

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE:
READING WILDFELL HALL IN THE L1 AND L2 CLASSROOM**

by

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For God, who makes everything possible,

And for the people who are most important in making my life wonderful.

For Emma

For Frankie

For Angie

For Mom and Dad,

For my family and friends

With love and gratitude

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ABSTRACT

Though both literary critics and anthropologists have sometimes recognized converging aims and methods between ethnography and narrative fiction, few interpretive studies of fiction have been undertaken using the framework of ethnography of communication. Because ethnography of communication centers attention on language in situated communicative interaction, it could be a useful tool for exploring literary texts, especially texts within the genre of “realistic fiction,” which sometimes also depend upon observation or creation of situated social interaction. This dissertation uses ethnography of communication to interpret a Victorian novel, Anne Bronte’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Ethnography of communication may also serve as a general framework for teaching literature, combining close linguistic or stylistic analysis of the language, detailed examination of the cultural and social situation, and re-creation of the meaning of the event as it may have been experienced by the participants. This approach may be especially appropriate in the case of L2 learners taking literature courses in university programs. The overall framework of the analysis, ethnography of communication, will be supplemented by Goffman’s model of interaction ritual and the concept of co-construction of reality. These frameworks will be employed in the analysis of brief communicative events within the novel. Insights about the characters and the speech communities deriving from ethnographic interpretation will be used to build more precise understanding of the events of the novel, thereby contributing to traditional areas of literary criticism, and offering options for literary study in L1 and L2 contexts.

INTRODUCTION

No one single manner of reading will do, so heterogenous is the world, so diverse are its peoples and cultures, so different are the texts, whether literary, cultural or symbolic by which we tell ourselves and others about ourselves, and by which others speak to us about their differences from us, whether from the present, from some other culture, or from the past, from whatever we may think of as our own culture. (Wolfreys, 1999, p. xii)

The Purpose

To find the origins of this study, you must go back with me to the summer of 1974, when I first began studying Spanish in Guadalajara, Jalisco. During the Echeverria administration (1970-1976), the Mexican government provided extensive support for cultural institutions, including SepSetenta, a series of more than four hundred books, costing ten pesos each, focused on Mexican and Hispanoamerican history and culture. With the help of these books, as well as weekly news magazines and the comics drawn by Rius, I covered my linguistic weaknesses with cultural awareness. My language learning experience taught me that language itself is only a small part of learning to communicate within a foreign culture. I have always believed that, if one has to choose between the two, it is better to have extensive cultural background and some language skills than extensive language background and some cultural knowledge. I have been teaching English in Mexico since 1976, since 1982 in a university major aimed at preparing professional teachers and translators of English. When we were designing the Lengua Inglesa major at the School of Philosophy and Letters of the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, we opted not to teach language (at least not directly and

formally) and also to include a variety of literature and history courses as means of developing the student's experience of the target culture.

Literature components in majors aimed at developing L2 teachers and translators are often questioned and sometimes difficult to justify. Some of the objection to both L1 and L2 literature courses, I think, derives from experience with programs that lack clear purposes or effective strategies for using literature. Professional teachers and translators need to be exposed to the history and literature of English speaking countries but they do not necessarily need to become professional historians or literary critics. In experiencing literature we are interacting with the culture that produced it. The sort of literature teaching that focuses upon memorizing information about the texts or labeling and classifying literary devices is probably of little use for either first L1 or L2 learners, even those who do plan to become professional critics. Strategies that call upon the student to learn about the text rather than to experience it are of limited value. If the L2 reader is going to develop an understanding of the target literature he must do so through direct aesthetic experience with the text itself, not through gathering information about it, tracing literary movements or memorizing literary terms. Steinbeck and Rickett, in a comment cited by Scholes (1985, p. 130) contrasts catching a live fish in its native habitat with dissecting a dead laboratory fish and argues that we can learn nothing important from the dead fish.

The Mexican sierra has XVII – 15 – IX spines in the dorsal fin. These can easily be counted. But if the sierra strikes hard on the line so that our hands are burned, if the fish sounds and nearly escapes and finally comes in over the rail, his colors pulsing and his tail beating the air, a whole new relational externality has come into being—an entity which is more than the sum of the fish plus the fisherman. The only way to count the spines of the sierra unaffected by this second relational reality is to sit in a laboratory,

open an evil smelling jar, remove a stiff colorless fish from a formalin solution, count the spines and write the truth "D.XVII – 15 – IX." There you have recorded a reality which cannot be assailed—probably the least important reality concerning either the fish or yourself. (Scholes, 1985, p. 130)

It is equally true in the study of literature that we seldom gain anything of value from dissecting a dead text. Voloshinov (1973/1930) describes works of art including literary texts as "crystallizations of behavioral ideology"; he argues that separated from contact with the behavioral ideology of the group that produced it, the text is as dead as Steinbeck's laboratory fish unless a connection can be made between it and the behavioral ideology of the new age. Any effective use of literature in the classroom must permit the student to forge that connection, to grasp the living fish; otherwise, the literary text differs little from any other text the student might read. Because students must experience the text before they can understand it, reader response methodologies are the most efficient ways to introduce students to literature. This is true in all literature courses but perhaps even more so in L2 literature courses, where the conventions that govern the texts are often unfamiliar to the readers.

On the other hand, L2 learners, like native speakers, often need additional information about the literary text before they can fully experience it. Making that information available to learners has been a central concern of literature teachers. In recent decades the most significant approaches to dealing with literature in the L2 classroom have probably been cultural studies and stylistics. Both of these approaches to the literary text have extrinsic motives beyond facilitating the student who seeks to experience the text. The cultural studies approach sometimes seeks to substitute the

cultural text for the literary one. The focus of this approach is upon the text as an entry into the target culture but the center of concern is often with the culture rather than with the story. Rather than using cultural background to illuminate the story, textual events might be used to cast light upon the culture. The stylistics approach deviates from the text in a different direction, focusing upon the use of language. If insights about language are used to open the text to the learner, stylistics can be an effective approach to literature. Often however, those insights are valued for themselves rather than for what they can indicate about the story, and the text may become simply a source of data for language learning. The task for the teacher in either case is to make available sufficient cultural and linguistic information to enhance the experience of the text without centering it so that it distracts from the experience.

