woman becomes

known years later, this demeanour continues to stand her in good stead even if it does not in itself win back her reputation. Nor was it only figures linked to the education of children who had to cultivate the protection of reserve. In Geraldine Jewsbury's The Half Sisters (1848), Bianca Pazzi is able to maintain respectability, despite her profession as an actress and the stigma of illegitimate birth, in part because she knows when to speak and when to be silent. It is the ability to recognise and use the assumptions that society makes about the link between reserve and character that allows these women to make their way in a world where women were encouraged to be withdrawn and serene.

But knowing when and where to speak is also about personal autonomy. The notion of reserve posits silence as an alternative to chatter on the one hand and to transgressive expression of opinion on the other. For many Victorian women, their public role was limited by their relegation to the private, domestic sphere. Within that sphere, conversation was a means of exercising choice, both in terms of speech and of silence. The pauses that I will call "suspended speech" provided a space for thought and for choice. Jane Austen is exemplary with her introduction of free indirect discourse and her insistence that readers appreciate the subtleties of speech and silences. Her proposal scenes are especially telling. In the proposal scene the personal domestic situation of the woman intersects with that of the man and provides a place for the couple to define themselves as domestic figures creating their own new version of a family. This moment of choice allows the young woman a sense of autonomy at the very point when, ironically, that autonomy is about to be challenged by the social institution of marriage. It is all the more crucial for this reason. Nineteenth-century convention insisted that the woman, whether or not she loved the man, was not supposed to anticipate the proposal (a

sexually charged overture), and she was expected to respond non-verbally with a blush, a smile or even tears of emotion.[2] If she did not speak, the lover could interpret this as a kind of speaking silence, a tacit agreement that she would be his wife. This is a convention that a writer like Austen often uses to comic effect. When Mr Elton's proposal to Emma elicits horrified silence, for example, the intrepid lover exclaims: "Charming Miss Woodhouse! allow me to interpret this interesting silence. It confesses that you have long understood me" (Emma 110). Emma is forced vehemently to deny the interpretation Mr Elton puts on the scene: "No sir, . . . it confesses no such thing. . . . I have seen you only as the admirer of my friend. In no other light could you be more to me than a common acquaintance. I am exceedingly sorry: but it is well that the mistake ends where it does" (110). Emma, of course, is surprisingly outspoken. Most young ladies in courtship novels tended to leave room for hope in their effort to be polite. After all, the convention also assumed that to have an opinion against one lover was to express a preference for another.[3]

Silence after a proposal underlines the importance of a woman's allowing herself a time of choice. In itself the silence is not sufficient indication of agreement, although it is often interpreted that way. In order to be accurately understood, this silence must be accompanied by appropriate signs of acceptance or rejection. In Emma's second proposal experience, she is again caught off-guard, this time by Mr Knightley. They have been talking of love. Emma denies ever loving Frank Churchill, and both she and Mr Knightley remark on how fortunate Frank is to be marrying the superior Jane Fairfax. Mr Knightley, who has received Emma's remarks about the undamaged state of her heart in silence, leads in to what will be a proposal: "Emma, I must tell what you will not ask

[about why he envies Frank], though I may wish it unsaid the next moment" (352). Emma, who assumes everyone is in love with her friend Harriet Smith, is reluctant to hear of her own rejection. She advises Mr Knightley: "Take a little time, consider, do not commit yourself" (352). However, she relents and lets him speak. He concludes his declaration with the plea: "Say 'No,' if it is to be said."–She could really say nothing.– "You are silent," he cried, with great animation; "absolutely silent! at present I ask no more" (353). Mr Knightley is not sure Emma will accept him, and his joy at her silence is almost as great as if she spoke in confirmation of her answer. Jane Austen takes the reader inside Emma's head by using free indirect discourse to show Emma's process of choice, her confusion, her silent pleasure, and finally her speaking in words. Emma really does love Knightley and she is too independent to rely on silence alone to indicate her consent.

When Elizabeth Gaskell takes up the courtship novel and attaches it to the industrial novel, she goes beyond Austen's paradigm. An Austen heroine moves from a domestic sphere in her father's home into a new domestic sphere in her husband's without agency in the public realm. But for Gaskell, women are already engaged in the struggle for survival in the harsher industrial environment, and their choices reflect that reality. In her first novel, Mary Barton (1848), she uses Mary's proposal scene to underline the need for space to think out one's response. When Jem Wilson asks Mary to marry him, the pressure to speak at once or to risk being misunderstood causes her great pain. At this point Mary is struggling with hidden feelings for the rich but profligate Harry Carson and with her own social ambition, so when Jem proposes, she is silent: "She could not speak at once; her words would not come." Jem interprets this as a

speaking silence indicating consent, and whispers: " 'Mary, they say silence gives consent; is it so?'. . . Now or never the effort must be made. 'No! it does not with me.' Her voice was calm, although she trembled from head to foot. 'I will always be your friend, Jem, but I can never be your wife.' " (Mary Barton 130). Mary wants a silence that is not liable to conventional interpretation, one that gives a genuine choice, but she is not allowed such a silence. And she soon regrets being forced into so quick and direct an answer when she realises that she really does love Jem after she has committed herself to refusing him. The convention of interpreting feminine silence in such situations as a speaking silence thus highlights the struggle to speak as an individual.

Gaskell's novels emphasize that women in particular require silence to provide a space wherein to consider–and often resist–the demands being made on them. Such silence takes advantage of the convention of reserve, which encourages women to remain silent in public. They can listen and learn and come to a decision, exploiting the feminine code for their own purposes without overturning it. In North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell nicely defines this space when she writes that at a dinner party Margaret Hale "silently took a very decided part in the question" the men are discussing (216). The men are concerned about threats that their mill workers will go on strike and are looking for ways to ensure that their own finances are affected as little as possible if this happens. Margaret is free under these circumstances to express an opinion if she wishes, but she prefers to respect the convention that women are not politically engaged. However, although she allows herself to be defined in conventional domestic terms, she uses her position to promote active social ends. Margaret develops her understanding of the issues being discussed, so that she becomes more aware of the implications of what she has

heard and can then act on this new understanding. Eventually, she gains a more active agency that is tied to her quietness. Since Margaret rarely speaks out, when she does speak others pay attention. These others notably include men engaged in the world of work from which the heroine is excluded, men like Nicholas Higgins, the trade unionist, and John Thornton, the mill owner. Revealing her grasp of public situations at key moments, Margaret gains indirect access to socio-economic power through private speech and influence.[4] She finds this approach to power so successful in fact that she continues to exercise it even after she becomes an heiress and is free to express open opinions or take overt action on her own behalf.

Although Margaret remains within conventional feminism, Gaskell nevertheless uses her as a vehicle to express dissatisfaction with several aspects of the feminine role, including marriage. In the opening sequence of the novel, for example, Margaret is surprised by the debilitating effect Edith's upcoming marriage has on her cousin. She never expresses aloud the subversive thoughts she has about the limitations of the role of wife and mother, although these are apparent in her reaction to Edith's chatty letters, when Margaret herself is struggling with life and death issues. Equally telling is her continued resistance to marriage after Edith returns to London with baby Sholto and tries to convince Margaret that married life is blissful. Margaret does not in fact consider marriage as an option for herself until she inherits Mr Bell's fortune and thus gains an additional agency in the social realm. Under these circumstances, marriage fulfils a different function, giving her more direct access to the public sphere while allowing her to remain within domestic space, where her natural reserve can give way to quiet private discussion.

In North and South, the proposal scenes have an added resonance because Gaskell sets up the problem as one of public influence from domestic space. While Margaret is still a young woman living in her father's house, she accepts her role as daughter and attends to the domestic responsibilities this role entails. Her father's indecision and her mother's illness give her additional agency in this conventional sphere, and this agency is augmented for Margaret by her understanding of the charitable work available to a minister's family. In Helstone, she is encouraged to take an active but confidential part in the life of the parish, quietly visiting the poor and sick and meeting their needs. She sees marriage placing limitations on this agency since wealthy men looking for a conventional wife expect that woman to confine herself to social events in their own circle of friends, restricting her activities to visiting and dinner parties. Margaret is unwilling to take on a position that would deny her the work her social conscience dictates and, therefore, she rejects such suitors. Thus for Gaskell the proposal scene becomes a place for the woman to evaluate her social role and to create a space for change. Later, when Margaret does accept the domestic responsibilities of her role as wife, she insists on combining these conventional expectations about her place in the family with a quiet influence in a wider social sphere because she still wants to alleviate poverty and sickness. In Gaskell's novels, women are shown to exercise choice in selecting or rejecting a husband, and marriage ceases to be the single means of self-definition. For example, Ruth refuses to marry the father of her illegitimate son because he never sought her out or showed any sign of caring for her after the end of their affair. She thinks he would be a negative influence on their child, and she rejects the idea of sharing responsibility for his upbringing with such an unequal moral partner. Although

Gaskell recognises marriage as an important part of a woman's role, her novels no longer predicate female success and survival on this one decision as was generally the case in eighteenth-century courtship novels.

Gaskell begins by presenting her female protagonist as someone capable of quietly accommodating herself to her circumstances, but she does not suggest that this ability to compromise has limited Margaret Hale's capacity to evaluate those circumstances or to choose her response. On the eve of her cousin Edith's wedding, Margaret attracts the attention of a suitor of her own, Henry Lennox, who is aware that Edith's marriage will remove Margaret from her aunt's London home and place her in humble circumstances in her father's southern parish of Helstone. While she is engaged in "happy brooding" about the coming changes in her life, her reverie is disturbed by her aunt, who calls her to model some Cashmere shawls (36). In this scene, Margaret's statuesque beauty is contrasted to her cousin Edith's feminine delicacy in a way that makes Margaret appear strong but reserved next to her fragile but loquacious relative. Her "quite silent and passive" figure attracts the attention of Henry Lennox, but he proves in subsequent banter his limited view of women (39). His requirements in a bride extend only as far as drawing-room conversation and the ability to look attractive. In his mind, only men work or can understand the intricacies of the real world outside the domestic haven. Basing his hopes on what he thinks he sees in Margaret, he proposes to her at Helstone. He asks: "But I may hope, may I not, Margaret, that sometime you will think of me as a lover?" She struggles silently, "trying to discover the truth as it was in her own heart, before replying, then she said: 'I have never thought of–you, but as a friend. I like to think of you so; but I am sure I could never think of you as anything else' " (61-

62). The moment of silence, which Henry does not interpret in his favour, allows Margaret to choose not to enter immediately into the conventional heroine's plot of seeking a good marriage.

Like Austen, Gaskell allows for more than one proposal scene to underline the importance of this event in a young woman's life. Margaret is next proposed to by John Thornton, and she rejects him. The reasons are different, although male misreading of the heroine remains the problem. John Thornton is moved to propose after Margaret has shielded him with her body when the rioting mill-workers threaten him with stoning. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests: "Margaret. . .is made to share publicity and its attendant confusion with Thornton and to work out for herself the psychic consequences of. . .asserting a personal stand in the face of a larger authority, and of enduring the complicated aftermath" (296).[5] Thornton assumes that Margaret's unconventionally bold behaviour is linked to love for him, a feeling he would like to reciprocate, and his proposal is designed to protect her reputation from the consequences of such an overt show of affection. But, like Lennox, Thornton has misread Margaret. Her motive in silently throwing herself in front of him is, at least in part, the sense of responsibility she feels for her own action in encouraging him to go out and speak to the crowd. She explains her actions by saying that "any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield, with her reverenced helplessness, a man in danger from the violence of numbers" (253). She sees her action as totally appropriate in the situation because she has exposed Thornton to danger she did not expect by goading him into speaking to the men. She thinks that her conversations with Nicholas Higgins, an unemployed mill worker, have given her an insight into the situation that Thornton lacks

as a mill owner out of touch with his men. When she steps in front of him, she assumes that her femininity will protect them both because she is unaware of the sexual implications of her action. Shirley Foster sums up: "Margaret's indignation [at Thornton's proposal] derives partly from the recognition that men inevitably interpret women's behaviour in sexual terms, and though Gaskell, with psychological astuteness, implies a degree of self-deception in her heroine. . .she shares her heroine's protest" (151-152). In rejecting Thornton's conventional response to her behaviour and silencing any romantic feelings she may have, Margaret continues to give herself the space she needs to grow and develop.

The opportunity for making that space has been generated for Margaret by her own father's doubts and uncertainties, which prompted the unsettling move from the comfortable southern rectory to the alien industrial north early in the novel. As Dorice Elliott points out: "Mr Hale's resignation from the established church is. . .significant because it leaves that contested space [for authority] clear for his daughter" (35). Hale's decision indeed opens up "contested space" in which Margaret can grow, develop, observe and speak.[6] The reserve necessary to suspend speech, it seems, is vital after a change of status, whether it is Margaret's displacement from Helstone to Milton or her later elevation to heiress, because the unsettling changes must be absorbed and evaluated before they can be articulated in appropriate ways. Any attempt to express opinions before internal adjustments have taken place risks being understood as criticism, complaint, or childish dislike of change. Those who know nothing of the strength of Margaret's character (because they know her only in the present) judge her by outward appearances. Like other female protagonists, Margaret cannot draw attention to her past

with its trials and privileges without drawing unwanted attention to herself.[7] Only the bare details of her situation are known. Change brings anxiety, doubts, and questions. These questions may lead to speech, but the new situation must first be considered in silence.

Restraint of speech allows the observer to avoid misjudging an alien world and hence expressing inappropriate opinions. Thus after a period of quietly observing how the north differs from the south, Margaret tells Nicholas Higgins that southern life would not suit him. She warns him about the outdoor work, the rheumatism, the inadequate wages and diet, the lack of human companionship. She recognises: "[Y]ou of all men are not one to bear a life among such labourers. What would be peace to them, would be eternal fretting to you" (382). She also learns that a widening of experience, linked as it may be to suffering and pain, changes one's own personality. As she realizes in her return visit to Helstone, what she once considered desirable for herself in peaceful southern life has become inadequate. The rural world of the south, mired in tradition and in petty but irresolvable disputes (like that over the death of a cat), is no longer a place of peace and charm for someone who has experienced at first hand how such divisions destroy social unity. Even the very limited fellowship available to the local farmers is under attack by a new minister who is opposed to alcohol, which Margaret has learned to view as a solace as well as a threat to well-being. The minister's invasive techniques of control sadden Margaret because she sees them as preventing communication and fellowship and dividing the rural community, much as the industrial world is divided. Other changes taking place at the rectory and at the school make her feel alienated from this previously familiar world. As in Milton, the new south must be learned in silence

and in observation. Nostalgia and criticism will not restore Helstone to what she remembers nor will they take away the changes in her own heart that contribute to her sense of alienation.

Margaret's journey to self-discovery begins with the rejection of an easy marriage and the acceptance of a new life in a northern location. Her father's decision condemns the family to a life of genteel poverty dependent on the goodwill of an old friend, Mr Bell, and the contacts he has in Milton. Bonnie Gerard comments: "Gaskell insists on our perceiving Margaret initially as a silenced figure in this industrial setting, her silence betokening both her social disempowerment and her ethical disdain for the materialistic practice of 'testing ... everything by the standard of wealth' " (23). Margaret Hale needs to learn a new language, converting her previous knowledge into new perceptions and strategies in silent observation before she can speak effectively. Coral Lansbury suggests, moreover, that Margaret's silence is a way of preventing Thornton from assigning economic motives to what she says and judging her by her reluctance to talk about money or possessions, both forbidden topics in the upper class circles she has known in the south (107). This chosen silence, which links her desire to speak appropriately to the need to learn new conventions, provides a space for Margaret to find her voice in an alien environment.

Gaskell shows how the expectations of feminine behaviour in the south can be misplaced and misread in the north where openness, integrity, and directness compensate for southern ideals of nobility, breeding, and polite but pointless conversation. Certainly, Margaret's reserve is misinterpreted at first, especially by John Thornton. He sees her as "superb," but the narrator also stresses his sense of her "haughtiness" and "feminine

defiance": "the short curled upper lip, the round, massive up-turned chin, the manner of carrying her head, her movements, full of a soft feminine defiance, always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness" (100). The tired Margaret is unable to carry on an animated conversation when they meet, and she often lapses into a silence which is compounded by his own "curt sentences [answering] all the remarks she made," so that "[h]er quiet coldness of demeanour he interpreted into contemptuousness" (100-101). Margaret then adds to the initial impression in subsequent visits by "continu[ing] resolutely silent" on the subject of differences between north and south, which have caused sharp dissension between Margaret and Thornton, and by neglecting to shake hands: "It was the frank familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it. She simply bowed her farewell; although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention" (123, 127). These early encounters leave Thornton unimpressed with Margaret, and he sees her as a "proud, disagreeable girl" (127).

Gaskell links Margaret's proud silence to the pride and privacy of the northern workers. Just as Margaret is reluctant to be judged by external appearances, so the workers are reluctant to build close relationships with outsiders where they might be misjudged. In the industrial north conventions are not the same as in the rural south. In the comparatively isolated communities of the south, visitors are welcome, and the minister and his family have an essential role to play in the survival of their parishioners. The church and its charities are crucial in softening some of the harshness of a rural economy. In the industrial north, on the other hand, houses are close together, and neighbours work hard to create privacy. Faith becomes a more personal response to

circumstances, less something regulated by church authority, and new, more rational versions of Protestant faith like Unitarianism flourish. As Lansbury stresses, commenting on Gaskell's Unitarian belief, Unitarian theology was "an optimistic affirmation of man as a rational being who could ultimately attain a perfect state in this world" (11). This climate of belief is translated to the fiction, and Gaskell presents Margaret as free in the north to exercise her mind and to come to logical conclusions about the world in a way she was not in the traditional, conservative south. This colours her attitude to charity, allowing her to respect others' private space in the north. Here physical poverty, an adjunct to an urban economy where income can rarely be supplemented with garden produce, leads to an unwillingness to be exposed to a stranger's view. In times of prosperity the house is neat and ornamented, but in times of need all the extras are pawned or sold to buy bread. In this environment, traditional charity is often seen as intrusive and controlling. The north is a cash economy, and the ability to earn that cash is a source of pride. Many northerners, deprived of the southern alternatives of bartering and growing goods to meet their needs, would rather starve than beg, and those excluded from employment like Higgins and Boucher are often driven to despair and occasionally suicide. Margaret chooses to experience these differences between charity in the north and south in reserved observation and in the domestic setting of Higgins' house rather than in pointed questions at public events like dinner parties.

When Margaret comes to the north, her immediate response is to read its culture in terms of what she has known in the south. So when she first meets with Bessy Higgins, Margaret sees someone who needs visiting and asks the family's name and address. Although Bessy's father responds to the questions with an address and their

name, to Margaret's surprise he also demands: "Whatten yo' asking for?" (112). She replies that she intends to visit, and then she learns that in the north such visits are not the gift of the visitor but the right of the visited, who must issue an invitation. Nicholas Higgins' response teaches her to expect things to be different: "I'm none so fond of having strange folk in my house. . . .Yo're a foreigner, as one may say, and maybe don't know many folk here, and yo've given my wench here flowers out of yo'r own hand;–yo' may come if yo' like" (113). Nicholas Higgins, a shrewd judge of character and a leader of one of the trade unions, is an excellent person to teach Margaret because he does not have the middle-class reluctance to talk business in front of a woman. Elliott sees in Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, "a new model of social relations that is based neither on rural paternalism nor on the industrial 'cash nexus.' In Gaskell's version of society, women play a vital role in the newly defined social sphere, a space which is both private and public" (25). It is a central Victorian paradox that part of feminine autonomy is the derivation of a sense of public significance in private space. If women choose the domestic sphere as the base for their social identity, defining themselves first as wife and mother, their agency in the public sphere would appear to be curtailed. However, as Elliott indicates, Gaskell's women bring to their domestic role a greater sense of their potential and agency, which spill over into the public realm through their domestic influence. This interest in women's roles in a new social sphere helps to define the importance of Gaskell's fiction, and it is crucial that she understands this sphere as a space which must be entered through silent observation and careful questioning.

These two techniques empower the woman and give her a new agency. By making friends with Nicholas Higgins and remaining in contact with John Thornton,

Margaret provides a bridge between the two men and, consequently, between their two class solitudes. They think that they are enemies with different approaches to joint problems, and they also think that these differences can be resolved only by the defeat of one side. What Margaret comes to understand is that the problem is in an important way one of language. Just as she has trouble convincing John Thornton about the differences in southern uses of words like "man" and "gentleman," so the workers have trouble communicating with him because of a language barrier.[8] Commenting on the class and gender implications of words in the novel, Patricia Johnson suggests: "It seems that a whole new set of social relationships between working and upper classes and between men and women has been brought about by industrialization. Yet the vocabulary and, more importantly, the consciousness of the nation have not caught up to this fact; there is no language to communicate these new realities" (2). Margaret, ready to listen quietly and attentively to both sides while maintaining an open mind about who is right, is the link between them, providing both a common language (so that the masters can hear the men, and vice versa) and a compassionate reading of that language to allow for movement and change. Higgins is pivotal in preparing her for this role. As Sally Minogue notes: "Higgins' place in the narrative structure of the novel, his direct speech (in dialect) and his moral place (as questioner of prevailing values), render him a central figure, especially as an agent of change" (77). Since Margaret already questions the northern values, which are so much at variance with those she has learned in the south, Higgins is an excellent interpreter of what she sees because he is also questioning the status quo, and her interest allows him to sharpen the focus of his answers.

Gaskell presents the reader with a mediated view of urban life which allows her as an author to criticise systemic poverty without becoming overtly political. What Margaret sees, once she gets over the shock of how direct and open the people are, is primarily misery in the streets contrasted strongly with the wealth of Thornton's friends. It is as she attempts to understand the class relations between men and masters that she learns the new language necessary to communicate in this environment. As her father comments: "One had need to learn a different language, and measure by a different standard, up here in Milton" (212). Like her father, Margaret learns this new language because the workers are willing to tell her about trials and tribulations which "[t]hey would have scorned to speak of. . .to anyone who might. . .have understood it without their words" (204). She also asks Higgins to explain about trade unions and strikes, and she listens in on Thornton's conversations with her father to help her understand "on sound economic principles" how Thornton's capitalist economy works (204). At the dinner party Thornton holds before the strike, Margaret is equipped to appreciate the conversation: "even some of the technical words used by the eager mill-owners." It is on this occasion that Gaskell writes: "She silently took a very decided part in the question they were discussing. At any rate, they talked in desperate earnest–not in the used-up style that wearied her so in the old London parties" (216). While she feels unwilling to join in with the public discussion, it touches a deep chord within her in a way that all her previous exposure to the small talk of polite conversation has been unable to do. Her silence does not indicate indifference, as the men might assume, but an attitude of intense interest and agreement with the necessity of resolving the social issues under discussion. This engaged interest indicates Margaret's productive use of silence to shape her own

opinions and actions. What she could not achieve by taking a speaking part in the discussion she accomplishes by storing up the information and applying it later when she has influence in private.

Private influence is always preferred over public action in Gaskell's novels because of the risks involved in too public an agency for women. When Margaret is the wealthy heiress to Mr Bell, she considers how she might use the knowledge she has gained in Milton to meet the needs of others in a more practical way. On holiday in Cromer, she takes the time "to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working" (508). She continues visiting the poor in London, as she had in Milton, in order to exercise her "moral responsibility to alleviate the negative side effects of industrial capitalism and to promote class harmony" (Elliott 29). In polite company, as at the dinner attended by Thornton and the new parliamentary candidate Mr Colthurst, Margaret continues to sit and observe, but she is alive to the conversation about Milton, although she remains silent. Her decision to offer her fortune to help redeem Thornton's mill takes place, in accordance with convention, behind the scenes. But then Lennox leaves her alone to explain her plan to the failed mill owner herself, forcing her to take responsibility for her generosity and for her feelings. This time Thornton is correct in reading love as one motive for her action, and he refuses to place himself financially in her debt unless she is willing to share his life and guide her investment with him. The mutuality of their relationship suggests that this companionate marriage will satisfy both partners. As she finally accepts his proposal, Margaret enables Thornton to acknowledge his weakness by revealing that he has visited Helstone and picked roses to remind him of

her when he thought that she could never love him. Together they will be able to bring about change because both have learned lessons in silence and in struggle. In many ways, as various critics have pointed out, Gaskell's novel redistributes conventional forms of power by blurring the line between the personal and the social.[9] Much of Margaret's public contact with people ends with her sitting quietly and listening to their conversations, yet, as Elliott observes, "Margaret's class mediation complements and, in some cases, threatens to displace male professional contenders for authority in the social realm" (33).

What Elliott has in mind is the way Margaret takes advantage of being in Thornton's house when the riot starts to influence his participation in the action. Indeed, she shows Thornton his responsibility to face the crowd and not cower away behind locked doors both by insisting that he go out and speak to the crowd as if they were human beings worthy of his attention (rather than a mob) and in standing in front of him when her advice goes wrong. Although this goes beyond the conventions of female behaviour and exposes her to danger, it does indicate Margaret's conviction that she is in charge of her public role and has the right to attempt to define and control that role. She has learned to hear both sides of the discussion, and she is now ready to play a more active role in the proceedings. She also encourages Higgins to speak to Thornton himself after the strike, and succeeds both in getting him employment again and in opening the discussion between the two men. This mediation eventually leads to important changes at the mill, so that the men's needs are taken into consideration. Minogue points to the multi-faceted changes when she writes: "We see. . .change taking place on the surface, through discussion; on a symbolic level, through action; and in the interior, through

changes of value and judgement" (77). These changes are all preceded by a period of silence spent either in observation of what is happening or in contemplation of possible solutions to the social problems. Margaret, Mr Hale, Higgins, and Thornton are all involved in the different ways of approaching change, so that they can all be said to learn in silence.

They share another conventional source of experience in Victorian fiction: suffering. Here it is conventionally the man's part to suffer in silence, while the woman is free to express her emotions in hysteria and weeping. Margaret's response to suffering shows a shift. She is not prostrate at the first sign of trouble. On the contrary. As Deirdre David comments, Margaret's "straight forward and non-hysterical dealings with the family doctor when she hears of her mother's approaching death, all mark her as having qualities which are not conventionally associated with feminine behaviour" (13). While her father is unable to cope with the news of his wife's illness, Margaret fights to be included in nursing her mother, refusing to allow the servant Dixon to carry the whole burden. She argues with Dr Donaldson that it would be more difficult for her to be left without accurate information about the illness, as she is "not good or patient enough to submit" to her mother's desire to keep the truth from her (173). When she hears the truth, she neither faints nor cries hysterically, but considers next how and when she should tell her father. She allies herself with Dixon, so that they can share the trouble of the next months in the face of Mr Hale's false hopes. When he does learn the truth, he is the one who nearly faints away. As Lansbury comments, "A man who can accept neither the reality of suffering nor the inevitability of death cannot minister to others" (103).

Margaret's strength seems all the greater contrasted with her father's (and later her brother's) weakness and grief.

Father and daughter have more than one opportunity to face suffering. She attends her mother's funeral with him, proving that she is not like the majority of middle-class women. She argues: "Women of our class don't go, because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are afraid of showing them. Poor women go, and don't care if they are overwhelmed with grief. But I promise you, papa, that if you will let me go, I will be no trouble" (336). She also agrees to go to see Bessy Higgins' corpse because she recognises her presence is one last respect she can pay the girl, but the action requires all her courage. She admits to Dixon: "I never saw a dead person. No! I would rather not [go]" (278). She is reassured by the peace in Bessy's face and has the strength to oppose Nicholas Higgins' attempts to leave the house and drown his sorrows, although he tells her: "It's very hard upon a man that he can't go to the only comfort left" (282). Finally, she proves to him that drink is not all that is left to comfort him, persuading him to visit her father and enabling Mr Hale to offer Higgins an opportunity to talk over union problems and other questions as Bessy had done. The evening ends in prayer, another form of convention that all three participants find a source of comfort and strength.

When Bessy dies, Higgins locks his door, explaining to Mr Hale when the latter seeks entry: "No. . . .I spoke as plain as I could, 'bout using words, when I bolted th' door. Let me be, this day" (373). Like Higgins, Margaret welcomes silence as time to think through the difficult decisions and think over the painful events that make up her life in Milton. One event in particular causes Margaret silent pain. When her mother is dying, she summons her exiled brother Frederick, but as he is leaving, they are seen

together near the railway station by John Thornton (who assumes they are lovers) and later by an old enemy, Leonards (who would like to get the reward for turning Frederick over to the authorities for his part in a mutiny years before). Leonards dies some hours after falling onto the track when Frederick pushes past him to get on the train. Although the events cannot be definitively linked, the police are interested in questioning potential witnesses like Margaret and the man she was with.[10] In her statement, "I was not there," Margaret avoids having to identify her brother and so prevents his arrest, but she also shows that speech is dangerous (343, 345). Margaret's lie is instinctive, but she pays a price. Thornton know she was there and, in choosing to protect her and stop the investigation, he closes down the possibility that she will be able to speak again and tell him the truth. Like Mary Barton silently in love with Jem, Margaret carries her secret shame in silence until Higgins mentions to Thornton the existence of the brother and the reasons for hiding his visit.

The silence designed to protect another can be broken only when there are no more secrets. From Thornton's perspective the information about Margaret's brother gives him permission to hope again that he might win her love. So long as he believes that she is shielding a lover by her lie, he is unable to pursue his own love for her. He has placed her on a pedestal, and her behaviour disturbs his perception of her nobility and integrity. But by now it is also true, as Lansbury points out, that he has come to see Margaret "as a woman and not as a chivalric symbol of love requiring the dedication of his life" (113). For her part, Margaret permits herself to respond to this love only when she knows that Thornton accepts her money, as well as her love, because she wants to be a silent but contributing partner in the marriage. Although Gaskell does not discount the

part love plays in a successful marriage, she is interested in the wider issues of how the changing relationship between men and women in general can be influenced by the rational mind and by fresh thinking on social responsibilities. In order for change to take place in the relationships between men and masters in a new industrial society, for example, the economic values espoused by the masters must be joined to a sympathetic attitude towards the workers, and the marriage of the protagonists serves as a metaphor for this desired union.

Despite her unwillingness to speak out in public, Margaret succeeds in influencing the area of social relations between masters and workers by her efforts to bring together two men she respects, Thornton and Higgins. Her agency is a key element in bringing about social change, although it operates not in the masculine public world but out of private domestic space. However, in order to learn what action is needed to bring harmony, Margaret has to cross the line between private and public through her involvement with Higgins as trade unionist and Thornton as mill owner. That is, she must become involved with their public roles as well as with them as private individuals. Barbara Harman concludes that Gaskell "neither saw the danger of public life as a reason to exclude women from it, nor sought to imagine their entry into that realm as an opportunity to domesticate it" (374). Although the experience of public action is not without risks, Gaskell shows that women are not destroyed by contact with a masculine world. Nor do they have to control that world by imposing feminine limitations on it. The public sphere does not become less dirty or dangerous because of Margaret's involvement. The poor are still poor, and the action necessary to improve their lot is still firmly placed in the public realm of politics. Private action may alleviate need, but it

cannot remove it unaided. In a political world, both men and women have a role to play. Margaret can continue to be a force for change within the protection of a conventional marriage because her husband accepts her: rational, intelligent, and capable of speaking for herself–but, significantly, no threat to his public agency.

Conventions can be repressive because they place limits on acceptable behaviour, yet within those limits there is a degree of freedom and choice. Silence can be part of the repression or a sign of individual choice. In many ways, the move from a speaking silence (which can be interpreted according to convention) to suspended speech (which cannot) is a small one. However, it signals a significant choice, and allows silence to be read in new ways. Within the confines of reserve, Gaskell's novel suggests, the Victorian woman could exercise the choice that defines autonomy, an autonomy constructed, paradoxically, in the power of silence.

# NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

* Epigraphs for the thesis are taken from Sirach, an apocryphal wisdom text written for the disenfranchised. Writing during the period after the Jewish return from exile in Babylon, Sirach recalls the words of Solomon and revises that conventional wisdom to fit the changing environment.

1. See in particular Mary Poovey's Uneven Developments. See also Elizabeth Langland, Nobody's Angels; Francoise Basch, Relative Creatures; and Shirley Foster, Victorian Women's Fiction.

2. On the conventions of the nineteenth century courtship novel, see Ruth Yeazell, Fictions of Modesty.

3. One of the earliest courtship novels, Richardson's Clarissa (1748), turns on just this problem when its heroine refuses Mr Solmes, the older, disagreeable suitor her family has selected for her. Clarissa is confined to the house until she agrees to accept him on the basis that her certainty that he would make her a poor husband must indicate a previous attachment, most likely to Mr Lovelace, the man who eventually kidnaps and seduces her.

4. In characterising Margaret's influence, Gaskell draws on standard Victorian distinctions between masculine "power" and feminine "influence." See Judith Lowder Newton, Women, Power and Subversion.

5. Also see Deirdre David (41-43), who gives a psychoanalytic reading of this episode.

6. In a related point, Deirdre David suggests that Hale's decision makes his daughter "both mother and father to her parents" (13). For a more positive reading of Hale, see Angus Easson, "Mr Hale's Doubts in North and South."

7. Compare Margaret Hale to Jane Eyre, whose painful past is recounted for the reader but not revealed to Mr Rochester; Evelina, whose very identity is in doubt until her father, Lord Belmont,

acknowledges her as his legitimate daughter shortly before her marriage to Lord Orville; and Bianca Pazzi, whose illegitimacy causes her to conceal her relationship to her half sister Alice even when the latter becomes a friend.

8. Thornton argues that "man" is the stronger term because "'when we speak of him as 'a man,' we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself,–to life–to time–to eternity'" (218). This is the definition Margaret would apply to a "gentleman."

9. See, for example, Gerard , "Victorian Things, Victorian Words: Representation and Redemption in Gaskell's North and South"; Elliott, "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's North and South"; and Johnson, "Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South: A National Bildungsroman."

10. Harman suggests that "[b]y protecting Frederick, Margaret traffics with what is dangerous, illicit, even violent, and this fact is re-emphasized when she herself commits a 'crime' [lying] in order to protect what she knows" (370).

# CHAPTER TWO

## Self-silencing and Sanity in Charlotte Brontë's Villette

> Some people keep silent because they have nothing to say,
> while others keep silent because they know when to speak
> –Sirach 20:6

While Gaskell develops the socio-economic role of a woman within the domestic sphere, allowing her to influence the public realm from a private base, Charlotte Brontë establishes Lucy Snowe, her female protagonist in Villette, within the public sphere as a middle-class working woman. By examining the issue of female agency within the field of education, Brontë argues for a femininity marked by rational control. She requires the rational to predominate not only to show how women might assume a properly adult role in the modern world by acquiring prudence and discipline but also to combat the psychological pressures generated by the female desire for independence. The problem for the Victorian middle-class working woman is maintaining autonomy along with respectability in an environment that labeled women as either virgins or whores and demanded that teachers and governesses in particular repress their sexuality. However, repressing sexuality leads to the risk of mental imbalance, to the possibility of hysteria and madness. The solution is to maintain a dignified and prudent reserve that does not talk about desire but looks for opportunities to express it in ways that preserve both autonomy and, more importantly, sanity.