Although, within the immediate context of reading and discussing a specific literary text, the story remains the center of attention, in the broader context of professional development, the focus is somewhat different. All courses, those focused on literature, as well as those in linguistics, pedagogy, translation methodology, research and writing, and other areas of language use or cultural awareness, center on developing in the learner confidence in her abilities as a multilingual/multicultural professional and sensitivity to cultural nuances and complexities of language. In the major in Lengua Inglesa, though there are no courses denominated language courses, all courses are taught in English. All reading, discussion and writing are done in English. This alone insures that the graduates will be extremely proficient users of English. In addition, however, all the courses consciously include general language and cultural components. From the

beginning of the program students are guided to use background information differently than it is used in most programs in Mexican universities. Rather than looking for answers in books, learners are expected to consider perspectives suggested by their reading in developing their own answers to the questions raised in the courses they take. An early student of Lengua Inglesa once described the program as “read, read, read, write, write, write.” Though this may be largely true, little reading or writing takes place in the classroom. Instruction centers on talk, in pairs, small groups or whole class arrangements. Learners develop their ideas and their identities in conversation with their peers, as they analyze and interpret the visions of the world set forth in the various disciplinary perspectives introduced in their reading. They work together to develop projects that test the concepts proposed in their reading and explore the nature of language learning. As they do this they are also analyzing and experimenting with spoken and written language. Within this context, interpreting literature is just another element in their growth as language professionals.

In content courses, including literature courses, we are still teaching language, developing awareness and communicative proficiency, but in a different way. Hymes (1983) has argued that language is the means by which we make our stories and that to reach through to the meaning of the stories we have to explore the means. So study of literature, in a sense, is always also study of language. The report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changing World*, (2007) proposes a model of literature and language teaching very similar to the model that functions in university programs taught in

contexts where the language of the academic discipline is different from the language of the general community. The report speaks of “deep translingual and transcultural competence” (2007, p. 3) as a goal for language majors, arguing that the desired outcome is “the ability to operate between languages” (2007, pp. 3-4) rather than native speaker proficiency. This translingual and transcultural competence is the factor that separates university preparation for language teachers and translators from simple teacher training programs such as those frequently offered to the teachers of public schools or language schools. Literature assumes a paradoxical role within this model. Literature courses are always secondary to other aims in a major preparing language teachers and translators but in the literature class as the student reads a literary text, the cultural and language aims are secondary to the experience of the individual story.

As with many English degrees, both in English speaking countries and in places where English is a second or foreign language, the curriculum of the Lengua Inglesa major includes survey courses providing overviews, often chronological, of the development of literature through successive historical periods. At Philosophy and Letters, whereas the survey courses in Letras Españoles and Filosofía begin with the most remote periods and move toward the present time, those in Lengua Inglesa begin in the nineteenth century and then move either further into the past or closer to the present. This arrangement was determined because, taking nineteenth century literature as the most accessible, it seemed to provide the easiest entry point for students who might not yet be comfortable with reading and interpreting literary texts in English. Looking back, it is clear that the perceived accessibility of nineteenth century literature is related to the

dominance of realism in the literary genres of the period. Realism as a perspective on the world seems to share several characteristics with the concerns of L2 students; the realistic orientation of the nineteenth century novel suggests that it is already an ethnographic enterprise. Buzzard (2005) claims that 20th century ethnography descends from the realistic novel of the nineteenth century more than from nineteenth century anthropology and that the nineteenth century novel has more in common with twentieth century ethnography than with the twentieth century novel. The parallels between the nineteenth century novel and twentieth century ethnography indicate that ethnography of communication might be a fruitful perspective from which to view these novels.

I first used *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (hereafter *Wildfell Hall*), the subject of this study, as a text for ethnographic analysis because it seemed to reproduce the elements of actual ethnographic observation. As I analyzed events in the novel I began to realize how much I was learning about the text through looking at it this way. I had thought I was exploring how the methods of ethnography could be applied and I discovered that I was exploring what the book was about. I eventually realized that ethnography of communication may be the theoretical framework that enables the type of literature teaching that should be done in L2 contexts. In his analysis of Chinook myths Hymes (1983, p. 237) notes, “It seems no accident that precise analysis brings to the fore instances of speech acts. Authentic performance of American Indian narratives focused much upon voices, their interplay and enactment”. What Hymes says about Chinook myth is equally true of the realist novel, especially one like *Wildfell Hall* that eschews omniscience and depends entirely upon the words and actions of the characters for insight

into their motives and intentions. Hymes continues, “Structural analysis can go a long way, a revealing way, by focusing upon the content of myths as sequences of speech acts”. It is this shift of focus, the decision to treat the literary text as a sequence of speech acts within specific communicative events, that brings to light the details of the story, opening up the text for exploration.

Saville-Troike (2003) describes ethnography of communication as a “synthesizing discipline” addressing “the structuring of communicative behavior and its role in the conduct of social life.” Hymes (1974, p. 3), similarly, characterizes these studies as “ethnographic in basis and communicative in the range and kind of patterned complexity with which they deal.” Hymes argues that it is not possible to combine linguistic material with ethnographic material to form conclusions; rather, the discipline requires the gathering of a new type of material through observation of events within a network or community so that language use is situated within the context of activities. Though the ethnography of communication combines elements of anthropology and linguistics as well as related disciplines such as sociology and folklore, its innovative feature is the focus on language in situated interaction. Bauman and Sherzer (1974, p. 417) make a similar point from a slightly different perspective when they argue that, “the ethnography of speaking, by its insistence on the interrelation of language and social life, provides new ways of investigating intuitions which avoid the circularity of arbitrarily dealing with linguistic, social or cultural institutions as separate systems.” Saville-Troike (2003, p. 2) defines the field by citing a central question, “What does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, and how does he or

she learn to do so?” The answer to this question leads us to the concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971 & Saville-Troike, 2003). Significantly, this question is not much different than the implicit question behind each language learner’s attempts to become a competent user of an additional language. From a slightly different perspective Hymes described his aim as “to help create a study of language that is rooted in the study of social life and that contributes to the transformation of social life.” (1979, p. 316)