Unlike Margaret Hale, Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe is a first-person narrator, and her narrative control of her story appears in the choices she makes about what to reveal and what to conceal. In an often-quoted phrase, Lucy refers to her account as "this heretic narrative" (235).[1] As Luann McCracken Fletcher reminds us, "heretic" is originally from the Greek, meaning "able to choose" and the word thus implies the action of a reasoning mind, one that weighs and decides not only between religious doctrines but also between other aspects of life (738). Indeed, Lucy makes it clear at every stage of her narrative that she is making choices. In contrast to Margaret Hale, whose calm personality rarely threatens to exceed social norms, Lucy has a passionate nature which she chooses to keep under strict control in accordance with the role of "a mere looker-on at life" she has assumed (211). This chosen silence provides her with the opportunity to censor the image she is projecting before submitting that self to public scrutiny. Brontë shows Lucy's impulse to concealment and self-silencing beginning in childhood, when it is a less deliberate response to her circumstances, and continuing in a more deliberate way into her adult life. For example, the account of her childhood visit to her godmother, Mrs Bretton, is couched in terms of what she understood as a fourteen year old. Her limited understanding is most clearly revealed in her reaction to "a letter. . .of which the contents evidently caused Mrs Bretton surprise and some concern. I thought at first it was from home, and trembled, expecting I know not what disastrous communication; to me, however, no reference was made and the cloud seemed to pass" (62). As in the childhood scenes in Jane Eyre (1847), Brontë is careful to reproduce the sense of childhood experience, allowing the reader to view the narrator's world through her eyes.

In both Jane Eyre and Villette, Brontë stresses the importance of childhood experience in forming a rational and balanced personality. Unlike Margaret Hale, who is able to reflect happily on her childhood, Lucy's past is associated with doubt, fear, and pain. Rather than talking about this painful area of her life, Lucy distances herself from her feelings, suppressing personal information and speaking ironically. When she leaves Mrs Bretton, for example, she reports: "I betook myself home, having been absent six months. It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted" (94). The use of the passive voice ("it will be conjectured") undermines the certainty of what is asserted and suggests an irony at work. Lucy could well fill her account with details of how she became the tense and often tortured woman of her first years in Villette, but she prefers to concentrate on how she grew beyond her early doubts and fears. Her ironic silence enables her to avoid a solipsistic, hysterical focus on her own feelings and thus allows for the narration to be more directed and rational. In wider terms, Lucy serves as an example to the reader that some experiences may be passed over in silence without denying integrity to the individual personality.

Too much narration would in effect threaten the integrity of personality, for it could suggest the working of hysteria. As the physician Thomas Trotter explained in A View of the Nervous Temperament (1807), among the symptoms of hysteria is "a selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of [the hysteric's] own sufferings" (qtd. in Logan 16). In order to maintain a non-hysterical balance between what needs to be stated and what can be implied, Lucy shrouds much of her history in silence. She draws deliberate contrasts between conventional expectations

and the reality of her own situation. The expectation is for a quiet, calm adolescence: "I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass–the steersman stretched on the little deck,. . .buried, if you will, in a long prayer" (94). Then Lucy gives the metaphor a darker turn: "However, it cannot be concealed that. . .I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been a wreck at last. I too well remember a time–a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. . . .In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished" (94). She does not need to detail her losses in order to make the reader aware of the fact of loss.[2] Her analogy between storm and shipwreck conveys the trauma, and the nightmare image of drowning and helplessness evokes her desperate psychic state. Moreover, Miss Marchmont provides a clue when she tells Lucy in the course of offering her work: "It will not be an easy life,. . .for I require a good deal of attention, and you will be much confined; yet, perhaps, contrasted with the existence you have lately led, it may appear tolerable" (95).

In addition to this sparse narrative style, Brontë uses foils to highlight the choices available to women struggling with a tendency to hysteria. Early in the book, the character of Paulina, who illustrates the conventional feminine norm, provides both a contrast and displaced parallel to Lucy's own situation and nature. Initially, four-year-old Paulina's position is not unlike Lucy's when she too is placed with Mrs Bretton during a period of family trouble. Already she has suffered the loss of her mother and must now allow her father to go away for his health. Lucy is concerned how so young a child will cope with the inevitable sufferings of life without giving in to hysterical emotions. She observes: "[t]he little creature. . .did for herself what none other could do–

contended with an intolerable feeling; and, ere long, in some degree, repressed it" (79). Paulina confirms Lucy's sense of the importance of controlling one's own feelings, and she points as well to a second strategy for coping with hysteria: the displacing of feelings onto a suffering other: "I wished [Paulina] would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease" (71). Such a displacement allows Lucy both to be concerned and sympathetic and to release some of her own suffering by sharing vicariously in Paulina's silent struggle for self-control.[3]

A similar situation occurs when the adult Lucy seeks work to support herself and takes a position with the physically ill Miss Marchmont. Lucy describes her as "a rheumatic cripple, impotent, foot and hand,. . .for twenty years. . . .[who] had the character of being very eccentric. . .stern with long affliction, irritable also, and perhaps exacting" (95). These symptoms stem in part from the tragedy of Miss Marchmont's life: the sudden loss of her lover before they could be married. Lucy's sensitive attention to Miss Marchmont's symptoms and her desire to understand them as physical rather than mental give a clue to some of Lucy's own fears, which have the potential to overwhelm and paralyze her. Lucy is careful to remove the description of Miss Marchmont from what could be viewed as hysteria, insisting that when Miss Marchmont was most irritable "a vein of reason ever ran through her passion: she was logical even when fierce" (96). She reserves the account of Miss Marchmont's suffering for her last night on earth, showing how self-silencing contributes to a sense of self-control. Breaking her silence allows Miss Marchmont to warn Lucy about the dangers of requited but unfulfilled love, and this warning later permits Lucy to learn from her mistress' example and avoid her paralyzing fate.[4] While Miss Marchmont's eccentricities tend to a particular reading of

her character, her experience of love can be generalized into a wider understanding of the risks of abandonment and loss.

Feelings which find no healthy outlet in the real world are likely to express themselves more forcibly in dreams and nightmares. The intensity of Lucy's dreams signals how firmly she has repressed her feelings of grief and desire. Her most terrifying dream comes while she is suffering from insomnia during the long vacation, "an avenging dream" in which she describes the central terror: "Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated" (231). While she is able to monitor and control her waking thoughts, Lucy is still a prey to her active imagination (however much she would like to deny its existence) and to her repressed feelings. She recognises the risks of giving too passionate expression to her nature, and she is especially careful to control any hysterical tendencies which might render her unsuited to her profession as a teacher. She describes her inner turmoil as "Hypochondria," a type of melancholic depression that she recognises as afflicting the King of Labassecour, whom she describes as "a nervous melancholy man" (257, 290). No class of society is exempt from melancholia and suffering, and Lucy is fully aware of the difficulty of fighting the symptoms of such a constitution. She comments that she seems to be the only person who can read the King's pain: "Full mournful and significant was that spectacle! Not the less so because, both for the aristocracy and the honest bourgeoisie of Labassecour, its peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I could not discover one soul present was either struck or touched" (291). Like the King, who feels alienated from the people around him but makes an effort to relate to them, Lucy

perseveres in hiding her alienation by her unwillingness to speak of her feelings or of the past that would bring those feelings to the surface.

Choosing to silence feelings of alienation is not easy, but Lucy is given an advantage in that, on her arrival in Villette, she has no knowledge "of *speaking* French" (123). Like Margaret Hale, with her awareness of the differences in language between north and south, Lucy is forced into silent observation of her new and strange surroundings. In addition she discovers that she can avoid speaking about herself at all in this new environment because she is received on trust and subjected to a physiological reading of her personality by M. Paul Emanuel and Mme. Beck. They trust to their ability to discern character via the methods of physiognomy and phrenology, and require no verbal assurances from Lucy.[5] Their accepting attitude gives Lucy the time to overcome her fears about a new adult role as an independent woman, and it also gives her the space she needs to come to terms with her inmost feelings. As the town of Milton did for Margaret, Villette provides Lucy with her first opportunity to form relationships with people who know nothing about her past except what she tells them. But the success of this means of denying her fears and forgetting the past is challenged by the reemergence of Lucy's godmother and her son, now Dr John Graham Bretton. Lucy is repeatedly placed in the position of renewing contact with people from the past, but she reveals little of what she has suffered to them. Although Mrs Bretton gives her the opportunity to talk about what has transpired in the intervening years, Lucy suppresses the story out of respect for the differences between their characters. She reasons that "the details of what I had undergone belonged to a portion of my existence in which I never expected my godmother to take a share. . .so the half-drowned life-boat man keeps his own counsel,

and spins no yarns" (254). What cannot be accepted with sympathetic understanding is better suppressed out of a reasonable appreciation of the audience to whom she is talking. By using the storm and shipwreck analogy again, Lucy reminds the reader of the original loss, reinforces the depth of her feelings, and indicates the impossibility of explaining them to someone who has not suffered. There is strength and wisdom in this silence, as confirmed later when Mrs Bretton, busy with her own life, writes to the lonely Lucy Snowe and assumes that she has "been just as busy and happy as ourselves at La Terrasse" (354).

In contrast to the calm routine of Lucy's life, Brontë uses gothic images of the supernatural to explore the individual's reaction to psychic stress. For Lucy, whose access to the world outside the school is limited, Rue Fossette is both a protected and an imprisoning space. It is in the moments when Lucy attempts to escape the mental and physical confinement of her situation that she is confronted by what appear to be supernatural images that make her question her sanity. Lucy is very aware of the risk of falling into fits of hysterics, a fear explored through repeated connection to the nun image.[6] Both the forbidden walk in the garden and the attic of the old school in Rue Fossette are associated with a story of a nun who lived in the house, transgressed her vows, and was buried in the grounds beside the enclosing wall. This ghost story strikes terror into the pupils, and the sight of a nun, shadowy and insubstantial, causes hysteria throughout the school. Lucy proves her capacity to rise above irrational fear when she encounters this image on five different occasions in the narrative. On the first occasion she affirms the reality of what she saw: "Say what you will, reader–tell me I was nervous or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that [first] letter [from Dr John];

declare that I dreamed: this I vow–I saw there–in that room–on that night–an image like–a NUN" (325). Without disturbing the rest of the school, she is able to rush downstairs and seek help from Mme. Beck. She confides the full description of what she has seen only to Dr John, thus allowing herself to avoid being seen as romantic or hysterical by anyone else. Indeed Lucy recounts how Mme. Beck "highly commended my discretion in coming to her private salle-à-manger, instead of carrying the tale of horror to the school refectory" (332). Repeated encounters with the figure confirm Lucy's suspicion that it is not a spectre but has a human reality, a view shared by M. Paul.

Brontë allows Lucy to transcend her initial fear and overcome her impulse to react hysterically by permitting her to think rationally about the phenomenon and by enabling her to express her hopes and fears to M. Paul, so that her mental state becomes less fragile. Towards the end of Villette, Lucy Snowe finally comes face to face with her ghostly nemesis. When she returns from her drugged visit to the town, she describes the incident of finding a nun's figure lying on her bed: "Be the spectacle what it might, I could afford neither consternation, scream, nor swoon. Besides, I was not overcome. Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. . . .I defied spectra" (569). Resolute and silent, Lucy investigates and destroys the image, which proves to be a mere "bolster dressed in a black stole, and artfully invested with a white veil" (569). Lucy rejects hysterical reactions to the situation and is able to take effective and rational action to rid herself of this frightening image, which has seemed to haunt her since she arrived in Villette.

Lucy overcomes fear by using a rational approach but other passionate feelings cannot be overcome by simply repressing them without dangerous consequences. After

all, hysteria is only one form of descent into madness. One may also move in the direction of the expression of uncontrollable desires. As many readers have noted, Brontë uses theatrical images to explore the risks involved in overt expression of passion.[7] It is significant that Lucy is first brought to an awareness of her feelings when M. Paul asks her to play a man's part in the school play. Confined to the attic all afternoon by M. Paul so that she can learn her part, Lucy prepares successfully for her theatrical debut. When faced with the necessity of appearing on stage as a man, however, she refuses to don a completely masculine costume: "Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small dimensions" (209). While acting may provide a release for suppressed emotions, it is not wise to submerge the personality in theatrical illusion. Lucy surprises herself by entering into the spirit of her foppish role and acting "to please [herself]" (211). But in the end she rejects any more acting as she rejected the masculine costume, recognising that the passionate expression required to play a theatrical role would compromise her ability to survive in a conventional world. This decision is reinforced by comparing Lucy's amateur experience with Vashti's acting, which both inspires and disgusts Lucy with the intensity of its passion. When she checks her mixed reaction with Dr John, as arbiter of reason and taste, "he judged [Vashti] as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement" (342). If Lucy wishes to attract the respect and retain the friendship of Dr John, or any other respectable suitor, she is correct in assuming that she cannot allow her passionate feelings to be seen in public.

While the theatre makes passion visible so that even an unobservant man like Dr John can recognise and condemn it, Brontë makes it clear that the convention of reserve

is not a complete shield for the passionate character. Lucy is painfully aware how close to the surface her intense feelings come, but only M. Paul recognises what she acknowledges to herself: "I scarcely know any one, Miss Lucy, who needs a friend more absolutely than you: your very faults imperatively require it. You want so much checking, regulating, and keeping down" (452). Ruth Yeazell sees Lucy's attempts at silencing her passion as a measure of the intensity of that passion (169). The more she pushes it down, the more it needs to be controlled. Lucy is not the quiet shadow she leads others to believe, although her passionate side is most frequently silenced, and Brontë examines in detail how Lucy keeps her feelings under control. It is a tortured and tiring process well exemplified by her method of responding to a kind but brotherly letter from Dr John. Her feelings would have her write a passionate response, laying bare her love for the reticent Englishman. Her reason, however, dictates a more rational response. She admits to writing two versions–"one for my own relief, the other for Graham's perusal" (334). She elaborates: "To begin with: Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors,. . .and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done. . . Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right" (334-335). Feeling may never be given public expression, but it is not denied. Reason, the force that drives Lucy's personality, is stronger than passion, and is able to keep that dangerous fire in check. Since Dr John receives only the "terse, curt missive of a page" satisfying his sense of decorum, he is unable to understand the passion of Lucy's character.

The unthinkable alternative is to yield to the force of desire which, for Lucy at least, is typically linked to imagination. Lucy describes the battle for control of that imagination in a Biblical metaphor. Imagination is a Sisera, a transgressive pagan general, seeking to take refuge in the tent of Jael, an obedient Jewish wife. Imagination penetrates and invades where it is not desired, hiding from the forces which would eradicate its power to overthrow the rightful authority of the rational mind. Lucy brings in the metaphor as she describes the excitement she feels during storms, which churn up her own longing for change and advancement: "This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; 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" (176). This intense imaginative longing for change threatens to overwhelm Lucy's quiet habits and bring her into danger.[8]

Brontë is interested in exploring a complete range of responses to the effort to silence desire. Consequently, imagination is given one opportunity to show its power. After M. Paul declares his intention of courting Lucy, Mme. Beck jealously keeps them apart and schemes to have her obedient cousin sent to the Caribbean on long-term business. Lucy is devastated by the news of his departure and by the belief that he has left without saying goodbye to her, and the strain of keeping her emotions under control is almost enough to overturn her sanity. When Lucy refuses Mme. Beck's suggestion of an opiate, the wily director arranges for her to receive a secret dose, and it is under the influence of the opiate that Lucy experiences the absolute release of imagination.[9] She

reports on the effect of the drugs: "Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought. . .Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous. With scorn she looked on Matter, her mate–'Rise!' she said. Sluggard! this night I will have *my* will; nor shalt thou prevail' " (547). In the grip of Imagination, Lucy slips through the dark streets of Villette and discovers a festival, where she expected darkness, and crowds, where she anticipated silence. In this dangerously overstimulated state she meets with both her English and her Labassecourian friends but without their recognising her. She is able to overhear their conversations and learns that she is kindly thought of by Mrs Bretton and her entourage, but she values being "the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbour" too much to make herself known (552).

While drugs heighten perceptions, they do not change a person's underlying character; they merely release his or her repressed emotions. When Lucy finds Mme. Beck's circle, she decides to remain hidden in an attempt to learn the truth about M. Paul's apparent indifference to her. She overhears that M. Paul has not gone away as he intended, information her employer has been at pains to withhold from her. She learns of M. Paul's plans to sail to the West Indies on a later ship and sees Justine Marie, whom she assumes to be her friend's fiancée. Accepting what she sees as true and slipping silently from the scene, Lucy misses the arrival of Justine Marie's real fiancé, but she gains the courage to be honest with M. Paul: "I could not meet his sunshine with cloud. If this were to be my last moment with him, I would not waste it in forced, unnatural distance. I loved him well–too well not to smite out of my path even Jealousy herself, when she would have obstructed a kind farewell" (579). Reason has interpreted the scene according to Lucy's measure of her own importance to M. Paul and has reasserted her

power, but Lucy decides in the extremity of a last meeting with the man she loves to risk verbalising her hidden feelings.

Brontë shows that only the acknowledgement of genuine feelings and desire has the capacity to prevent insanity. Although feelings must be controlled, even silenced at times, their complete denial is unhealthy. Previously Lucy had allowed Reason, which she calls "this hag," to govern her passion and prevent her from placing too much hope in a correspondence with Dr John (307). Admitting that "Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination–*her* soft, bright foe, *our* sweet Help, our divine Hope," Lucy struggles against the desires of her passionate heart, yielding only in extremity to the cry: "My heart will break!" (308, 580).[10] While the rational mind is stronger than her desire for the unattainable Dr John, it is no match for the reality of love and despair she feels when faced with M. Paul and his imminent departure. Silence is not a solution Lucy can adopt in extremity without denying some essential part of her nature, and the emotional release from speaking out is matched by M. Paul's own loving and healing response. At the centre of Lucy's soul a fire of passion is burning, and only her sense of propriety and her fear of madness enable her to suppress it so completely and thus to maintain the quiet reserve necessary to her sanity.

In Madness and Civilization, Michel Foucault describes nineteenth-century treatments for madness, which for the first time begin to address abnormal behaviour as a mental rather than a physical disorder. He describes how patients were confined in a stable environment and treated as sane so long as they did not act out their neuroses. In many ways, Mme. Beck's school provides this kind of environment. It is a type of

prison, closed to outsiders and to all but a handful of men, and housed in a former nunnery. This environment is policed by Mme. Beck, who knows every detail of the lives of those under her care. Lucy surprises her examining her clothing, and she knows when Mme. Beck has read her letters. Lucy remains quiet about her discoveries, but is careful to observe Mme. Beck in turn and to choose carefully the time and place for unobserved activities. Within the school walls Lucy gains almost unlimited freedom because of her ability to silence her passionate and anti-social inclinations. Her freedom includes the right to sit and walk in the "*allée défendue*," a gloomy walk on the edge of the property forbidden to the pupils because it is next to a boys' school. It attracts Lucy because of "the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk" (174). Like the attic, dark and despised by the other teachers and pupils, the alley provides Lucy with the privacy unavailable in the commonly inhabited portions of the school and grounds. Boris Knezevic comments that "the attic. . .circumscribes the symbolic space of fallen, failed women: the space of madwomen and ghosts of transgressive nuns" (73). Lucy disproves this theory by reclaiming the space, by exposing the "nun" as transgressive male trespassing in the school, and by proving that she herself is far from mad. In these quiet physical spaces, Lucy has the mental space for the silence, reflection, and secret indulgence of grief and imagination denied inside the main part of the building. Lucy's love of space and distance from others is underlined by a telling detail in relation to Ginevra. Lucy places a pin in her own waistband to keep Ginevra from leaning too close. The shrewd Mme Beck recognises the value Lucy places on solitude. While she rewards the other teachers with material gifts she tells Lucy: "One thing, however, I *can* do to please you–leave you alone with your liberty" (383). Self-confinement and silence give

Lucy this "liberty" and they contribute to provide the equanimity she desires and without which she would be unable to survive.[11] Freedom from observation enables her to retain the sense of self-control that she fears will be overcome by madness if she gives in to her hidden feelings too overtly.

Brontë uses Villette as a place to explore how freedom is curtailed and protest denied in a society ruled by institutional values such as the church. Mme. Beck counters the sensuality of her pupils' upbringing with strict surveillance, preferring to regulate their behaviour by spying on them rather than by teaching them right from moral wrong. Lucy elaborates: "she seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance, and under a surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest children" (135-136). Nevertheless, she persists in her regime. Its ultimate failure is revealed in her inability to prevent Ginevra's elopement with de Hamal, but the novel does not suggest that the system itself will alter in any way as a consequence. In the world of Villette femininity is constantly under discipline. This point is underlined outside school space in the well-known scene in the art gallery when M. Paul finds Lucy alone and (contrary to his sense of propriety) looking at the nude picture of Cleopatra. He directs her instead to a series of paintings called "La vie d'une femme," which symbolize his expectations of a woman, moving from a sheltered and unstimulating childhood through marriage and motherhood to a pious widowhood, all clearly subordinated to love for church and institutional authority (277). Lucy comments: "All these four 'Anges' were grim and gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-

giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers" (278). Rejecting the "Anges," Lucy applies her mind to resisting this confining paradigm, but she does not burst out in rebellious words or action. Rather, she adopts silence as a shield of resistance.

Behind this shield of silence Brontë shows that imagination is still active. Although Imagination can be dangerously transgressive, leading into unacceptably passionate behaviour, Reason in the extreme is dangerous in other ways because it makes assumptions about the limits women should observe. There are two situations which patriarchal society would assign to Lucy: the cloistered religious life favoured by her Catholic mentors (that is, the role of virgin) or a self-effacing marriage with its attendant ideal of the domestic angel. She rejects both, well aware of the risks of conforming to such expectations. When her depression leads her to the formal act of confession before she is reunited with her godmother, Père Silas the priest recommends she visit him at home, suggesting that "a mind so tossed can find repose but in the bosom of retreat, and the punctual practice of piety" (234). Lucy rejects his kind offer of spiritual support, sensing the danger of putting herself into the hands of the church. Had she continued to seek his help, she says, "I might just now, instead of writing this heretic narrative, be counting my beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent on the Boulevard of Crécy in Villette" (235). Such confining self-denial is anathema to Protestant Lucy. Silent and withdrawn she may be, but a passionate interior smoulders underneath and threatens to overwhelm the defences she has erected to contain it.

Brontë is also concerned about other institutional expectations which threaten to confine women. Lucy is pragmatic in her view of the role of the woman as wife and mother. Even as an adolescent, she is aware of the limitations of marriage when she

watches Polly's devotion to Graham, even to the extent of allowing his foot to kick her as she lies "on the carpet at his feet, her face to the floor; mute and motionless" (90). When the adult Paulina, still small in stature and treated like a child, confides to Lucy her love for Dr John (the adult Graham), Lucy advises her to continue to use caution in the expression of that love.[12] She asks: "How did you reply [to his letter]?" Paulina, like Lucy, understands John's taste. She responds that her short reply cost her some effort since she was afraid "of making the answer too cordial: Graham's tastes are so fastidious. I wrote it three times–chastening and subduing the phrases at every rescript; at last, having confected it till it seemed to me to resemble a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar, I ventured to seal and dispatch it" (466). Lucy commends this approach, recognising that the young woman has perfectly understood Dr John's nature; they both know Dr John's character well enough to recognise the risk of too openly expressed passion.

Such self-effacing devotion is not suitable for all women, and Lucy herself is not willing to pay the price such love exacts. Seeing it as close to idolatry on Paulina's side, she acknowledges that she can only avoid falling into the same trap by not thinking of Dr John's appearance at all, preferring to remember his face rather than risking "being struck stone blind" (520) for admiring one who is unable to see her as anything more than an inoffensive shadow, and who "wanted always to give me a role not mine" (404). Paulina is willing to become the conventional wife, totally subordinated to her husband's desire, as colourless and self-effacing as the angelic pictures of womanhood Lucy rejects at the art gallery. Lucy has observed such sacrificial love as a child and as a woman, and she knows that it is too confining and lacking in passion to suit her. By contrast, Paulina

does not assert a strong identity; she has a "sunny imagination" and counts her blessings rather than anticipating suffering (596). Lucy is more pragmatic, reasoning that her nature is not suited to the calm of convention. If she is to be married, Lucy cannot live without passionate reciprocated love, a love she finds and loses in M. Paul Emanuel.

Brontë reveals that the path to such reciprocated love sometimes leads through unrequited expectations and encounters disappointments on the way to its goal. When Paulina returns and claims the love of Dr John, Lucy chooses to bury the evidence of her hopes for love from him–his letters to her–in the grounds of the school.[13] She justifies her action by saying "people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos: it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret" (378). However, she also wants to hide her lost treasure from the prying eyes of M. Paul, the man who replaces Dr John in her affections: "the thought that these letters, mere friendly letters as they were, had fallen once, and might fall again, into his hands, jarred my very soul" (379). The motive for the burial is further reinforced by Lucy's statement: "I was not only going to hide a treasure–I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding sheet, must be interred" (380). The burial of the letters, then, offers Lucy a sense of closure in the unrequited love affair. She is not gathering melancholy mementos to prolong her attachment but prudently distancing herself from painful reminders without either destroying what she treasures or leaving herself open for misunderstanding should M. Paul find the letters again at a future date.

Such self-silencing has a positive result because it faces up to the reality of grief and acknowledges it before giving it an appropriate burial. Lucy's action, in fact, opens the way for M. Paul to love her because he is aware of the disappearance of his rival. At first, M. Paul tries to shape Lucy into the type of woman he is used to meeting around him, and this includes helping Lucy to the education normally denied to English women but not necessarily to Continental girls. He helps her with mathematics, where she is "abundantly deficient," and with essay writing (439). However, he is suspicious of those of her intellectual capacities that threaten to outshine his, especially in English since she is obliged to examine pupils with him in that subject, and he submits her to tests to see if she wants to steal his place or hides secret knowledge. He is unable to read through her silence completely at first and, although he alone is aware of her talents, he is uncertain whether to foster them or to discourage their growth. Such a mind as Lucy's, developed to its full rational capacity, might eclipse his own.[14] However, the gift of the school in Faubourg Clotilde is a sincere expression of his confidence in Lucy's mental prowess and business acumen, rewarding her silent efforts to improve herself and recognising her need for financial security. In leaving Lucy to run the school and make a success of it in his absence, M. Paul acknowledges her intelligence and her right to independence.

Intellectual autonomy, however, addresses only one of the concerns Brontë indicates are necessary to sanity. The second area where M. Paul grows to appreciate Lucy and to allow her some autonomy is in the area of religious belief. Once M. Paul expresses an interest in her as a companion, he subjects her to a series of attempts to convert her to Catholicism. Her reasons for rejecting that faith reinforce the rational individualism that refuses unquestioning obedience. Lucy needs to understand what

motivates action, and she is offended by the stress on outward conformity to the forms of religion and by melodramatic lives of saints that generate sentimental superstitions. In the end, her own convictions prove strong enough and her mind rational enough to convince M. Paul to say: "Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for 'Lucy' " (594-595). This is an important moment, for it allows a couple (potentially a family) to operate with different creeds or codes instead of insisting, as was conventional, on a unity of thought and belief.

The novel's ending is equally unconventional. Instead of the proposal of marriage closing down the possibilities for individual growth, as is usual, the wedding is deferred by M. Paul's stay in the Caribbean. Instead of the conventional courtship as a time for lovers to be together without the restriction of a chaperone, after sharing a symbolic last supper M. Paul and Lucy carry on an affectionate three-year correspondence. This three-year period is a time for Lucy to build her professional reputation and run the school M. Paul has rented for her. In fact George Eliot sees "the self-sufficiency of her world at Faubourg Clotilde, and the satisfaction she derives from it [as]. . .the logical culmination of her story" (qtd. in Nestor 139). At the end, Lucy resorts again to the same passive voice and ironic tone distancing her from statements about her own fate that we saw early in the novel, burying in renewed silence what does not need to be explained. She begins with a shift in her use of time: "And now the three years are past: M. Emanuel's return is fixed. . .he is coming" (595). This is followed by the repetition of the Banshee wails that preceded Miss Marchmont's death and the nightmare image of the shipwreck, which the reader already associates with death, loss, and grief.

"That storm roared for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks" (596). The account concludes with the reaction of those waiting on shore. "Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered–not uttered till, when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some!" (596). Lucy is unwilling to confirm her own loss in direct terms and chooses the ironic distance employed in earlier passages about suffering. "Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror,. . .the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life" (596). This silence does not offer hope, but it does suggest Lucy's strength and endurance, so that the reader sees her as courageous in her success and rational in her work, whether it is teaching in her school in the suburbs or telling the story of her life.

Such silence enables the reader to acknowledge grief and loss in the context of growth. In contrast to the case of her early mentor, Miss Marchmont, the absence of Paul Emanuel does not end Lucy's expectations of hope and desire. Rather, it gives her room to develop in her own direction, allowing her to be ruled by her rational mind in her business world, which flourishes as a result, while permitting her memory and Paul's letters to sustain her emotionally. These letters, which she describes in Biblical terms as "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed," do not need to be buried (like Dr John's) because these letters express the reality of feelings and reason in harmony (594). Lucy has learned to give voice to her feelings and her dreams, and the expression of her deepest nature gives her the strength to survive as a working woman who is neither

idolised as an angel nor condemned as a whore but venerated as a rational human being. Lucy appreciates M. Paul's love because it draws her out of her self-imposed silence by validating her passionate nature, affirming her spiritual faith, and acknowledging her mental abilities. Although this affirmation is what Lucy needs for sanity, it does not replace her efforts at self-silencing and self-control which are equally necessary for her continued autonomy. Ruth Yeazell sums up: "it is precisely because the self-contained Lucy carries her internalized restraints around with her, as part of her very being, that the novel imagines her as at liberty to move about her world, free from the continental system of 'surveillance' and restraint" (176-7).

Women who reject the domestic model are subjected to stricter standards to monitor their behaviour. They are required to exhibit prudence and discipline in their professional lives, even when this means repressing their feelings. Self-silencing contains both these elements, but while the discipline of reserve is comparatively easy to maintain, feelings cannot be repressed without any outlet for their expression. In order to remain sane, a woman must have the freedom to confront her own passion, either alone in privacy or with a trusted and sympathetic companion. What Brontë indicates is that the right to economic independence is not sufficient for a modern woman. In order to survive as a working woman she also needs to express her feelings of passion and desire in socially acceptable ways without being forced to define herself as either an inviolable Madonna or a domestic Angel. She needs to be appreciated as a rational human being whose needs can and should be met within society without offending propriety, even if they challenge convention. The way to achieving such power, it seems, is to choose to

experience self-control, silencing the excess of emotion which would disturb the norms too much but insisting on respect and consideration.

# NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. For some recent discussions, see Rosemary Clark-Beattie "Fables of Rebellion: Anti-Catholicism and the Structure of Villette"; Patricia E. Johnson " 'This heretic Narrative': The Strategy of the Split Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's Villette"; Kate Lawson "Reading Desire: *Villette* as 'Heretic Narrative' "; and Luann McCracken Fletcher "Manufactured Marvels, Heretic Narratives, and the Process of Interpretation in Villette."

2. Brenda Silver suggests: "[Lucy] projects her readers into the landscape of the novel. . .and asks them to use their imagination in a mutual act of creation which in turn validates her own emerging self" (90).

3. Foucault links sympathy and hysteria: "The entire female body is riddled with obscure but strangely direct paths of sympathy; it is always in an immediate complicity with itself, to the point of forming a kind of absolutely privileged site for the sympathies; from one extremity of its organic space to the other, it encloses a perpetual possibility of hysteria" (153-4).

4. Suggestively, Judith Lowder Newton comments that Miss Marchmont's "grief – since she has been a cripple for the last two decades – has been quite literally paralyzing" (Women Power and Subversion 91).

5. Nicholas Dames discusses how these Victorian pseudo-sciences influenced the novel in "The Clinical Novel: Phrenology and Villette."

6. For a discussion of hysteria, see Athena Vrettos, "From Neurosis to Narrative: The Private Life of the Nerves in Villette and Daniel Deronda."

7.See, for example, Clark-Beattie "Fables of Rebellion: Anti-Catholicism and the Structure of Villette"; Lawson "Reading Desire: Villette as 'Heretic Narrative' "; and Surridge, "Representing the 'Latent Vashti': Theatricality in Charlotte Brontë's Villette."

8. George Eliot uses the same biblical image in The Mill on the Floss to describe Maggie Tulliver's vengeful treatment of her Fetish, so that her literally hammering nails into the wooden doll's head brings temporary psychological relief from her frustration and anger.

9. Lisa Surridge comments that "Lucy's opium reverie. . .links her to the great (masculine) literary figures of the previous age; through it she lays implicit claim to their imaginative powers" (11).

10. In discussing Lucy's desire, Elizabeth Preston argues that working women like Lucy "must ultimately resist being the nun, the nonentity, and risk exposing their subjectivities by saying 'I', by speaking their desires" as Lucy does (395).

11. Kucich claims that this desire for solitude is also a search for "the preferred field for a turbulent kind of emotional experience," interpreting solitude as the place for self-indulgent sexual desire (51). I would argue that Lucy fears being misunderstood if she reads a letter from a male friend openly, so she hides not only her feelings but also the physical letters.

12. On the relation of the two heroines, Borislev Knezevic comments: "It is as if Lucy sees Polly as the ultimate hysteric: one not only depleted of her language, but also one completely depleted of her body" (80).

13.Commenting on this episode, Sally Minogue writes: "Lucy has to bury her love for John as she buries the letter, but in so doing she does not bury her passion in favour of reason or even repress it. In one such as Lucy, passion is always present; it is what she recognises in Vashti. It is what she does *not* see in Dr John. And she continues to embrace it in the novel even as she buries the letters" (91-92).

14. Kate Millett has drawn attention to the fact that Lucy's is "a superb mind imperfectly developed" (140).

# CHAPTER THREE

## Secrecy and Survival in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

> Curse the gossips and the double-tongued for they destroy the peace of many
>
> –Sirach 28:13

Secrecy is a more profound silence than reserve or self-silencing, but it contains elements of both these techniques used to promote autonomy and sanity, and it also expresses a specific desire to protect identity. Sissela Bok has argued in Secrets that secrecy is an essential layer of privacy and self-protection behind which "human beings attempt to guard and to promote not only their autonomy but ultimately their sanity and survival itself" (20). Like silence, secrecy is layered. Privacy is the outer layer and can be compared to the necessary space created by suspended speech in that it opens a place of self-defined choice about the level of intimacy that is comfortable for the autonomous individual. Privacy is a form of secrecy which looks and acts like reserve. The second layer of secrecy is more self-protective and acts like the self-silencing intended to preserve sanity. It involves the suppression of specific information, generally a choice about what is revealed about identity, in order to respect feelings and to guard against their violation. Admission to this level of intimacy about an individual is on the basis of trust. Violation without achieving a measure of trust is abuse. The inner layer of secrecy is the most complete. It is a deliberately erected barrier which excludes people from penetrating some aspect of the personality. This barrier is permeable but, because it

represents an attempt at controlling access to identity in particular, it is necessary to maintain as strong a barrier as possible for survival. Anne Brontë deals with all these levels of secrecy in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall where she uses her heroine, Helen Huntingdon, and her need to protect her identity to survive an abusive marriage to explore both the implications of intimacy and trust, and the role of marriage itself in defining and potentially undermining and destroying identity. Furthermore, Brontë reveals the moral dilemmas women face in the struggle to survive if they are obliged to adopt a false identity and live a secret life.