Hymes based his early methodology on a modification of Jakobson’s model of the speech event (Bauman & Sherzer 1975, p. 99). He altered slightly the content of some of Jakobson’s (1999/1960) elements and divided Context, arriving at seven elements of the speech event: Addresser, Addressee, Message Form, Channel, Code, Topic and Setting. In 1964, he added an eighth element, the event, and then, in 1967, he reworked the elements to create the SPEAKING grid (*Setting or Scene, Participants or Personnel, Ends, Acts, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of Interaction and Interpretation and Genres*). He has varied the elements occasionally and he views the grid as a guide to elements that might be significant rather than a rigid formula for doing research. The SPEAKING grid, though developed as an aid to ethnographic observation of events centers on the interrelationship among elements that in some form are also central to fiction: Scene (Setting), Participants (Characters), Ends and Act Sequence (Plot), Key (Tone), Instrumentalities, Norms of Interaction and Interpretation, and Genres. Thus, it may seem natural to use it as perspective from which to interpret a literary text. Saville-Troike (2010) argues that ethnography of communication is not an anthropological theory, perhaps not even a method. It may be, as Waugh (personal communication, March 12,

2010) suggests “a way of thinking about the world”. Hymes posits certain goals: becoming aware of the context of the event, perceiving how the participants understand what is happening, discovering the precise interpretation they give to the language they use and, from that, distinguishing what the participant needs to know. The SPEAKING grid that he developed is a reminder of the elements of the speech event that may help us to elucidate it, but it is not a formal method. The process of ethnography of communication is inductive. The ethnographer attempts to enter the target community free of the bias of theory and to learn to recognize the theoretical categories the members of the community use to organize their experience. Insofar as it can be called a method, ethnography of communication may be characterized by Hymes’ repeated insistence on using all there is to use, his insight that depth of meaning can be discovered through focus on details of language and context, and his reminder that the communicative event involves more than the referential content of the words.

The study centers on the application of the perspective of ethnography of communication to the analysis and interpretation of an early Victorian novel, *Wildfell Hall* by Anne Bronte. The overall framework of the analysis is the ethnography of communication. The scenes (communicative situations) of the novel have been broken into sequences of speech events and analyzed using components of Hymes’ SPEAKING grid as a basis for observation. Although attention centers on the role of language in the interactions, the participants’ perception of the events and the contextual background either provided or assumed by the text, all the components of the grid are considered at one or another point. The analysis also brings out the characteristics of and variations in

the principle speech communities represented in the novel. Questions of communicative competence “knowing what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation” (Saville-Troike, 2003) are also addressed. During the course of the analysis a number of related approaches are touched upon, most frequently Goffman’s model of interaction ritual. These models are used, not instead of ethnography of communication, but in deference to Hymes’ call to use all there is to use. At times a particular perspective will bring out an element in a communicative event that is not readily available from other approaches.

Ethnography of communication, a revealing model for interpreting literature, can also serve as a general framework for teaching literature. Ethnographic observation and analysis incorporates close linguistic or stylistic analysis of the language used in the communicative event. Stylistic analysis is supplemented by detailed examination of the cultural and social background of the event. The goal of this combination of attention to language and context is re-creation of the meaning of the event as it may have been experienced by the participants. These three components of the event, language, context and experience constitute the focal points of the three principle approaches to teaching literature of the past forty years: stylistic analysis has fixed attention on close reading of the language of the text; cultural analysis has situated the text within its historical, cultural, sociological, political, literary or biographical contexts; and reader-response analysis has centered upon the enabling the student to experience the text aesthetically. Each of these three approaches, however, often draws attention away from the text as a story. Within the framework of ethnography of communication, these three strands are

continually reincorporated into the core goal of achieving an emic understanding of the communicative event embodied in the text. This attention to situated event may bring to life texts that would otherwise be dead. Returning to Steinbeck and Rickett's dead fish, Saville-Troike (personal communication, March 12, 2010) suggests a perspective on ethnography of communication that places it somewhere between the fisherman pulling the struggling fish into the boat and the scientist in the laboratory dissecting the dead specimen. Like the laboratory scientist, the ethnographer attempts to count the spines on the fish. She seeks to observe the details and detect the structures but without dimming the pulsing colors or stopping the beating tail. Rather than the type of autopsy that the New Critics sometimes performed on the literary artifact, Saville-Troike argues that the ethnographer performs a cat scan, allowing her to study the details and recognize the patterns without killing the subject of the study. In the teaching of literature it is necessary to take the student beyond the level of immediate emotional response. Hymes (1981, p. 10) is telling us this when he cautions, "Meaning is deepest where that artistry is most evoked. Although it may appear paradoxical, perception of depth depends on perception of detail and of the relationships implicit in its placement". In other words, to attain the full experience of the story, we need to have our attention drawn to the significant details and patterns that bring out the complexity of the interaction. Background information related to both language and culture is often necessary, especially for L2 readers. Because ethnography of communication focuses our attention on the communicative event it keeps the story as the center of attention, avoiding

deviation into questions that are purely linguistic, purely cultural, or purely response oriented, becoming thereby a point of combination of all these perspectives.

The use of ethnography of communication as a perspective for teaching literature might be especially appropriate in the case of L2 learners taking literature courses in university programs. This framework, perhaps more than any other enables the student to use and further develop her considerable skills of cultural analysis. L2 learners, with the experience of entering and adapting to another culture and language have already assumed some of the attributes of ethnographers. Whether or not they are aware of it, they practice on a regular basis the art of using all there is to use as they apply their linguistic and cultural insights to the management of the communicative events in which they interact. By introducing learners to basic concepts of the approach such as communicative competence and speech community, this approach can also help them toward greater awareness of the nature of the activities they engage in as language learners. In this way, by asking them to apply skills developed in learning languages to the reading of the L2 literature, we make the study of literature an integral part of their development as transcultural persons. There is a tradition of using ethnographic techniques to look at what happens in the language classroom. Increasing research is also being conducted into involving language learners in ethnographic analysis of society. Ethnography of communication has not, however, been commonly used as an interpretive framework in the teaching of literature though it offers the possibility of naturally integrating many of the skills that the student is developing as a language learner into the study of literary texts. In addition, the focus of ethnography of communication makes it a

convenient framework for incorporating the concerns of the various approaches to literature teaching for L2 learners into a common procedure. Because ethnography of communication validates careful scrutiny of the language of the text, comprehensive research into the context of the event and concentration on the aesthetic experience of literature, it can serve as a point of convergence for the three major approaches to literature teaching in L2 courses. While unifying the focal points and incorporating the benefits of stylistic or linguistic analysis, cultural studies, and reader-response approaches, the ethnography of communication fixes attention on the situated communicative event, thereby encouraging literature teaching not to stray from focus upon the story in pursuing linguistic, cultural, or response oriented goals.