Privacy depends not only on the individual's desire for a self-defined space, but also on external circumstances. For example, Margaret Hale and Maggie Tulliver have less trouble finding a quiet space to be alone than Lucy Snowe because they live in a family and not in an institution like Lucy. Brontë shows that Helen has had little experience of invaded privacy until she is courted by two suitors, Mr Boarham who bores her to tears, and Arthur Huntingdon who takes advantage of every opportunity to spend time alone with Helen, despite the impropriety of his behaviour. Unlike Margaret Hale with her reserved demeanour and quiet grace, Helen is a lively and witty conversationalist with quite decided opinions about her own power to choose between the suitors. This determination leads to a compromising scene at a dinner party where Arthur draws Helen away from the company on the pretext of looking at a picture. Helen's aunt is quick to move her niece back into the middle of the party, insisting that only a proposal should draw a young woman away alone with a man. The prospect of such a proposal reveals a convention which did not emerge in Emma or North and South; Helen is expected to direct her suitor to seek her uncle's permission before she accepts the offer of

marriage. This expectation undermines the female protagonist's choices in the matter, and Brontë reveals that the intervention of parents and guardians compromises the choice by considering several responses to proposals, from that of Helen's friend, Milicent Hargrave, who reluctantly accepts Ralph Hattersley, to Milicent's sister Esther's determined refusal of all suitors until she meets a man worthy of her love in Frederick Lawrence, Helen's brother. What many Victorian novelists portray as a moment of power for the woman becomes a contentious space where privacy and autonomy are threatened as a prelude to Brontë's exploration of the short-comings of the institution of marriage.

Parents and guardians are not the only threat to privacy. The male characters in Brontë's novel are depicted as insensitive to female feelings about personal space. They appear to delight in encroaching on the boundaries women erect to provide themselves with physical and mental space. The narrator, Gilbert Markham, makes a point of trying to watch over Helen's shoulder when she is drawing or painting, and he avails himself of Helen's brief absence on his first visit to Wildfell Hall to go through the pictures she has stacked in her studio in what is clearly a masculine invasion of feminine privacy. There are consequences to this attitude which are most clearly portrayed in relation to Arthur's courtship of Helen. While examining some of her sketches, Arthur discovers Helen's innocent expression of love, revealed by her abortive attempts to draw Arthur's likeness on the back of her pictures. He is aware of a woman's desire to conceal her feelings, and he knows where to look for evidence of those feelings. He remarks: "I perceive, the backs of young ladies' drawings, like the postscripts of their letters, are the most important and interesting part of the concern" (156). Torn between her fear of being read

and the desire for self-expression, Helen hides the truth of her feelings in plain sight. The knowledge of her love makes her vulnerable to Arthur and gives him an unwanted power over her. In effect, he feels he cannot lose her, and this fact short-circuits the courtship process (in which he should be wooing her and giving her time to get to know more of his character) by allowing him to assume power over and manipulate her love.

Despite the attacks on privacy, Brontë examines one area where privacy can be preserved and provide a source of strength that has sustained women through many trials: their Christian faith. In an important way, faith functions as a self-protective barrier which creates a private space around the believer. Faith is available to any who want to believe, but it is a closed book to those who reject its power. What interests Anne Brontë in particular is the way in which, as Frawley puts it: "traditional religious discourse encourages women both to accommodate and to subvert Victorian patriarchal values" (17). Accommodation is apparent in Helen's belief that all will eventually be saved. Subversion is most clearly revealed in Helen's absolute rejection of Rev. Millward's advice when he tells her to repent of the sinful behaviour, which he suspects is hidden behind her respectable widowhood, and to return to the protection of the church. This advice is particularly inappropriate to her situation because she has not left the protection of faith but she has rejected the values Rev. Millward's brand of religion upholds. She chooses not to trust the representative of the church with the truth that she has fled an abusive marriage with her son, legally her husband's property, recognising that the minister cannot be trusted to keep her secret and would, in fact, counsel her to return to her duty within the marriage. The key point is that the faith portrayed in the novel is extremely personal and represents an unexpected source of female strength. Arthur,

however, cannot appropriate its power or destroy its efficacy for Helen. He sees in her devotion to Christianity a challenge to his power in her life because he is not willing to submit to the ideals which give her strength and he is forced to recognise that these moral ideals place her beyond his reach as she will not be turned from her integrity or her duty. At first, he deliberately gives the impression that her devotion may make him change, an impression that might have been dispelled had he had to woo her without inside knowledge of her feelings, but at the end her very presence symbolising her Christian duty as a wife to forgive and to nurse her dying husband increases his torment. While faith represents shared intimacy for believers, it offers neither strength or comfort to outsiders like Arthur.

Although issues of privacy are a concern, Victorian fiction seems to have had a special interest in secrets, and the rise of genres like the mystery novel and the sensational novel in the period indicates its interest in this subversive and powerful kind of silence.[1] The power of secrecy resides in the ability to maintain silence and to deflect attention from what must remain hidden. As with conventional silence, in narrative this effort must be marked in order for the reader to recognise that information is being suppressed. The clearest indication that a secret exists is the discrepancy between questions which are fully answered and those which are inadequately addressed or ignored. This incompleteness corresponds to the space created by suspended speech and this space can also be used to express resistance to conventional interpretation. Thus, the insistence of Helen Huntingdon that she is English but that she is "not disposed to answer any more questions at present," especially not to specify where she was born or where she has lived, reveals that she may have something to hide (62). A second indication is

the tendency to begin to say what is most natural and truthful, but then to stop and correct one's speech. In a conversation about alcohol and the way she is bringing up her son, for example, Helen asks, "And why should I take it for granted that my son will be one in a thousand?–and not rather prepare for the worst, and suppose he will be like his–like the rest of mankind, unless I take care to prevent it?" (32). The natural continuation in this sentence would be "father" but that is the secret relationship she is trying to conceal, so it must be corrected and quickly glossed over.

Inevitably, such secrecy is dangerous because it combines elements of repression and of lying. In The Power of Lies, John Kucich argues that the Victorians saw lying in various ways: "as a fundamental form of resistance to social control,. . .as a way to recognize the presence and the force of desire, and. . .as a way to rethink the distribution of power across lines of social or sexual difference" (15). When lying is specifically linked to the desire to keep a secret, the secret itself takes on these characteristics of the lie.[2] At the heart of Anne Brontë's novel is the heroine's flight from her abusive marriage, taking with her the son considered her husband's exclusive property. This is the secret on which the narrative pivots, and the action takes on the characteristics of the lie noted by Kucich. It obviously resists social control by defying both the conventions and laws of marriage; in so doing, it explicitly rethinks the distribution of power across lines of sexual difference by usurping male parental rights; and it is impelled by a desire for personal, if not sexual, freedom.[3] As the impact of Margaret Hale's lie on her own personality and on her world has demonstrated, lying has serious moral implications. If a secret can only be protected by lying, however noble the intentions of that lie (exemplified in Margaret's protection of her brother and Helen's desire to protect her

son), the secret will cause moral dilemma for the liar. It is, in fact, these moral implications that set secrecy apart from the desire for privacy and from the exercise of reserve and they encourage an evaluation of its power and purpose.

When privacy is violated and intimacy is abused, the second level of secrecy, that of self-silencing, becomes an effective barrier to further abuse. Helen's marriage to Arthur teaches her this lesson. After the marriage, Arthur continues to exercise power over Helen by the judicious exposure of secrets, both hers and his own. He takes a sadistic pleasure in embarrassing her, and frequently uses stories of his past conquests and behaviour to this end. Her modesty and innocence ensure that he is successful, at least at first. She admits: "I used to fly into passions or melt into tears at first, but seeing his delight increased in proportion to my anger and agitation, I have since endeavoured to suppress my feelings and receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt" (208). However, she is led to admit that she would not have married him had she known of his past amours. Maria Frawley comments that although Helen's silence is a tactic of "emotional retaliation" against Arthur, "yet it also marks what she calls 'inward struggle,' a phrase that suggests an uncomfortable repression of feelings" (29). Arthur seeks to exploit this discomfort by turning to a more devious torture to derive pleasure from Helen's feelings. Not content with using his past, he now attempts to make Helen jealous by flirting in public with Annabella, his friend Lord Lowborough's wife, in order to upset her, and clearly enjoying the result. His penitence is an act of "mock humiliation. . .[as,] burying his face in his handkerchief, he affected to sob aloud" (233). He feels safe in behaving in these overtly insensitive ways because he believes that Helen will continue to love him as long as he claims to love her. Arthur's manipulation of Helen allows him to

control not only what his wife knows or does not know about him but also how she will react to his revelations.

Abusive behaviour leads to new techniques for self-protection. Helen begins by repressing her feelings but she discovers, like Lucy Snowe, that it is impossible to deny them. She prudently chooses to pour out her anger, frustration and disappointment to her diary, thus providing herself a release while denying Arthur the satisfaction of seeing how she is suffering. In such an abusive relationship, any kind of honesty becomes a liability, making Helen even more vulnerable. As N. M. Jacobs suggests, Helen cannot afford to reveal her feelings in public and must hide behind a screen of conventional female behaviour if she wants to survive: "in writing down her experience, she affirms its reality; by making visible the invisible, speaking her forbidden rage, she breaks out of her emotional prison" (Jacobs 213). This emotional outlet enables Helen to exercise more self-control and retreat behind an assumed reserve but it also restricts her spontaneity and changes her personality, making her suspicious and bitter. Ironically, this desire for self-protection is instrumental in shaping her art too. At the outset, Helen enjoys romantic depictions of the world around her, such as the turtle doves cooing over the young girl in the springtime scene Arthur finds so appropriate to her virginal and hopeful state before their marriage. After her flight from Arthur, however, such fantasy pictures are replaced by a more realistic landscape art which will sell at a good price and earn her the money she needs to survive. Art is a creative activity and, if used to satisfy the artist's creative bent, can provide emotional release. Jane Eyre demonstrates this important property in her own imaginative depiction of mythical characters and symbolic scenes in the watercolours Mr Rochester selects from her portfolio as worthy of close examination.

Helen is restricted by her economic situation to painting realistically and she is further limited in what she can paint by the physical limitations of her exile. Until the summer weather makes a picnic on the coast a possibility, her subject matter is bounded by the countryside immediately surrounding Wildfell Hall and she complains to Gilbert Markham, the novel's narrator, that she lacks the variety necessary for continued inspiration. Like the loss of spontaneity she experiences in forcing herself to hide her feelings, the creative impulse which made painting an enjoyable release is also reduced by her need to hide her identity and her physical location.

While self-silencing secrecy can have deleterious effects on the personality, it can also open up ways to manipulate others. In The Tenant of Wildfell Hall this kind of secrecy is what I will call the "open secret" because it is available to an inner group that takes pleasure in knowing information and uses it to manipulate those without this knowledge, even to the extent of revealing the secret if it suits the group's purposes. This open secret is most visible in the behaviour of Helen's husband, Arthur Huntingdon, and his friends, who work like an old boys' club to maximize the advantages of their knowledge and to exercise male power over their wives, as well as over other men who refuse to conform to their behaviour and expectations. Because the intention is to use secret knowledge to control others for their own ends, this kind of secret is immoral. This is contrasted with another kind of secret; the "closed secret" that requires a sustained effort to exclude the community at large. It is exemplified by Helen Huntingdon's attempts to isolate herself from exposure and contamination by hiding herself away at Wildfell Hall. Although her actions are illegal, her decision to protect herself and her son

is not immoral in the same way as is Arthur's abuse. These kinds of secrets can be evaluated in terms of the type of silence they create and of the power they generate.

The pleasure of power is at the bottom of Arthur Huntingdon's use of secrecy. He is very aware of the use he can make of information, and he works actively to expose the secrets of others and so to gain power over them, and he manipulates his own secrets so that he derives the maximum pleasure from his transgressive behaviour. But there is more to it. In Repression in Victorian Fiction, John Kucich argues that the Victorians decided "to value silenced or negated feeling over affirmed feeling" because "a certain kind of repression, experienced by Victorian protagonists, actually heightens interior life libidinally by disrupting it" (3, 23). Denying sexual feelings, or silencing their outward expression, increases the sensual and sexual pleasure they elicit because the effort of displacing such feelings and allowing them expression in non-sexual ways increases their intensity by adding the thrill of concealment to the original feeling. Since Arthur is a rake and a sensualist, libidinal power is essential to his pleasure-seeking mind and he uses this power to his advantage whenever he can.

Such manipulation leads to repression. As Helen ceases to reveal her reactions honestly and openly, Arthur begins to use gossip about others to elicit a reaction. He confides in Helen about Annabella's feelings for Lord Lowborough, laughing at his friend's blindness in assuming that the woman he intends to marry really loves him. Arthur says: "And the cream of the jest. . .is that the artful minx loves nothing about him, but his title and pedigree, and 'that delightful old family seat' " (197). He takes pleasure in disconcerting his wife and in exposing her moral reaction to scorn. He mocks her to her face and also discusses her remarks and reactions with his friends so that they too can

despise her morality. As Elizabeth Signorotti suggests: "By garnering knowledge about their wives, the boys can later use it (by threatening to expose them) to maintain power and control over them" (23). It is clear that the men who surround Arthur have heard of Helen's behaviour because they come to her with well-founded assumptions about how she will react, and they take pleasure in her shame and anger. Mr Hattersley abuses Milicent, his wife, in a similar way when he is drunk by insisting that she tell him publicly why she is upset, despite her plea: "Do let me alone, Ralph! remember we are not at home" (277). Thus open secrets are used to create an abusive relationship where any remark can be used to embarrass another, or turned against a friend for the sake of a laugh.[4]

The fullest example of an open secret in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the way Arthur and Annabella exclude Annabella's husband, Lord Lowborough, from knowledge of their affair. Arthur's relationship with Annabella begins before her marriage, and he encourages her to marry as this will give them opportunities to meet without attracting suspicion. In deliberately entering into a loveless marriage with the intention of deceiving her husband, Annabella colludes with Arthur in selecting a victim of their open secret. The victim is to be excluded from the secret, mocked, and deceived for the pleasure of those on the inside. Once Lord Lowborough has been chosen as the victim, gossip about him circulates among the participants on the inside of the secret. Here, knowledge is power, and that power extends from the intention to deceive to the intention to manipulate circumstances to the benefit of the insiders. It appears that a conspiracy of silence adds to the fun, but it serves another purpose because those who are admitted to the secret place themselves in an ambiguous moral position. The fact, for example, that

Arthur's friends Hargrave, Hattersley, and Grimsby are in collusion with him in the affair compromises their honesty and gives him power over them that is equal to their power in knowing the secret. They use their knowledge to blackmail Arthur into accommodating their pleasures for wine and hunting, but they also risk exposure for their willingness to hide what he is doing.

One way in which this power is used is to widen the circle of people who are entangled in the secret because this compromises their morality too and keeps control over potentially dangerous people, like Helen, who might otherwise expose the secret and spoil the fun. Knowledge is a lever to control the person with something to hide. Revealing the secret selectively serves several purposes. First, it puts pressure on the person with the secret to conform to the desires of his antagonists. Hattersley, Grimsby, and Hargrave, alarmed that their genial host is retiring from the field of drunken debauchery and abandoning the good times they enjoy, employ themselves in exposing Arthur's adulterous affair to Helen. In their twisted minds, there is more pleasure in torturing Helen with a knowledge of the truth than in maintaining Arthur's secret. They use the power of the secret to secure what they most want from life: a group of men who band together to promote each other's fun. Second, the revelation is of advantage to Arthur himself, who assumes he has absolute power over Helen anyway. Juliet McMaster points out that Arthur despises secrets, and intends that Helen should find out what is going on because "[h]is wife's knowledge of his affair with Annabella clearly adds spice to it for him" (359). Third, the selective revelation creates new victims because each person admitted to the secret circle is forced to make a moral decision about becoming part of the web of secrecy or exposing the whole humiliating situation to his or

her own shame. When adultery takes place under her roof, Helen is unable to ignore it, and unwilling to forgive this betrayal of their marriage vows. She chooses, however, to restrict her reaction to the two guilty parties, refusing to enlighten Annabella's husband about what is going on. In this way, Helen is drawn into the web of secrecy Arthur has constructed around himself and gives him an additional power over her because of her silence.

Eventually, of course, the secret is revealed to even the one excluded person, Lord Lowborough himself. The men in Arthur's circle derive the same pleasure from his discomfort as they did from Helen's initial reactions. However, this revelation serves an important additional purpose in the whole pattern of power and lies. The truth is also available for use as a weapon of abusive power. Arthur is now tiring of Annabella, as he previously tired of Helen, and telling her husband the truth opens the way for Annabella to be conveniently removed from the scene without Arthur himself appearing to be responsible. Moreover, Arthur hopes to maintain power over Helen by degrading her to his level. To this end, Hargrave uses this vulnerable moment to attempt to seduce Helen, offering her his help and protection in her flight from her abusive husband. But his insincerity is clear because he makes no attempt to protect Helen's reputation. He ensures that the interview is observed by Grimsby, who immediately goes to report to the others what he has seen. Hargrave underlines the point: "[he] has no love for you, Mrs Huntingdon–no reverence for your sex–no belief in virtue–no admiration for its image. He will give such a version of this story as will leave no doubt at all, about your character, in the minds of those who hear it" (357). This group of men is held together by secrecy, and the secrets have contaminated them, leaving no room for honour or

compassion. Each member of the group has his own reasons for keeping or for exposing the secrets of the others, and each selfishly attempts to gain his best advantage in the process, setting the pleasurable urge to exercise power and satisfy desire above all other considerations.

Gender politics are at the heart of the open secret since the code of silence, maintained profitably by the men, is viewed as dishonourable in the women. Helen, in particular, is doubly victimised because she is publicly exposed by Arthur's friends, as well as held accountable for her silence by the cuckolded husband. Helen, who is in a unique position to speak honestly to Lord Lowborough when she first learns of the affair, justifies her silence by saying to her rival, Annabella: "I must. . .beg that hereafter, all familiar intercourse may cease between us; and if I still continue to treat you with civility, as if you were a woman worthy of consideration and respect, understand that it is out of regard for your cousin Milicent's feelings, not for yours" (310). The powerful tentacles of deception maintain the secret, delaying the moment of disgrace for all concerned. Helen, in fact, feels that this deception is part of her Christian duty to Annabella. Although she feels "like a criminal" when Lord Lowborough challenges her about her deception two years later, she denies ill-doing by saying: "I hoped she would return to her duty, and then there would be no need to harrow your feelings"(341). She implies that she expected Annabella to behave according to feminine conventions of conscience and honourably remove herself from the affair. She herself places a high value on moral integrity and she expects Annabella to agree with her views out of respect for her cousin if not out of love for her husband. Lord Lowborough's accusations overturn the power of the secret which has trapped her as much as it has hurt him. Helen is finally able to

choose a new plan of action. The power of Arthur Huntingdon's secret is broken, but its destruction opens the way for another kind of secrecy, which is designed to protect the innocent rather than victimise them as in the case of the open secret.

This kind of secrecy takes the form of a positive self-protection and Helen is its most striking practitioner. Self-protection in her case goes beyond the psychic protection effected by withdrawal and repression of her feelings, although Helen clearly exemplifies Kucich's claim that repression in nineteenth-century fiction tends to function as "an internal, emotional consummation that scrupulously preserves individual will and emotional inviolability from penetration for others" (27). At stake for Helen is not only her own self-preservation but also the preservation of her son. Little Arthur becomes the logical next victim when Helen asks if Arthur will let her leave their marriage with the boy. Arthur already wants to weaken her relationship with the child he jealously sees as a rival for her time and affection, so the knowledge that corrupting the boy will hurt his mother gives him a further source of power. It is not, however, until the affair with Annabella is exposed and effectively brought to an end by Lord Lowborough's departure with his wife that Arthur begins to encourage his son to drink and swear as a new source of amusement for himself and his coterie of cronies.

Helen illustrates Bok's point that secrecy may be a matter of survival. To protect her secret, Helen makes sure that it is closed. Not for her the open web of interconnected relationships and lies that surround her husband's open secrets. She wants to build an impregnable wall of privacy that cannot easily be threatened by external circumstances, and the open secret is too permeable for her purpose. Her decision to keep a closed secret is of course largely based on her legal situation. If her husband knew where she was, he

could demand the return of young Arthur, since the matrimonial laws of the day allowed women few rights if they chose to separate from or divorce unfaithful husbands.[5] A mother could not even be assigned custody of an infant until 1839 (Berry 34). In 1821, when Helen's diary account begins, she had no rights to custody at all, and Arthur was entitled to view both wife and child as his exclusive property.

In planning her escape, therefore, she keeps to a minimum the participants in her secret. In particular, she avoids involving anyone who might be untrustworthy. Not surprisingly, this includes Hargrave, whose motives for offering her his help are self-serving and would involve Helen in an adulterous relationship parallel to that which has incensed her against her adulterous husband. But it also includes her closest relatives, since she fears her aunt and uncle could be intimidated into revealing her whereabouts. She is obliged to tell her servant, Rachel, and to involve one of the men "on account of the boxes" (389). The only other person who knows the truth about her plans is her brother, Frederick Lawrence, on whose shoulders will fall the burden of concealing her physically at Wildfell Hall and of denying any knowledge of her to any enquirers. He is also to be the intermediary between Helen and her friends and relatives. At this moment, before the flight is complete, power to carry out her plans resides equally in Helen's ability to hide her intentions at home, and in Frederick's ability to keep quiet. Reducing the number of people who know the secret is crucial to maintaining control and eliminating possible weak links.

Self-protective secrecy must sometimes be multi-layered so that identity is doubly concealed. Within the community Arthur's runaway wife is Helen Graham, a widow with a young son and the tenant of Wildfell Hall, but her economic viability is governed

by another name and address under which she markets her paintings. So long as she is able to maintain these fictitious names, her secret is inviolate and her autonomy is protected. Since her survival depends on this level of secrecy, she is reluctant to reveal any more information than necessary. Her life depends on making others believe the illusion she has created but the anomaly of her situation as a woman almost alone, living in a tumble-down ruin in an isolated village inevitably attracts attention. Furthermore, her own honesty is an additional threat to her position because she subconsciously wants to tell her own story, and she draws attention to the discrepancies in her position by her speech and behaviour. Maintaining this kind of secret depends on communal acceptance of the authority of the cover story. That authority typically derives in some way from social standing or reputation. So Ruth's secret is safe for several years because of the unquestioned honesty of the respectable Bensons who take her in, although Ruth's own reserve helps to buttress the story they tell: "Her ways were very quiet; she never spoke much. Anyone who has been oppressed with the weight of a vital secret for years, and much more anyone the character of whose life has been stamped by one event, and that producing sorrow and shame, is naturally reserved. And yet Ruth's silence was not like reserve; it was too gentle and tender for that" (Ruth 391). Social status in itself, as in the case of Sir Percival Glyde in The Woman in White (1859), can secure a secret: his illegitimate birth need never have been revealed if he had not attempted to obtain his wife's money to pay his debts. But Helen Graham has cut her social ties, and to keep her cover story intact she must remain silent. Unlike heroines like Ruth or Lucy Snowe, however, Helen has great difficulty in keeping her reserve.

While Helen maintains the mask of her false identity, she is not able to silence her convictions, which run counter to those of the conservative rural culture in which she is now living. It is largely these attitudes, especially towards alcohol and child-rearing, that suggest she is hiding something. Jacobs notes that Helen is surrounded by "cheerfully conventional neighbours" whose "attitudes, which seem like harmless traditionalism, are shown in Helen's diary to be essentially identical with those that produce the domestic hell at the center of the novel" (210). Understandably she keeps her distance. For their part, her neighbours resent her autonomy, her ability to speak her mind, and her intellectual and moral superiority. They attempt to infiltrate her secret, and when they fail, create gossip designed to flush out the truth by its expansion to the whole community and by its nasty disregard for Helen's own feelings. The gossip centres on the one person with whom Helen might be expected to have a relationship: her landlord. Since Frederick Lawrence is also (unknown to anyone) her brother, the family likeness between him and his nephew, little Arthur, leads to the belief that Helen is a fallen woman and Frederick her lover. She is again at the centre of an open secret, except that this time the information the women disseminated is not the truth. In Gossip, Patricia Spacks discusses the "subversive implications" of gossip because "as a phenomenon [it] raises questions about boundaries, authority, distance, the nature of knowledge" especially when it "serves serious. . .purposes for the gossipers, whose manipulations of reputation can. . .generate an immediately satisfying sense of power" (12, 4). Spacks sees gossip "as a resource for the oppressed and dispossessed" because it gives these marginalized people the opportunity to create their own narrative in "an effortless illusion of understanding" (15, 16). Helen becomes a target of this attempt to codify her and to

harm her reputation because she refuses to acknowledge that she is disenfranchised like the women who are talking about her. In an open secret, silence indicates lack of power and complicity with the plans of those in the know; in Helen's case silence means safety. It is only in continuing successfully to exclude the Linden-Car women from the truth about her life that she can continue to live unmolested by her husband.

Such secrecy, deliberately excluding the community, has its dangers. False rumours and false identities go uncorrected, and they can result not only in suspicion but in more violent attacks on individuals as well. Gilbert is even more suspicious because Frederick tells no one of Gilbert's murderous attack, attributing this silence to "fear of raising enquiries as to the cause of the quarrel, and drawing the public attention to his connection with Mrs Graham, which, whether for her sake or his own, he seemed so very desirous to conceal" (119). Frederick, in fact, seems to be able to keep silent about many things. When he quietly slips away to his own wedding with Esther Hargrave later in the novel, his servants describe him as "very close" (462). This closeness has characterised him throughout: he never volunteers information about his sister, and he keeps the answers to Gilbert's questions strictly literal especially after Huntingdon's death. Although Gilbert suffers under the constraints of this silence, he is unwilling to challenge the man he injured and demand a fuller account of Helen in her widowed state. Gilbert attributes Frederick's coolness towards him to his relative lack of status now that Helen is no longer a fugitive artist who must paint to earn her living. What ever the reason, it is apparent that the truth, then, must come from Helen herself.

From the outset it has been apparent that Helen is not someone who can live comfortably in a state of fear and uncertainty. Gilbert is aware of her fear from the first

meeting when he rescues little Arthur from a fall. Her terse "Give me the child!" reveals her intense anxiety about her son's safety for she expects to have him ripped from her by kidnappers at every moment (25). She also fears for her own personal safety, as when she withdraws from the company on the occasion of the picnic overlooking the sea and when Gilbert's shadow "gave her an electric start." "I hate anybody to come upon me so unexpectedly," she tells him (67). Gilbert perceives that Arthur is the way to his mother's heart and makes an effort to win her trust through his kind attentions to the child. His success gives him access to Wildfell Hall and to a growing measure of Helen's confidence and love. But just when she is ready to tell him enough of the truth to engage him as a protector and friend, he sees and hears her in the garden with Frederick, and his suspicion that the gossip about them is true blocks the opportunity.

In her desire to trust Gilbert, Helen surrenders some of the power conferred by keeping the secret. In order to expose the impossibility of their love while her husband is alive, she must let down her guard. Sharing her intimate past with Gilbert is also a test of his personal character and loyalty. She can discover at one stroke whether he is trustworthy and honourable, in which case he will not only keep her secret but distance himself from her out of respect for her married state. The diary so clearly condemns Walter Hargrave for attempting to seduce Helen in the name of love that Gilbert receives a clear warning of what is expected from him, along with the revelations of Helen's unhappy marriage. In some ways, Helen's trust is repaid. She does not lose her friend, which would inevitably have happened if she had continued to shut him out of her private world. He waits to tell the gossips the truth of her status until the information is of no value, asking permission to clear her name only after she has returned to her husband. He

even uses his own secret knowledge to help others, warning Frederick of the cruel streak in Jane Wilson and Eliza Millward, who started the gossip about Helen. In this way, Gilbert also proves his moral integrity. Unlike Arthur, he does not collect secrets to gain power or to manipulate others. He knows how to protect others from all kinds of secrecy.

But if Helen surrenders some power in sharing her diary with Gilbert, she does not relinquish her agency. She is still in control, and she uses her power to make rational decisions. In particular she refuses to be ruled by fear of exposure. Just as she was able to create a safe environment for herself and her son at Wildfell Hall, and to ignore for some considerable time the gossip that so disturbs Frederick and Gilbert, so she is able to return to Arthur and nurse him when he is abandoned by his mistress and his friends. Now Helen is in the ascendancy.[6] She has the strength of character to dictate terms to her husband concerning her right to leave again, making his access to their son contingent on his compliance. She controls his access to alcohol, watering his wine as directed by the doctor, and depriving him of choice about how his recovery is managed. This time, Helen has the inside knowledge about how drinking will hurt him that enables her to manipulate the situation, and Arthur is on the outside because of his unwillingness to submit to her version of the truth.

Silence offers a widow additional protection. A widow has agency over her family and her estate, so she needs no secrecy to hide her identity. She can withdraw from the world and continue to exercise power within it. After Arthur's death, Helen is slow to emerge from behind this shield of duty and faith. The secret of her identity is known, and those who are closest to her have access to her again. The trust which she has invested in Gilbert gives him permission to court her, but she offers no

encouragement. As Langland suggests: "Gilbert becomes silent, submissive, passive and acquiescent" (121). In many ways, his hesitancy mirrors the woman's normally passive position in society. Helen still holds the balance of power, although not this time in secrets but in economic terms. He is silenced and powerless because of her position. Helen does not intend this to be a barrier. If she did she would inform Gilbert of the change in her financial position after her uncle's death, which erects a much more considerable economic barrier than does the estate she holds in trust for her son from Arthur Huntingdon. Her silence, then, must serve a different purpose. More specifically, it is an extension of the test of her trust, asking without direct communication how strong his love for her is. Her silence also throws the young farmer into the reflective space where character development can take place, and it is the case that he does mature during the time of her silence.

Some critics have questioned the apparent betrayal of his wife's secret in the narrative frame structured by an exchange of confidence between men. Elizabeth Signorotti sums up a prevailing view: "Keeping his wife in her place be appropriating her private history becomes vitally important for Markham, just as the appropriation of women's secrets–and the power derived from that knowledge–was essential to the survival of. . .Victorian boy's clubs. But in Markham's letter to Halford, we witness the ebbing power of the old boy network over women like Helen Huntingdon" (24). That power is ebbing because men like Markham are no longer allowed to appropriate their wives' secrets. Women who have suffered abuse choose who they will admit to intimacy and who they will exclude and this gives them greater protection than the naive Helen enjoyed as a young bride. To approach the question via the issue of secrecy, however, is

to see that the power of the secret has been destroyed by Arthur's death and by Helen's remarriage and the story needs to be told. If abusive male power is to be rendered inert, secrets which support and foster that power must be revealed. Silence must be broken once it has served its purpose, for to continue to live in secrecy denies a voice to those who are still living in danger behind walls of powerlessness and silence. Helen Huntingdon knows this and supports the telling of secrets for positive ends. She shares Millicent's private letters with Millicent's husband, Ralph Hattersley when he asks how he can improve his marriage. As with conventional silence, it is the power to choose that matters. That power involves not just what Bok identifies as the freedom to act in the cause of one's own "sanity and survival," but also, as she argues, "the capacity to put knowledge to use" (20, 19). Secrecy is, after all, about knowledge, but knowledge alone does not confer power. Control of information is one part of secrecy, knowing when not to control information is the other. Ultimately, power comes from the choices linked to knowing when to speak and what to say, making secrecy, like silence, a powerful tool for self-definition and self-expression.

# NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Secrecy in Victorian fiction has been much discussed. For helpful recent studies see Peter Thoms " 'The Narrow Track of Blood': Detection and Storytelling in Bleak House." Nineteenth-Century Literature 50 (1995): 147-167; Melynda Huckey *"No Name*: Embodying the Sensation Heroine." Victorian Newsletter 82 (1992): 5-13; Christine Kreuger "Literary Defences and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain." Victorian Studies 40 (1997) 271-294; and Lyn Pykett, The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing. New York: Routledge, 1992.

2. Bok comments: "Lies are part of the arsenal used to guard and to invade secrecy; and secrecy allows lies to go undiscovered and to build up" (xv).

3. For Helen's transgressive behaviour see Elizabeth Langland "The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," in Anthony Harrison and Beverly Taylor, eds., Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art.

4. On male humour and female reactions see Juliet McMaster, " 'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall."

5. Francoise Basch outlines the legal position of married women in Relative Creatures.

6. For readings of the ending see Langland "The Voicing of Desire in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," in Antony Harrison and Beverly Taylor, eds. Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art; Signorotti " 'A Frame Perfect and Glorious': Narrative Structure in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall"; and Jacobs "Gender and Layered Narrative in Wuthering Heights and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall."

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Withdrawal and Reflection in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss

> The mind firmly resolved after due reflection will not be afraid in a crisis
>
> –Sirach 22:16

The three kinds of silence we have considered so far are all rooted in reality. Margaret Hale's strength comes from her ability to deal with changes in silence: her reserve signals a pragmatic approach to her circumstances, all the more striking when contrasted with her father's weakness and inability to deal with the realities of doubt or death. Lucy Snowe withdraws into a private space, but she uses this time of withdrawal to acknowledge and express her feelings, so that she can appear reserved and rational in public. Helen Huntingdon is obliged to hide herself away physically from her husband in order to survive, but she has no expectations that the withdrawal itself will change her character or transport her to a perfect world. She is safe so long as she can keep the secret of her identity, but guarding that identity does not deny her ability to feel or to acknowledge her passion through her art, her diary, and conversation with those she trusts. In contrast to these productive uses of silence, in The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot examines the consequences of a more complete withdrawal from a social world unable to accept deviation from tradition. Maggie Tulliver's contact with the world makes for a negative experience, and, since her efforts to conform meet with rejection, she develops as a conflicted personality with little hope of positive resolution. In the end,

Eliot's novel suggests that withdrawal and the decision to reject socially approved models of feminine behaviour may result in destructive alienation instead of healthy integration. This withdrawal into a fantasy world can be overcome through a reflective acceptance of reality, but the wrong use of imagination opens the way to a misreading of identity and a false sense of autonomy.

Like Lucy's adult experience in Villette, Maggie's childhood experience of the rural world in St. Ogg's is one of living in an alien environment. As in Villette too, the alienating aspects of that environment derive from traditions and conventions. However, the traditions in The Mill on the Floss are Maggie's own heritage, while those in Villette are indeed foreign to Lucy. Thus for Maggie to reject the world she lives in and to withdraw to a private world of the imagination is a denial of her roots, a much more serious issue than Lucy's reservations about foreign ideas and ideals. This is not to say that Maggie should embrace the traditions and expectations of the Dodson family. Eliot does indeed characterise their values as unusually conservative even for a rural environment where change comes slowly. In fact, Eliot portrays the family traits in unflattering terms, referring to their behaviour as "emmet-like" and poking fun at their "particular ways of doing everything" from cleaning to cooking and from being born to dying (363, 96). Moreover, Eliot details idiosyncrasies indicating that silence already plays a controlling role in the family. Aunt Glegg's use of old clothes and frizzy false curls to indicate her disapproval and Aunt Pullet's unspoken fear of death, disguised as concern over her health and worry over whether she will ever wear her new bonnet, both serve as examples of how Maggie's relatives use withdrawal and silence to create a fantasy environment around them, as Maggie herself learns to do. Eliot makes it clear

that this kind of withdrawal is odd, even absurd, but the choice Maggie's aunts make to engage the world on their own terms sets the pattern for Maggie's own escapism. Although such a withdrawal is comic for them, it will have tragic consequences for Maggie because she is superior to her aunts in many ways.