From one perspective, it may not matter whether literature students using ethnography of communication to explore literary texts are L1 or L2 learners. Most students are removed from most of the literature taught in schools either by time or space. L2 readers may have an additional separating factor between them and the text, but their separation is not necessarily greater for that. The students with whom I have read this text have been L2 readers. Some of them may have entered the program with comparatively limited abilities in English. Some of them may initially fail to perceive some of the implications of the events they read. In this they are like native speakers, who often also fail to notice implications in their reading. As language learners, on the other hand, they may be more sensitive to some of the issues related to intercommunity interaction that are developed in the text. Ethnography of communication has seemed to be a fruitful technique for enhancing the experience of readers in my classroom but I can see no

reason why it would be less effective with L1 readers. The report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages speaks directly to this issue.

Replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses, will reinvigorate language departments as valuable academic units central to the humanities and to the missions of institutions of higher learning. (2007, p. 3)

The MLA report focuses upon foreign language departments but the issue it raises applies equally to all literature teaching. When students reach a certain point they do not cease to be L2 learners; they can still benefit from focus on language. But this is also true of L1 readers of literature. Similarly cultural background is frequently necessary for both L1 and L2 readers attempting to enter into literary texts. Because ethnography of communication incorporates cultural and linguistic insights into comprehending the communicative event and thereby experiencing the story, it helps build communicative competence while fostering appreciation for literature. Such an approach helps to eliminate the cleavage described in the MLA report between language learning and literature. Because it promotes focus on the story, it minimizes the importance the secondary apparatus of literary terms and conventions that sometimes dominates literature teaching.

The ethnography of communication in its ethnopoetic variant has been shown by Hymes (1981, 2003) and others to be a significant tool in establishing authentic texts of transcribed oral literature. Hymes (2003) has also shown that the approach can contribute insights to the interpretation of some forms of modern American poetry. Though the method has only occasionally been used for the analysis of fiction that does not have a

basis in oral storytelling, related anthropological models have been used by several critics (Buzard, 2005; Handler & Segal, 1990) especially to analyze nineteenth century realistic novels. This study attempts to demonstrate that the ethnography of communication can provide significant insights into realistic fiction, insights that often are not be accessible through other interpretive approaches. Saville-Troike (2003) has emphasized that the model of ethnography of communication enables us to explore not only speech but silence. In observing a speech community we become aware not only of who may speak and under what circumstances but also of who may not speak. Communicative competence involves not only knowing what to say but knowing when not to say anything. Exploration of silence provides another parallel between ethnography of communication and literature. Iser (1974) argues that without silence there is no space for literature. Literature occurs in the gaps that the reader must fill in the literary text. Ethnography also requires certain kinds of silence. A text with an omniscient narrator, for example, depends less upon communicative events for its meanings. *Wildfell Hall*, a text that explores silence in various ways, is constructed of communicative events. The conflicts and resolutions of the story are motivated by different kinds of silence, compounded by the unreliability of the narrative voices. Ethnography of communication is a method of observation that allows the researcher to focus directly on these silences.

Both anthropology and fiction are geared toward discovering and formulating underlying patterns and profound truths about life rather than listing superficial facts. But this core motivation places both methods of visualizing the world near the divide between what is true and what is fictive. One of the signs that announces a work of fiction is the

opening assertion that everything is true. The substantial number of books dealing with truth in fiction (Roberts 1972, Fleishman 1978, Jacobs 1990, Furst 1992, & Galligan 1998), especially realistic fiction, might be illustrated by the title of Riffaterre's (1990) study *Fictional Truth*. The parallel group of books exploring the fictional aspects of anthropology (Rose 1993, Wyndham 2001, Clifford 1988, 2003) can be illustrated by the title of Kloos' (1990) collection, *True Fictions*. Beyond the ambiguous relationship with truth that they share, several studies have noted stylistic parallels and shared goals between anthropological or ethnographic writing and fiction. From the anthropological perspective several researchers have discussed the pervasiveness of fictional narrative techniques and sensibility in modern ethnographic practice (Clifford, 2003). On the side of literature, several studies (Emery, 1996 & Bentley, 1995) have explored the anthropological elements in nineteenth and twentieth century literature or the interactions between anthropological theory and fictional practice. Others (Handler & Segal 1990, Buzard, 2005) have applied specifically anthropological concepts to the analysis and interpretation of fiction. Given the many shared elements in the two fields, such an application may be of value.

In discussing the ethnography of communication as a tool for reading, interpreting and teaching literary texts, it has not seemed practical to begin with any extended theoretical discussion. It was first necessary to apply the ethnography of communication to the process of reading a story, to explore what breaking down a narrative into speech events and analyzing them ethnographically can teach us about a text. The process of ethnography is inductive. It is necessary to begin from the details of the speech acts, not

just what is said but all the elements of the context that are expressed or implicit in the communicative event. It may not be possible to explain the ethnographic techniques of literary analysis so that they will make sense to the reader without first demonstrating how they can be applied. Once we have used ethnographic techniques to help us understand what is happening in selected speech events in the text we are considering, we can begin to discuss how the insights of ethnography of communication can help us to experience a literary text as story, how they can enrich our literary interpretations, and how they can open the text to students in a literature classroom, especially in a literature class in which the students are removed from the context of the original story by distances in time, space, or first language.

The Book

You must now go back with me to the autumn of 1827. A young farmer, who recently inherited his father's farm, is thinking about the circumstances that brought him to where he is and speculating on the options before him and the course his life will follow. Years later that young man will recount some of the thoughts and experiences of this period of his life in letters to his brother-in-law. Because the young farmer is a careful observer of details, he leaves a record of his activities that enables us to comprehend some of the multiplicity of his life. The young man, however, is a fictional character, the narrator of the second novel of a 27 year old governess living in Yorkshire. The author of the novel possesses an ethnographic imagination and an awareness of the complexity of routine events that, two centuries later, bring her characters emphatically to

life and guide readers of the novel through a world as intricate, inconclusive and real as our own.