Eliot examines how Maggie's sense of alienation leads to a series of attempts to escape from her uncongenial environment. The first is an angry rejection of the rules by which her family lives. Like Lucy Snowe, Maggie is obliged to silence her passionate nature in order to fit in, and she withdraws to the attic in her search for a space where she can give some vent to her passionate feelings of love and frustration. The description of her two dolls reveals the intensity of these passions and suggests the problems she will face in bringing these feelings under control.[1] One doll, described as "a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes," is kept in the attic, her retreat on rainy days (78). Maggie solaces herself by "alternately grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimneys. . .sobbing all the while with a passion that expelled every other form of consciousness" (79). For Maggie, the attic is not a place for quiet reflection but a place where feelings can be expressed through shouting out anger and sobbing out tears of rage. Katherine Hayles notes that her motivation for withdrawal includes the idea that others will be punished by her absence, a tactic that fails because the person Maggie most hopes to impress, her brother Tom, is able to ignore her anger and withdrawal by pretending that he is always right and that it is Maggie who needs punishing. In a sense, Maggie's retreat to the attic is a form of self-inflicted punishment, but the opportunity to indulge in this very necessary purge of passion enables her to conform to the restrictions her mother places on her public behaviour more appropriately.

Although this angry withdrawal is not silent, it allows Maggie to deal with the injustice of the outside world and rids her of much of her frustration while preserving her unique sense of identity.

Eliot is concerned about the expression of all kinds of passion, not only anger and frustration. Like Charlotte Brontë, she is interested in exploring the development and expression of love as well. Maggie's passionate capacity for love is revealed through her treatment of the second, wax-faced, doll "towards which she had an occasional fit of fondness in Tom's absence,. . .lavishing so many warm kisses on it that the waxen cheeks had a wasted unhealthy appearance" (68). It is also expressed in her clinging movements, which threaten to engulf Tom when she seeks love and reconciliation from her judgmental brother. This is one area where Maggie soon learns self-control, moving from the impulse to hang around Tom's neck as a child to the capacity to reserve outward shows of affection for key moments of crisis. The most poignant reconciliation occurs after Mr Tulliver's death when Maggie begs, " 'Tom, forgive me–let us always love each other,' and they clung and wept together" (465). It is a scene foreshadowing the moment of their own deaths, when "brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted–living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together" (655). The remainder of her love is locked in, restricted to limited expressions of affection controlled by the incest taboo.[2] By contrast, Tom's love (something Maggie longs for more than anything else) is capricious and dependent on her behaviour. Maggie lives in its sunny moments, as on their fishing trip to the Round Pool, where "[t]here was nothing to mar her delight in the whispers and the dreamy silences. . .Maggie thought it would be a very nice heaven to sit

by the pool in that way, and never be scolded. . . .[I]t would always be like the holidays; they would always live together and be fond of each other" (93). Although such moments of unity are rare as the siblings grow up, their final encounter recalls a sunny moment of childhood, revealing the depth of Tom's love for his sister when he uses "the old childish – 'Magsie!' " to convey his willingness to forgive her when she rows out on the flood to rescue him (655). These moments of acceptance and reconciliation allow Maggie's identity to be reconfirmed in times of silent agreement or under crisis conditions, and they provide the affirmation she needs to survive.

In contrast to the affirming moments, Eliot adds a sinister dimension to her description of Maggie when she distances Maggie from the real world (and particularly from the uneducated world of St. Ogg's) through mythological references. As a child, Maggie is compared to the Medusa, whose snaky head petrified all who viewed it, as well as to a Pythoness, a demonic witch figure. Her trance-like whirling and willingness to retreat into silent contemplation are linked to these powerful but destructive comparisons, suggesting that Maggie's unusual behaviour is a response to occult influences and reinforcing the impression that her withdrawal, like her angry rejection of family values, is an unproductive use of silence. Nor are these images confined to childhood. Philip Wakem, the disabled son of Mr Tulliver's old enemy, lawyer Wakem, and a budding artist, describes the elegant seventeen-year-old Maggie as a Hamadryad or wood nymph, who is more in tune with the Scotch firs of their favourite meeting place in the Red Deeps than with her human companions. These pagan images are linked to the Christian legend of the Virgin of St. Ogg's, who conferred a blessing on a boatman in ancient times because he did not "question and wrangle with the heart's need" but took pity on a

desperate woman and ferried her across the river when no-one else would (182). These repeated references to mythological links reinforce the impression that Maggie is special and that her unique qualities will be misunderstood by those around her.[3]

The issue of social acceptance is, of course, a broad issue for women writers in the Victorian period, and it can be viewed from many angles, ranging from the question of the reintegration of a fallen woman into society, a theme Elizabeth Gaskell explores in Ruth, to the questions of identity and autonomy explored by Charlotte Brontë in Villette. Like Lucy Snowe, Maggie Tulliver is one of literature's "dark unhappy ones," and she judges herself by her family's reactions to her appearance and impulsiveness. George Eliot's insect and animal images define the problem: the "emmet-like Tullivers and Dodsons" stand in contrast to Maggie and her older brother Tom, who evoke the untamed wildness of Shetland ponies and dogs while their cousin Lucy, more like the ideal compliant child, is compared to a white kitten (363). The implication of these descriptions is that the siblings, though young, are out of tune with the communal habits of their ancestors. Maggie's own concern about belonging is poignantly described in her imaginative reflections on the spiders in her father's mill on the river Floss. She wonders how they get on with other spiders since "there must be a painful difficulty in their family intercourse: a fat and floury spider, accustomed to take his fly well dusted with meal, must suffer a little at a cousin's table where the fly was *au naturel*, and the lady spiders must be mutually shocked at each other's appearance" (80). Her musing supposes that there is room for difference and accommodation, a view her father shares. Maggie is a product of two parents, and it is her father who recognises that "[t]here's red wheat as well as white,. . .and some like the dark grain best" (118). He is always willing to take

Maggie's part and his unconditional acceptance is a frequent solace to her. Her willingness to be comforted by her father's love indicates her desire to be part of a family that does not reject her for her appearance or behaviour, even when they differ from the family's norms.

The novel examines the whole issue of conformity for Victorian children by showing the links between social and familial expectations and personal identity. While Lucy Deane is able to fit in with her mother's desires for a quiet, well-behaved daughter, Maggie's identity is forged out of conflict between her mother's intentions for her and the pressures of her own nature. Certainly, her hair symbolises her impulsive resistance to her mother's desires. Maggie is frequently described as unruly and her untamed black hair, so at variance with Lucy's blond curls, is symbolic of her wild personality. Nina Auerbach links Maggie's appearance to her underlying rebellion when she writes: "The traditionally demonic connotations of unruly hair are reinforced by Maggie's life. The intensity with which she flings herself at the moment contains a certain murderousness" ("The Power of Hunger" 156-7). Although Mrs Tulliver acknowledges her daughter's wildness and rebellion with regret, she is more concerned with accidental drowning than with Maggie's propensity to smother the people and things she loves. And she expresses her prosaic take on life by worrying that her daughter will grow up "half an idiot" because of her inability to concentrate on what her mother deems important (Mill 60). The tension between the two generations is illustrated in particular by their differing attitudes to Maggie's external appearance. Maggie so hates having her hair curled that one morning she "dipped her head in a basin of water standing near–in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day" (78). More

drastically, she attacks her rebellious locks with scissors before the dinner party at which her relatives are to be consulted concerning Tom's education. It is as if her hair, and hence her personality, prevent her from seeing clearly in more than physical ways, as the narrator describes her standing "cropped in a jagged uneven manner, but with a sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain" (120). Shorn of the encumbrances implied in allowing herself to be shaped by outward conformity, she will be able to grow as she wants. Later in life, her hair becomes a measure of her self-control as she "submit[s] to have the abundant black locks plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head" to please her mother (388). But as with Lucy Snowe's quiet demeanour, this outward appearance of calm and order suggests an inner sense of peace that is more tenuous than it seems.

Throughout her fiction, Eliot explores the problems exceptional women face in being exceptional.[4] In The Mill on the Floss, she focuses in particular on how looking and acting differently are viewed with suspicion by a traditional community, and on how the individual is pushed into silence in an attempt to create a place of self-definition. Auerbach has defined the problem in terms of different kinds of vision. Invoking the prefatory frame, she places the "swimming vision" of the ducks with their heads under water in contrast to the vision of the "drier world above," where Mrs Tulliver behaves like a mother hen who has hatched the wrong kind of chick ("The Power of Hunger" 151, Mill 54). Auerbach suggests: "plunging one's head underwater entails the exchange of a clear vision for a swimming vision, a submergence of experience at the cost of objectivity and judgement" ("The Power of Hunger" 151). This exchange of "clear" for "swimming" involves a denial of reality in order to create a vision more in tune with

desire. This "swimming vision" must be cultivated in privacy in periods of withdrawal, periods which must be interspersed with times of conformity analogous to the ducks swimming on top of the water as opposed to diving beneath it. As Auerbach comments: "it is part of Maggie's nature that. . .she never grows away from her capacity to plunge into the moment, to submerge herself exclusively in what is near" ("The Power of Hunger" 151). This ability fully to enjoy the present without reference to the traditions of the past or the consequences of the future further defines the differences between Maggie and the Dodson and Tulliver clans. They reject impulsiveness in favour of calculation, but Maggie does not.

This "swimming vision" and the impulsive behaviour it promotes become a form of resistance to conventional expectations. But at the same time they are potentially destructive. While she is reacting to the dictates of the moment, Maggie is indifferent to the consequences of her action, and such indifference indicates a dangerous loss of self-control. Maggie is aware of the need for a greater measure of control over this impulsiveness as she matures and, like Lucy Snowe, she attempts to silence her desires in order to achieve it. However, before Maggie can grow to this new understanding of the need for self-control, she must also overcome a second tendency as destructive to her personality as her impulsiveness: that of dreamy withdrawal. This withdrawal involves retreat to an imaginative space where Maggie can play with alternatives to the conformity her relatives demand. In this imaginative withdrawal Maggie does not need to vent her frustration but can replace her negative feelings with musings on a perfect fantasy world. The mill functions as the initial centre of this new kind of silence. As with the water that alters the ducks' visual perception, the mill changes perception: "The rush of the water

and the booming of the mill bring a dreamy deafness which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond" (54). This mental withdrawal into a dream world goes beyond the moment of impulse because it provides a constant place of escape, while the "swimming vision" must by its very nature be more transitory. Maggie desires this "dreamy deafness," for it softens the harshness of what she hears from the Dodson side of the family: her mother, brother, and aunts. In the mill or standing staring at the millpond, she is caught up in her own reverie and able to distance herself from reality. These are spaces for imagination and dreams, rather than places to deal with excessive passion. Here Maggie can create her own world and escape the social expectations of conformity and tradition because, as Margaret Homans suggests, "daydreaming is inefficacious and irrelevant, too trivial to be either punished or rewarded" by those whose lives are ruled by economic principles without regard for individual character ("Eliot, Wordsworth" 236-7).

Eliot's narrator gives the reader a clear idea of how Maggie uses this imaginative withdrawal as a child to provide escape from her surroundings. Take the incident of her flight to the gypsies. One of Maggie's ambitions is to be in charge, and she imagines herself as the queen of the gypsies. Having been told she is like a gypsy, she imagines they will "gladly receive her and pay her respect on account of her superior knowledge" (168). The reality, of course, is quite different. Maggie is no gypsy, even if she looks like one with her black hair and brown skin. The local band of nomads treats her as if she were a lady and much too fine to join them, although they do take advantage of her ignorance to remove the contents of her pocket and steal her thimble. Maggie quickly comes to the realisation "that it was impossible she should ever be queen of these people,

or ever communicate to them amusing and useful knowledge" (175). She is unable to accommodate herself to a group outside her family, and her reflections about who she might resemble usually end with seeing herself physically unchanged but as well-behaved and beloved as her cousin Lucy. This form of childish imagination falls short of making necessary changes in her behaviour, and the dream remains unfulfilled in childhood despite her desire to make herself acceptable by some means or other.

There are similarities between Maggie and her extended family which indicate that she is not unique in choosing withdrawal to deal with feelings of anger and rejection. Aunt Glegg's wrong use of religious reflection and her misappropriation of Christian reading serves as a parallel example to Maggie's behaviour in the attic. After the family dinner, which ends in a fight over money Mr Tulliver has borrowed from her, Maggie's aunt uses Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest as an escape from strife. She does not actually read it but leaves it "open before her. . .gradually calming her feelings" so that she is able to reconcile with her husband, who has suggested she was wrong to quarrel with her brother-in-law (193). The book serves as an external excuse for Mrs Glegg to spend the day in peace, supposedly in prayer and religious reflection, but it really serves as an opportunity for a more mercenary consideration of her own investments and her prospects for inheriting Mr Glegg's money. While such thoughts produce the necessary calm, they do not have the salutary effects that genuine repentance and religious reading should have. Both aunt and niece withdraw in order to punish someone else, and they both spend the time they are out of communication with their families to create a fantasy world that satisfies and soothes them without effecting any changes in character or behaviour. Both need to repeat the experience of withdrawing to achieve peace whenever

there is a crisis. Maggie eventually grows out of the passionate but frustrated tears into a more mature reflection on her behaviour but, like her aunt, she never completely transcends the desire to remake the world in her imagination in an attempt to find acceptance.

The effects of the "dreamy deafness" of daydreaming are compounded by Maggie's approach to reading. In an uneducated family where, in Mr Tulliver's opinion, "things have got. . .wrapped up i' unreasonable words," reading is a way of unsupervised escape for the intelligent Maggie (69). Education trains Maggie's mind and forces her to recognise that even in the area of reading her imagination leads her to transgress conventional boundaries. Margaret Homans has defined two kinds of reading in the novel: "disobedient reading," which allows the reader to add to the written account but which is "incompatible with femininity"; and reading with "complete feminine docility," that is, reading unquestioningly in the writer's voice, a process Homans feels culminates in silencing the individual personality and in potential death ("Eliot, Wordsworth" 229). Initially, Maggie reads without paying much attention to the words. She is interested in the way the pictures feed her active imagination, and she adds her own gloss on what she sees. This is most clear in her conversation with her father's friend Mr Riley and the discussion about the picture of the witch. Maggie admits that the picture is "dreadful" in its portrayal of the water test for witches, but she is fascinated by it (65). She understands that death by drowning indicates innocence and that the ability to float confirms the old woman in the picture as a witch. She asks: "But what good would it do her then,. . .when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she'd go to heaven, and God would make it up to her" (66). Maggie is quick to recognise injustice and to question it. Mr

Riley does not ask how Maggie perceives God's action in the case; he merely condemns the reading matter as unsuitable for children and suggests "prettier books," by which he means less subversive reading (67).

Through characters like Mr Riley, the school-master Mr Stelling, and Luke Moggs the mill manager, the novel looks at how identity is tested in the wider, patriarchal world and suggests that the identity conferred by family members can be countered or confirmed by an outside audience. Luke Moggs learns what Maggie reads about in her "prettier books," but he is not impressed by people from other lands, although most of the area's trade is carried on with Europe and with the reviled Dutch in particular. His comment, "There's fools enoo–an' rogues enoo–wi'out lookin' i' books for 'em. . . .I can't do wi' knowin' so many things besides my work," indicates to Maggie that reading is another interest which fits poorly with the people around her (81). Even her father is concerned that she is "too 'cute for a woman," and that she will gain little from her mental acuity (60). Maggie's love of books is further ridiculed by Mr Stelling when he suggests that girls have "a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (220-221). The learning that Maggie expects will set her apart and win her influence in a world that refuses to be impressed by her appearance becomes a further indication of her negative difference from those around her. Those who have the capacity to learn are regarded as unusual, and their talents are belittled and curbed to fit the patriarchal expectation that men have the brains and women the bodies. Maggie's desire to excel in the educational field is gradually eroded until it becomes no more than "a certain mirage [that] would now and then rise on the desert of

the future, in which she seemed to see herself honoured for her surprising attainments" (380).

Like Margaret Hale, Maggie is schooled by suffering more than by any formal education. After her father's bankruptcy and illness, her dissatisfaction with previous means of withdrawal and escape leads her to seek the answer to her need for happiness in a Christian text. When she receives a copy of Thomas à Kempis' teaching on renunciation, she is seeking "happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life. . . .She could make dream-worlds of her own–but no dream-world could satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life" (379). What she finds is a text that is already marked for her: "it had the corners turned down in many places, and some hand, now for ever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen and ink marks, long since browned by time" (382). By following the prompting of this other voice, Maggie gains the illusion that she is living by the text, much as her aunt assumes that Baxter's text provides the right moral reading to deal with her anger and self-righteousness even though she does not follow the teaching. Like Lucy Snowe too, whose efforts at self-silencing reveal rather than conceal the depth of her passion, Maggie is still passionate and impulsive by nature even when that nature is submerged in religious devotion.

Just as her early sense of identity was tested against the views of people outside her family, so this new behaviour is tested by external pressures. In some ways, Maggie is still governed by externals. She moulds her behaviour through a rejection of pleasure but not an inner acceptance of pain. This becomes especially clear in the descriptions of her love of nature and her unwillingness to exclude country walks from her regime. Although "she thought she ought to deny herself the frequent indulgence of [visits to the

Red Deeps]" it becomes a favourite place of withdrawal from the routine and boredom of her everyday life. It is also a new emanation of a dream world, where "she could sit on a grassy hollow under the shadow of a branching ash,. . .and listen to the hum of insects, like tiniest bells on the garment of Silence" (393). In the book of nature, the script is still open to interpretation and has not been written over by an unknown and long dead hand. Denied access to the "dreamy deafness" of the world of the mill by her father's financial failure, Maggie seeks to replace the mill's function in a new world which defies accurate definition. The flowers and trees of the Red Deeps cannot be quantified and reduced to hard cash. They are constantly changing and encourage imaginative speculation rather than profitable industry. It is significant that Maggie sees in this walk the indulgence of the desire for happiness, far from dead although held in abeyance by her deliberate renunciation of pleasure.