A first reading of Anne Bronte's *Wildfell Hall* can be astounding, especially to a reader familiar with the plodding novels of Charlotte Bronte or Emily Bronte's overwrought *Wuthering Heights*. First the book is very funny. My initial reading occurred at a time when I was teaching a short story class at the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua in which I used, among other texts, Shirley Jackson's *Strangers in Town*. I was immediately struck by the parallels between Addie Spinner and Gilbert Markham, with his desperate compulsion to know all the gossip coupled with his constant denials that he cares about gossip. From the beginning the parallels that most readily suggest themselves in Anne Bronte's style are to Jane Austen rather than to either of Anne's sisters. In looking back over the early reactions to Bronte's work we find that the similarity to Austen was identified early. A January 1848 *Atlas* review of Bronte's first novel, *Agnes Grey*, identifies it as a 'somewhat coarse imitation' of Jane Austen (Allott, 1974). Despite her light touch and satirical tone, Bronte's narratives are not as flawless as Austen's are, but her range of subject matter is wider and her challenge to conventional attitudes more direct.

Later, as I was exploring the use of ethnography of communication as a technique for understanding what is happening in communicative situations, I found that I kept coming back to *Wildfell Hall* for examples. Several characteristics recommend this novel as a text for analysis. First it is a realistic novel with evidence of close observation of social interaction, detailed enough in presentation to provide adequate data for analysis.

The plot of the novel hinges in part on variations in communicative competence within the speech community where it is set. These differences derive at least in part from heterogeneous expectations among the characters due to subtle nuances among several closely related yet distinct speech communities. More than most novels of its time, *Wildfell Hall* presents complex characters that react believably in multilayered social interactions. The unreliability of the narrators, the participation of a multitude of voices, and the indirectness of the author's interventions in the story create dynamic speech events with a variety of possible implications. Because *Wildfell Hall* deals openly and directly with alcohol abuse, domestic violence, the property rights of women, sexism in education and other social problems that were not openly discussed at the time the novel was published, and because the treatment of these problems is realistic rather than moralistic, the book responds to several different ethnographic and related approaches. Although both narrators take themselves seriously, the author constantly undercuts them, augmenting the humor but also the complexity of the book.

As we observe the communicative events, we note that the information that the author gives us through the narrators often contradicts the interpretations that these narrators make of the events. This dissonance between event and interpretation leads us to evaluate the conduct of the narrators differently than they themselves present it to us. The re-imagining of the narrative voices calls into question many other assumptions that have been made about the novel. It becomes clear, for example that the narrators can not be intended as unambiguous spokesmen for the views of the author and that the meaning of the book cannot be simply what the interpretations of the narrators imply that

it is. The novel that we discover through ethnography of communication is more complex and more true to life than the one that some past readers thought they were reading. Like Hymes (2003), we can, through the techniques of ethnography of communication experience the satisfaction of restoring the authentic text and coming closer to hearing the voice of the author. The book seen from this perspective, especially when it is through the scrutiny of the learners that the complexities are revealed, comes to life and becomes capable of opening up to students and offering them an authentic aesthetic experience.

Certain historical factors have contributed to a relative neglect of this novel and to critical misreading. It was controversial when it was published because of the direct portrayal of scenes that were considered inappropriate at the time. It was suppressed when the author died shortly after the publication of the second edition and not reprinted for several years. It shocked readers of the 1840s and was dismissed as didactic by critics of the early twentieth century. Anne Bronte's life provoked considerable interest during the century and a half that followed the publication of *Wildfell Hall* but the novel, though it continued to be read, was little regarded by critics. Although there were a small group of critics during the first hundred and twenty years of its existence, who praised *Wildfell Hall* highly, there were few who read it closely. Only in the past thirty years has the novel received serious critical attention and even now it is often overshadowed by lesser books written by Bronte's sisters. The ethnography of communication is an approach that allows us to start over, return to the events of the story, observe what happened, draw inferences about what the events meant to the participants, and re-envision the text—just

as Hymes (1981, 2003) re-envisioned the Chinook texts that had been obscured by the effects of inadequate interpretations and misleading arrangements on the page.

Another characteristic of *Wildfell Hall* that makes it an ideal subject for ethnographic analysis is the evidence it shows of Bronte's ethnographic imagination. Because she provided the reader with the kinds of data an ethnographer might look for and then stepped back rather than interpreting for the reader, she creates an opening for ethnographic analysis. Craik (1968, p. 238) arguing that Bronte's work most resembles Fielding and aspects of Scott, adds, "But Anne Bronte differs from them because her creations are memorable in groups, rather than separately, and because they depend upon action to provoke self-revelation". She provides some examples of interactions, noting, "All of this rings precisely and originally true" (Craik, 1968, p. 239). She questions Bronte's success in portraying Lawrence because her methods, "always require speech and action, the two things in which Lawrence is deficient" (Craik, 1968, p. 240). Although Craik does not attempt to define or analyze Bronte's dependence on 'speech and action' and her treatment of both the themes and the characters of the book is often vague and inadequate otherwise, these comments indicate that she senses the centrality of the communicative event in *Wildfell Hall*. Her insight that the characters are 'memorable in groups' underlines the importance of interaction in revealing character in the narrative. Because neither narrators nor author are privy to the thoughts of the characters, 'speech and action' are the only clues available to the reader. Because Bronte is aware that the slight almost unnoticed details of interaction are the most significant, the events she describes 'ring precisely true'. Because *Wildfell Hall* explores communicative situations

and events that may be familiar to L2 learners, the ethnographic approach allows them to apply their own experience of the world to analyzing the events of the novel. Because the ethnographic approach brings together questions and methods of finding answers that are already part of the repertoire of L2 learners, it enables them to see the correspondence between interpreting literature and interpreting the world.

Altogether, then, the realistic development and complex ambiguity of the narrative, the multiple contradictory voices of the presentation, the misleading responses of earlier readers, and the ethnographic imagination of the author all combine to make this novel a rich source of data for analysis through the procedures of ethnography of communication, an approach to research in linguistic anthropology that focuses upon the use of language in actual communicative events. Because this approach centers attention on situated communicative interaction, it might be seen as a useful tool for exploring literary texts, especially texts within the genre of “realistic fiction,” which sometimes also depend upon observation or creation of situated social interaction. Ethnography of communication is characterized first by attention to language as it is used in real events to accomplish communicative purposes. Secondly it requires a comprehensive analysis of context summarized by Hymes’ (2003) dictum, “use all there is to use.” Third, it strives for an emic perspective, attempting to understand the event as it was understood by the participants. Finally, it concentrates attention on the situated concrete communicative event rather than upon abstract patterns of language use or theoretical constructs. Because fiction is also often interaction, it is possible that ethnography of communication might offer insights that clarify the event (or story) in ways that other approaches to literary

analysis have not done. Barber (2007, p. 20) argues that American anthropology has always centered on the text as “data, method and outcome”, viewing it as the focal point of cultural patterns and personal experience. The text was “representative of an entire lived culture . . . imprinted with the distinctive qualities of an individual mind” (Barber, 2007, p. 18). She attributes to this concentration on the text, the emergence of ethnography of speaking, ethnopoetics, and several other branches of modern American anthropology. Yet, despite the textual focus of anthropology and the gradual shift in ethnographic research from endangered Native American cultures to observation of social interaction in particular contexts within mainstream American culture, ethnographers of communication have seldom fixed their attention on literary texts that do not derive from oral traditions in “exotic” cultures.

I believe that *Wildfell Hall* is one of the seminal novels of the Victorian age. Located at the crossroads of most of the intellectual currents of the nineteenth century, it is a powerfully imagined and precisely drawn depiction of the complexities of social interaction. However, the purpose of this study is not to analyze or interpret *Wildfell Hall*; it is to demonstrate how ethnography of communication can be used to help us interpret works of fiction. Because ethnography of communication focuses our attention upon communicative events, thereby drawing us further into the story, the story may at times seem to take over. However, the events of the story, the content of this study, are not important. What is important is that you sometimes can't get to the content without going through the process of ethnography of communication. As a study of the novel, this paper is fragmentary. Because fiction is, as Riffaterre (1990) points out, over-determined, no

communicative event is critical. I chose a few events to discuss and as the study developed reduced the number even further. The events that are used are mostly from the first chapters of the novel. This was necessary as these chapters focus upon introducing the characters and conflicts and they require less outside context. If these scenes had been omitted in favor of later scenes, those scenes would have required more explanation and contextualization.

The Study

The present study does four things. It is, first of all, an ethnography of Wildfell Hall comparable to Graham's (1993) study of the Xavante of Brazil using analysis of speech events to gain insight into the participants' understanding of what is happening. It is only an application of ethnography of communication to a fictional text not a complete study of the text. For the purposes of the study we probably gain enough insight into the characters from the events considered to demonstrate the effectiveness of ethnography of communication as an interpretive technique that permits the reader to focus closely upon the details of the speech events while encouraging him to enter more fully into the story from the perspectives of the characters in the story. Secondly, it is a literary analysis, utilizing the methods of ethnography of communication to gain insight into the meaning of the narrative and perhaps the intentions and methods of the author. Because the study uses ethnographic techniques to discover literary insights, it is also a demonstration of the relevance of ethnographic methods such as ethnography of communication to the interpretation of literature. Finally, it is a discussion of the utility of ethnographic

methods for the exploration of literature in a classroom environment, including the special relevance of this perspective for L2 learners, who frequently have experience dealing with problems of communication, such as those suggested by close attention to the communicative events of the novel.

The study has been divided into three parts. As in *Wildfell Hall*, the central core is the middle section, accounting for a little more than half the total text with the enveloping sections on either side together totalling less than half. The three chapters of the first part provide a general context for the analysis, focused upon introducing the narrator of *Wildfell Hall* through an analysis of the opening sentences of the novel, discussing the parallels between ethnography and fiction, and reviewing the tradition of reactions to and critical opinion on the novel. Chapter 1 is an ethnographic and semiotic analysis of the first narrator's introduction of himself to the reader in the first five sentences of the novel. Understanding of the narrator's stance in these lines is a necessary basis for interpreting his interactions in the sections that follow. Chapter 2 briefly discusses the relationship between anthropology and fiction, focusing on ethnography and the nineteenth century realist novel. Chapter 3 traces the critical reactions to *Wildfell Hall* and the shifting frameworks that have been used to interpret and evaluate the book over the past 160 years (1848-2009) and discusses the principal themes that have been developed in prior studies of the novel. Although many critics have written about *Wildfell Hall*, it has only been in the past thirty to forty years that they began to look seriously at what was happening in the story rather than judging its morality or viewing it as a source of autobiographical information about the author. Altogether, the three chapters of the

opening section establish the context of the action of *Wildfell Hall* as described by the narrator, the relation between ethnography and fiction, and the tradition of critical responses to the novel.

The twelve chapters of the second part of the study apply anthropological and sociological models, principally ethnography of communication, to specific communicative events in *Wildfell Hall*. Because the novel is constructed essentially as a series of speech events, it would be possible to analyze almost any sequence in the book using ethnographic techniques. The extreme density and multiplicity of the text insures that almost any sequence chosen at random anywhere in the text involves complex and unique presentations of key issues. A serious student of the book might feel compelled to include nearly every speech act because each is constructed purposefully to reflect on other acts and events elsewhere. In this study, however, only a small number of events, mostly from the beginning chapters are analyzed. Partly the number of events considered needed to be limited to reduce the length of the text. To avoid excessive explanation, most of the material for analysis has been drawn from the early scenes in which the context is established, characters are introduced and the conflicts begin to develop. When using *Wildfell Hall* as a classroom text, we focus more closely upon the first three chapters of the novel for classroom practice in using the techniques of ethnographic analysis, so that as learners continue reading the book they can identify and delimit key communicative events themselves and apply to them the techniques they have been practicing. This study is intended only as an illustration some of the contributions that

ethnography of communication can make to the interpretation of literary texts, not as a detailed interpretation of *Wildfell Hall*.

Chapter 4 is an application of some of the elements of Hymes' SPEAKING grid to the interpretation of the events in the narrator's home, the scene for the first interactions of the novel. It permits an early discussion of the physical and psychological context and it enables the reader to re-evaluate the stance presented in the opening sentences of the chapter. Focus on details of the scene allows the reader to interpret the norms of interaction that govern the actions of the participants and to contrast them to the narrator's assumptions. Despite Gilbert's description of his home as a 'haven,' these early encounters already disclose some of the basic conflicts within the family and they provide a context for looking more closely at several examples of facework in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 is a re-analysis of some of the events considered in Chapter 1 using Goffman's model of interaction ritual. This chapter focuses on the narrator's face encounters with his brother, his sister and his mother early in the first chapter. These three brief encounters are significant because they focus attention on the conflict within the family as the narrator seeks to establish a new line in relation to the other members of his family and they resist. The challenges to his line offered by his siblings and mother also lead the reader to reevaluate the face presented by the narrator to the readers in the five sentences that open the novel. Goffman's (1967, 1971, 1981) theories of interaction ritual provide a secondary framework for the analysis of some of the communication events in *Wildfell Hall*. Duranti (2003) and Saville-Troike (2003) both link interaction