Significantly, it is in this natural scenery that Eliot locates the reawakening of desire. In this liminal world between the privacy of her home and the public space of the nearby road, Maggie meets Philip Wakem, Tom's old school fellow and the son of Mr Tulliver's worst enemy, lawyer Wakem. Janice Carlisle suggests that "Philip enters the novel to become the voice of rebellion and desire once Maggie herself embraces submission and denial" (184). This view explains the renewed tension Maggie experiences between the choice she has made to live without considering her wishes and the choice she is now offered to indulge her taste for imagination by returning to the reading of fiction. Philip tempts her with the suggestion: "It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny

now, will assault you like a savage appetite" (429). Maggie already feels the pull of such appetites. As John Kucich comments: "Morality, like economics, is deadening so long as its goal is functional efficiency," and Maggie has expended her efforts in outward conformity to her new morality without imbibing the spiritual principles which gave it life for Thomas à Kempis ("George Eliot and Objects" 335).

Thomas à Kempis writes about the renunciation of desire, the ability to recognise the heart's need for love and then to deny a selfish expression of that need by sublimating human desire in return for God's love. What Maggie reads is a set of instructions which should teach how self-denial can be accomplished, but she accepts them without replacing her need for human love and affection with divine love. Because the words never become more than a written code of behaviour for her, they have no deep life-changing power. In her reflections on how to live with poverty and disapproval, Maggie has come to the end of dreams and begins to be hungry for what will really satisfy her need for love and acceptance. Joseph Weisenfarth suggests that what she should find in Thomas à Kempis' text is "the paradoxical proposition that there is a heart's need that cannot be neglected if one is finally to achieve a truly human resignation" (32). But what she does find is a new way to avoid facing that need. By withdrawing into what she perceives as the principles of Christian renunciation, Maggie really succeeds in creating a new fantasy world. It is, first of all, a world not governed by appearance. She is able to turn her mirror to the wall and to live without regard for how others see her. Initially, she spends her time "forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness, and in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain." But genuine renunciation is not about such

self-satisfaction. As the narrator reminds the reader: "renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly" (Mill 384). In her imaginative appropriation of the words on the page, Maggie is still directed by her own desire for love, approval, and acceptance, which she still sees as coming essentially from the human world around her. Like her aunt, she does not transcend her humanness by focusing on religious texts but withdraws instead into a psychological space where ascetic behaviour as a means of self-punishment replaces condemnation from others. When she lies on the floor all night, it is merely a variant of her aunt's withdrawal with Baxter. It makes Maggie feel more holy, but it has little bearing on her identity. In the end, as Mary Jacobus points out, "[t]he morality of submission and renunciation is only a sublimated version of Tom's plain-spoken patriarchal prohibitions" (218). Maggie internalises what Tom has said by her refusal to read Thomas à Kempis with the imaginative "disobedient reading" she applied to earlier texts. Her reliance on the form of devotion denies it the power to change her from within.

Eliot uses Maggie's reading of The Imitation of Christ to look at the overall issue of adult feminine conformity. This reading functions on two levels: rejection of worldly values and the stoic endurance of pain. Maggie is allowed to withdraw from the materialistic world of her mother and aunts, rejecting the Dodson attitude towards possessions that has taken over Tom's life in his obsession to restore the family fortunes.[5] In some senses Maggie takes to this lesson naturally. She has never been interested in possessions or in the material world, and this has already been a source of childish conflict with Tom. It is Maggie's inability to focus on mundane details that prevents her from remembering to feed Tom's rabbits while he is away at school, for example. As a

young woman, she experiences an increased need for self-denial because of her family's bankruptcy and subsequent poverty, but it seems to gall her less than it does her mother, who spends an inordinate amount of time complaining about the loss of her linen and china. Tom's obsession with eliminating the family debt and redeeming the mill from Mr Wakem's possession, a mandate he inherits from his father as necessary for Mr Tulliver's sense of justice, is also rooted in the family pride in outward status that Maggie rejects. In fact, as Marianne Hirsch suggests, "Maggie's self-denial is a long habit, her only behaviour ever rewarded, and ironically. . .her only form of self-assertion" ("Spiritual *Bildung*" 35). Maggie is interested in bringing the family out of poverty, and her renunciation of her own selfish desires allows her to spend time doing plain sewing and earning some income despite Tom's insistence that he will redeem their honour without the help of a woman.

The other aspect of self-denial addressed by this reading of the Thomas à Kempis text is that of punishment. Maggie's new-found asceticism allows her to inflict punishment on herself for what she sees as her inadequacies. She is able to take pleasure in "making out a faith for herself without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides," even when it means striving "to be contented with. . .hardness, and to require nothing" (386, 387). Her strict self-denial permits her outward behaviour to mirror conformity with family dictates, so that she appears to be growing good and submissive under the influence of the teaching of renunciation. However, she does not abandon her habit of creating her own world in withdrawal any more than her father changes his habits as a result of her changed behaviour. Eliot reinforces the parallels of past and present by stating: "[Mr Tulliver] did not want spiritual consolation–he wanted to shake

off the degradation of debt and to have his revenge" (388). Although Maggie's behaviour has changed, so that her punishment is now self-inflicted rather than induced by negative behaviour, underneath she is still the same person liable to be seduced by impulsive desires and led astray by passion.

When withdrawal leads to the stifling of natural desires and ambitions, Eliot suggests, then it becomes an abuse of the power of silent acceptance. So long as Maggie's quiet withdrawal protected her identity, it was encouraged. Now when it comes into conflict with a new set of ambitions, it is questioned. For Tom, the choices are automatic. He has become the head of the household during his father's illness, and continues to be the main source of income after Mr Tulliver's recovery. As Maggie says: "[Y]ou are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world" (450). She herself also longs for the power to change their situation, and for women that power normally lies in an advantageous marriage. John Hagen suggests that it is only Tom's obsessive insistence on his father's desire to punish the Wakem family that keeps Maggie and Philip from making a profitable marriage, a desire not as far out of line with family loyalty as Tom believes. Yet Maggie is relieved when Tom finds out about her secret meetings with Philip, and she is glad to pass the decision not to see Philip again to Tom because it relieves her of the necessity of hurting Philip herself. The love she feels for him is not strong enough to extend into a marriage that, moreover, would itself be an impulsive attempt to escape a difficult world. Maggie's decision to abandon her friendship with Philip before it can be challenged by a proposal of marriage is indicative of her deeper desire to acquire virtue and develop more completely as an individual, yet it also denies her the adult life normally associated with marriage.

George Eliot is aware of the risks involved in not taking personal responsibility for difficult decisions, and she examines these risks in some detail. Even Tom bases his decision to close down Maggie's friendship with Philip on the curse he has dutifully inscribed in the family Bible at his father's direction, a curse that confirms Mr Tulliver's refusal to forgive Philip's father and binds Tom to taking revenge on Mr Wakem if possible. In the microcosm of St. Ogg's this unwillingness to think as an individual and to stand by decisions is reflected in the narrator's comments on "the world's wife," that all-powerful woman whose influence covers all of society and dictates acceptable behaviour to men and women alike (619).[6] After Maggie's illicit boat ride with Stephen Guest, it is the women's opinion of her that supposedly prevents the men from welcoming Maggie back into polite society. However, it is clear from the actual behaviour of the men that the problem goes deeper. Once Maggie is condemned by the wives and mothers of St. Ogg's as an unhealthy influence on the girls of the town, the men begin to treat her with less respect too. On her way to ask help of the minister, Dr Kenn, Maggie is exposed to their stares, "and she could not help seeing young Torry step out a little with his glass at his eye, and bow to her with that air of nonchalance which he might have bestowed on a friendly bar-maid" (623). A refusal to accept responsibility for actions suggests an inability to live in the real world, and that, as George Eliot proceeds to reveal, is dangerous and destructive to the individual and to society as a whole.

Like Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot understands that passion must be acknowledged before it can be controlled. Lucy Snowe's struggle to bring her passionate desires fully under her control is detailed in the description of the battle between reason and feeling to govern her personality and define her identity. For Lucy, this effort is part

of her deliberate attempt to create a space in which she can preserve both sanity and autonomy. Maggie Tulliver makes no such effort. She relies on other voices, such as Tom's admonitions to loyalty and duty and Thomas à Kempis' teaching, to guide her personality without dealing with the rebellious impulsiveness still buried underneath superficial conformity. In many ways, Maggie fails to choose at all more than she fails to choose wisely. All her life, she is carried along on the stream of others' desires and intentions for her, and her moments of withdrawal act as a preservative counterbalance to their teaching and demands but without touching the core of her being in a real way. Her love and desire are merely repressed, and she seems alarmingly unaware of the need to find some one to trust with the reality of her passionate imagination. By contrast, Lucy Snowe is actively aware of her smouldering passions and of how close they are to the surface, and she is willing to let down her guard and trust the one person who is capable of seeing beyond her carefully built protection of silence.

Unlike Lucy's first-person narrator with her sense of narrative control over her story, Eliot's narrator generates a sense of controlling narrative as she tells Maggie's story. Her habit of making statements which become self-fulfilling prophecies, in particular adds to the sense of determinism and fatalism that enters so frequently into the novel. One such statement, which ripens slowly, first emerges in the childhood relationship between Tom and Maggie. As Maggie sobs out her sorrow at Tom's anger over the dead rabbits in the attic, she is overcome by her need for love and acceptance. The narrator comments: "It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love, this hunger of the heart: as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world" (91). Maggie eventually learns to subdue this

"hunger" to the point that she can live in Tom's presence without a sense of his approval, but she is not able to sublimate her desire for his love sufficiently to become fully independent, as Lucy Snowe is forced to do by the death of her family members. When Maggie goes away to teach, she is not satisfied with the experience, comparing herself to a trained white bear in a show: "I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space that he would keep doing it if they set him free" (481). Maggie has been restricted in her access to love, and her hunger to be accepted and appreciated for herself is like the bear's constant turning to try and find a way out of his imprisoning cage. Ironically, that cage is constructed from her own imaginative attempts to escape the limitations of her restricting world because the scenarios she imagines oblige others to adapt to her expectations but do not place demands on her to change. She comes back from her "dreary schoolroom" longing for a way out, whether it is through more education or through Lucy's offer of a refreshing vacation (481). Lucy's kindness provides an interlude of escape from the pressures of the real workaday world, and throws Maggie back into the pattern of retreat into a fantasy space in a concrete way.

Eliot uses these circumstances to examine the role of impulse in temptation, allowing her protagonist to be overwhelmed by passion in response to a new and eligible friend, Stephen Guest. In responding to his adoring love, Maggie yields to all the early impulses guiding her into a state of contentment in the past, but their combination here underlines the danger of creating an unreal world. Maggie's hearing, vision, and thinking are all compromised by Stephen's passion. She allows herself to become caught up in music, as she was previously deafened by the rhythmic sound of the water mill. She sees

herself through Stephen's idealised vision of her, and the pleasure of being loved and being able to love in return helps her to give in to the temptation to go out in the boat with him. Once on the river, Maggie is content to drift with the tide: "thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped–it belonged to the past and the future that lay outside the haze" (589). As with the ducks with their "swimming vision," the impulse of the moment dulls all other sensibilities. This temporary forgetfulness of anything outside the present moment works much like the imaginative "disobedient reading," allowing Maggie to create for this brief space of time the fiction that she is able to live without family ties or moral virtue. Commenting on the inadequacy of this vision to sustain Maggie in the real world, John Bushnell compares Stephen, who lulls her into a "thoughtless trance," to Philip, who desires to make Maggie an object of adoration (388). They both desire to confine her within their vision of womanhood, but neither man can succeed because each vision imposes conventional limitations on Maggie that her strength of character will not fully permit.

Homans sums up Eliot's realisation of the consequences for Maggie: "She sets her heroine's insatiable need for love, together with her own narrative commitment to realism, against the antisocial implications of what she represents as the introverting power of the imagination." It is this "introverting power of the imagination" which is destructive because it refuses to make allowances for moral reality. Eliot is not satisfied to leave Maggie in unreality. She "schools her heroines to choose a love that represents a turning away from disruptive visionary power" (Homans 230). Withdrawing into a silent world of the imagination is a denial of self and leads inevitably to self-destruction. The only recourse is to live in a present tempered by the past and hopeful about the future. It

is this state that Maggie finally achieves in the aftermath of her decision to go away with Stephen. She condemns his unthinking behaviour, accusing him of attempting to undermine her possibility of choosing what she will do. In the recognition of this responsibility to think and to act responsibly for herself, Maggie moves from imaginative withdrawal into true reflective silence for the first time. After a quiet time of waiting and praying that "the light that had forsaken her would come again" she forgives Stephen, burns his letter, and resolves that tomorrow she will "write to him the last word of parting" (648, 649). She accepts responsibility for her own choices, and she rejects Stephen's solutions to their dilemma, preferring to return to St. Ogg's unmarried and in disgrace, to spending the rest of her life living out a choice she did not freely make.

The full impact of Maggie's suffering emerges in her mature reflections on renunciation, now linked not to a feminine reading of the à Kempis text but to an internalised voice that allows the truth of the teaching to reach deep into Maggie's soul and touch the core of her being. After Tom's refusal to let his sister return to the mill, Maggie seeks refuge with her old friend Bob Jakin and his family. Tom's rejection allows her to focus on other relationships outside her love for him, and she recognises the call of duty and loyalty in new ways. Lucy's forgiveness and Philip's support recall her to a sense of right and wrong, and she is strong enough to put their needs ahead of her own desire and (at least verbally) to refuse Stephen's second proposal, burning his letter to indicate the completeness of her decision to reject her lover and to trust that "she must be learning a secret of human tenderness and long-suffering, that the less erring could hardly know" (649). Her capacity to imagine the pain of others is finally rooted in the

memory of her own suffering, and focusing on the reality of that pain instead of withdrawing from it into a world of make-believe makes reflection possible.

Although Bernard Paris suggests that "[a]t the end Maggie resigns herself to a suffering from which there is no relief and devotes herself to a goodness for which there is no reward," the final scenes suggest something more (192). The arrival of the flood water follows too swiftly on her decision to reject Stephen for her to live out the implications of that choice, but the decision is valid nonetheless. As when she gave up hiding from Tom in the attic and went to seek his forgiveness, this decision translates as a desire for reconciliation and a sense of closure. The scene outside is one of chaos and confusion, but Maggie is guided by one clear purpose. Laurence Lerner suggests that Maggie's question "Which is the way home?" requires the answer: "the way to yourself" (277). And that is exactly what Maggie finds as she rows through a nightmare world exceeding her imagination. In this crisis, "there was an undefined sense of reconcilement with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in our primitive mortal needs?" (652). The great test has come, and Maggie has learned real lessons, not the ones taught in books, but the ones taught by life and suffering, and she is ready. Her reliance on her imagination to build an acceptable world around her is transcended, if only briefly, by a reflective and silent acceptance of what life really is with all its struggles and injustice, and it is a moment of triumph. Eliot declines to consider the alternative to Maggie's violent death, wrapped in her brother's embrace, but she does suggest that Maggie's life is worthy of remembrance not only by the two men who visit her grave but also by every reader of The Mill on the Floss. Her sacrifice is not

lost in silence but resonates like the legend of the Virgin of St. Ogg's. In returning to the power of collective memory to transcend individual experience and make sense of tragedy, Eliot suggests that communal growth and change do require the tradition and continuity that Maggie rejects. While the individual can escape these forces for a time, a rejection of common roots leads to alienation rather than integration, and that alienation is destructive. Thus Eliot's Mill on the Floss brings the Victorian woman writer's exploration of the uses of silence full circle by suggesting that although women cannot survive if they are denied autonomy nor can they survive in a social world without accepting the limitations convention creates. Silence can work productively only for those who choose to accommodate themselves to the social code of reserve and self-control without retreating completely into a self-defined fantasy world ruled by impulse and desire.

# NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. There are many readings of The Mill on the Floss in terms of desire. For some examples, see Margaret Homans, "Dinah's Blush, Maggie's Arm: Class, Gender, and Sexuality in George Eliot's Early Novels"; Bernard J. Paris, "The Inner Conflicts of Maggie Tulliver: A Horneyan Analysis"; Diana Postlethwaite, "Of Maggie, Mothers, Monsters, and Madonnas: Diving Deep in The Mill on the Floss"; and Philip Ranjini, "Maggie, Tom and Oedipus: A Lacanian Reading of The Mill on the Floss."

2. Philip Ranjini, "Maggie, Tom and Oedipus" is an excellent article on the possible incest between Maggie and Tom.

3. On the mythological images, see Joseph Wiesenforth, "Legend in The Mill on the Floss."

4. In Middlemarch, for example, Dorothea Brooke's story essentially begins where Maggie's life ends, continuing the legend of the Virgin of St. Ogg's in the new hagiography of St. Theresa. Mary Garth is, in some ways, a more mature Lucy Deane, and Rosamond Vincy shows Eliot's continued interest in the inadequacy of female education to prepare women for marriage or for life.

5. Economic issues are discussed in Jules Law "Water Rights and the 'crossing o' the breeds'" in Linda Shires, ed.; Judith Lowder Newton, Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860; and Michael Steig, "Anality in The Mill on the Floss."

6. For more on St. Ogg's as a microcosm, see Richard A. Currie, "Lewes' General Mind and the Judgement of St. Ogg's: The Mill on the Floss as Scientific Text"; and Reva Stump, Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels.

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