ritual and ethnography of communication as connected models for observing interaction. Goffman used the concepts of line (essentially the pattern of acts that express, voluntarily or not, a participant's view of the situation, the other participants and himself) and face (the positive value or image that a person claims for himself) to organize the behavior that occurs in any face-to-face or mediated social encounter. Goffman argued that in every encounter the participants seek to avoid threats to face and that any incident that might challenge one participant's face may be resolved through a four-part ritual of challenge, offering, acceptance, and thanks. An important element in interaction ritual is the emotional investment that participants in interaction have in line and face and the care that is given to maintenance of face (one's own and that of others) through the duration of an encounter. Though Goffman used examples derived not only from ethnographic observation but also from various textual sources including fiction to illustrate his constructs, his model of interaction has not often been used for the interpretation of literary texts. Nunokawa's (2003) use, for example, of Goffman's theories as a model for interpreting Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* doesn't focus upon interaction ritual. Nonetheless, interaction ritual provides an especially revealing perspective from which to analyze fictional interactions and interpret the emotional reactions of the characters. Within *Wildfell Hall*, the analysis of face work provides insights into the reactions of characters at transitional moments when there is a dissonance between the face they wish to project and the perceptions of others. This framework also makes clear certain reactions by the narrators or major characters that may otherwise confuse the reader.

Chapter 6, an analysis of communicative acts accomplished within a framework of silence, is an application of Jakobson's model of the speech event and Hymes' SPEAKING grid to a series of communicative events occurring in church during a Sunday service in Chapter 1. This brief scene helps to demonstrate some of the range of communication acts that can take place in the absence of vocal speech acts. Because the speech situation of a Sunday church service is often associated with sacred or ritual silence, the bluntly secular and trivial nature of the communication acts in this sequence suggest inferences about the speech community as a whole. The narration in *Wildfell Hall* depends to a great extent upon paralinguistic features and silences that determine our interpretation of the words spoken. In the speech situation of a Sunday church service, Bronte is able to foreground silent communication because the context eliminates the possibility of spoken discourse.

Moving to the second chapter of *Wildfell Hall*, Chapter 7 of the study analyzes the narrator's brief description of a walk to *Wildfell Hall* using techniques of Systemic Functional Analysis to discover what the grammatical choices disclose about the narrator's intentions. The process through which the narrator describes his actions and thoughts in walking from his farm toward *Wildfell Hall* enables us to understand some of his customary modes of interaction with other people and with himself. The insights into the narrator's customary indirection in stating his motives that we can take from a systemic functional analysis of these sentences help us to understand his perplexing behavior at several key moments in the narrative. This analysis also allows us to characterize the perspective of the narrator (or perhaps the author) toward nature, and the

proper role of nature in human life. This brief sequence of sentences provides a microcosm of the whole book, both in disclosing the principal character flaw of the narrator and in summarizing the debate over nature that reappears in different forms throughout the novel. Systemic Functional Analysis, a “descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic meaning-making sequence” (Eggins, 2004, p. 2) may be the most language-centered of the techniques used to interpret Wildfell Hall in this study. One of the basic premises of SFA is that the meaning of discourse can be found in the grammar, which simultaneously expresses three distinct strands of meaning. Like ethnography of communication, however SFA views texts “in relation to the cultural and social context in which they are negotiated” (2). Although SFA does not primarily focus upon literary analysis, it has often been used to interpret literary texts because detailed and systematic description of attention to the syntactic patterns in discourse can offer unique insights into textual meaning.

Chapter 8 uses Goffman’s interaction ritual to analyze the first encounter between the narrator and the new neighbor who will later become the second narrator. This event approximately repeats a silent encounter two days earlier in the church. Once again, the narrator senses that his line has not been accepted and that he has been challenged and again he concludes the interview angry and frustrated. The challenge to face in this interaction is more open than in the face encounters with his family in Chapter 5 and his corresponding anger is also more open. In the sequence leading to the breakdown of communication, however, the tenant of *Wildfell Hall* also finds that her line is questioned by the narrator and angrily breaks off the interaction. Our first impression of the final

reaction of the tenant to Gilbert may be that her abrupt turning away was unprovoked. By analyzing the communicative event through the model of interaction ritual, with the added context that ethnography of communication provides, the angry response that terminated the interaction begins to seem predictable and moderate.

Chapter 9 analyzes an encounter between the narrator and the vicar's daughter using the concept of socially co-constructed identity. In contrast to earlier examples of interaction ritual, each of the two major participants in this encounter is anxious to confirm the other's line. At the same time, they indirectly indicate expectations to each other and finally enact identities that may have no relation to their actual selves. The co-construction of reality is a model of communication positing that participants within an interaction each contribute to constructing the reality of the interaction. As a consequence, we can encounter relationships in which both participants respond to clues suggested by the other and neither enacts an accurate representation of authentic views and beliefs. Although the selves that Gilbert and Eliza display during the communicative event at the vicarage may be false, their familiarity with each other and the ease they show in interpreting and playing off of each other's hints enable them to maintain much smoother interaction than Gilbert has been able to accomplish in the other encounters in the first two chapters.

Chapter 10 is an analysis of an interaction occupying all of Chapter 3 of *Wildfell Hall* and involving several participants first using Fairclough's (1995) techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and then reconsidering the event as an illustration of implications of Hymes' (Saville-Troike, 2003) concepts of speech community and

communicative competence. In this extended speech event, the new neighbor, Mrs. Graham seems to be deliberately using CDA methods to undermine the arguments of the Markhams. CDA (Pennycook, 2001) includes a variety of approaches to discourse analysis that bring out such issues as power relationships and ideological foundations of discourse as well as the role of discourse in reproducing social relations. Fairclough (1995) indicates that certain theoretical assumptions are both the necessary conditions for and the products of action and that, furthermore, subjects are typically unaware of these theoretical assumptions and may subscribe to ideologies and beliefs that directly contradict their theoretical assumptions. The framework involves a socially committed approach to social problems (i.e., commitment to not only identify but to change what is happening). Despite certain weaknesses in CDA, the approach frequently foregrounds elements of discourse that might be overlooked by traditional varieties of Discourse Analysis. As an analytic apparatus, CDA often relies on the strategies of Halliday's Systemic Functional Analysis. Although Mrs. Graham's application of CDA to the topic of education seems to leave her opponents unable to answer, the exchange is more interesting as an illustration of how she fails to integrate herself into the community when the opportunity is provided. Her conversational strategies leave her appearing odd and encourage the neighbors to believe the worst of her later when questions emerge about her character. The interaction in this chapter demonstrates the centrality of communicative competence. Mrs. Graham's ideas, though stridently espoused and in some aspects controversial, are not in themselves objectionable. Her arguments are well reasoned and convincing, especially when she challenges Gilbert by asking him to

consider the implications of his own arguments. Her agitated excitement at the end of the encounter indicates that she is happy with the effect she has produced. The effect, however, though Mrs. Graham doesn't realize it, has been to alienate her from opinion leaders in the community, to reinforce the impression that she is odd and perhaps disreputable, and to expose her failure to submit to the norms of social propriety. Like several previous interactions, this discussion clearly demonstrates that the ideas being exchanged are only a small part of the communicative event.

Chapter 11 analyzes the processes, purposes and effects of gossip as it occurs in several speech events in the early chapters of the novel, focusing on the role of gossip in establishing community membership. Extending over several communicative events in four chapters, it discusses the nature and purposes of gossip and illustrates the processes active in the development of gossip. In contrast to some earlier interpretations, this discussion stresses the natural and positive aspects of gossip within the community together with negative aspects and considers the polyvocalic characteristics of gossip. Although Gilbert Markham complains bitterly to Halford about the relentless gossip in Lindenhope, he obviously participates enthusiastically in the exchange of rumor when it does not touch upon his own interests. By looking at the performance of gossip through several key events, we can learn much about who may legitimately participate and under what circumstances as well as which topics and approaches may be considered acceptable in specific circumstances. We can also see how Helen Graham, though she does not herself participate in the community gossip, has made herself an object of concern for the community and thus a legitimate target of gossip.

Chapter 12 returns to the closing section of Chapter 1 to consider, within the context of the letter, the context of the novel and the interrelation with other events, what we can learn about the narrator from his descriptions of other characters. Rather than trusting us to learn about these characters through the events of the story the narrator instructs us in advance how to react to them. But the information he shares about these neighbors is not necessary for the readers at the moment and in almost all cases involves details that the reader already knows or that will be provided again at appropriate moments in the text. For the most part these characters are peripheral to the main story and would have been of no interest to Halford who is the primary recipient of the information. Gilbert's introduction of these minor characters can also be viewed as a misleading treatment of the neighbors that helps the reader to recognize aspects of his character. Markham's compulsion to control the story and to carefully construct his own image can be seen in these descriptions. His negative evaluation of qualities in the neighbors that he evaluates positively in himself and his family calls into question his version of the events he records. And his eagerness to relate details of the lives of neighbors who figure only slightly in his narrative and will never be known to Halford, demonstrates his obsession with gossip.

Chapter 13 brings together several brief events to consider the interactions between oral and written communication in the speech communities under consideration. In a sense the contrast between orality and literacy is an important motif in the novel. The contrast between the focus on spoken gossip and the compulsion to write everything in letters and diaries permeates the novel and may be an element in the distinction between

speech communities. The central characters judge each other on the basis of their relation to books; they negotiate court and fight through books. But the characters who are most comfortable with reading and writing are sometimes the least adept at spoken communication. This discussion also explores several implications of silence as it occurs in various speech events throughout the course of the novel. Silence intervenes as an important determiner in the relationships and events of the narrative. Both Mrs. Graham and Markham fail to speak truthfully about their intentions and situations and their silences have implications for the events that develop. Much of the ambiguity in the relationships between the various characters derives from the general silence that they observe about their feelings and intentions. Silence is the motive for gossip and the weapon of domestic conflict. This section focuses on issues of ambiguity, ownership of speech, the spiral of silence, and the element of falsehood in silence.

Chapter 14 draws together fragments from the previous analyses and looks at them from the perspective of the speech community, including questions about whether speech communities really exist, and whether the concept of speech community might help explain the misunderstandings between some of the characters and the ambiguity in the silent communication. Most of the characters of the novel are members of the community of rural landowners, either farmers or gentry or in some cases marginal aristocrats. But despite the overlapping situation of the communities, we can observe differences in the ways they use words depending on both their relation to farming and their religious orientation. The three communities that seem to be operating are the traditional community of small farmers and their families at Lindenhope, that of

somewhat more affluent Methodist landowners centered at Staningley, and that of the rural leisure class seen in Grassdale, landowners who are not actually involved in the operation of their estates. Differences among these three communities, which might alternatively be characterized as speech communities, ideological communities, imagined communities, or interpretive communities, might help to explain phenomenon such as the misunderstandings that take place between characters and the ambiguity in the silent communication. Using the research that has already been done into the religious conventions that influenced Anne Bronte, combined with research into various styles of religious speech done in contemporary ethnographies, a more precise definition of the communities that Bronte was contrasting might be made—one that could provide textual evidence of an attempt to indicate different communication expectations among the characters in the book. Looking at the physical communities around Lindenhope, Staningley and Grassdale as separate speech, ideological or interpretive communities, helps us to explain Helen Graham's difficulty in adapting to the various situations in which she finds herself during the novel and permits us to view some of her missteps as deriving from inadequate intercultural competence

Chapter 15 is an analysis of the implications of Bronte's claims in the Preface to the Second Edition to be concerned purely with truth. The discussion first questions to what degree Bronte's wish to tell the truth was compatible with the expectations of mid-nineteenth century readers and asks what truths Bronte was trying to convey. Was she focusing on truthful depiction of the position of women in society, the effects of a misguided educational system, the ravages of vice, or the hypocrisy of superficial

religious practice? Or was she indicating, as a number of critics have believed, that her novel is a barely fictionalized account of scenes she witnessed in her home and in the homes where she worked as a governess? If Bronte did not mean to indicate that the events of the narrative were true in the sense that they actually happened, in what sense did she mean them to be taken as true. We can understand Bronte's truth claims from the perspectives of fictional truth, moral truth and ethnographic truth, and it is possible to discover aspects of the novel from any of these perspectives. The framework of fictional truth permits us to observe how such elements as metaphor and subtext are used to extend, modify and reinforce the central themes of the narrative. The model of moral truth encourages us to consider the varied types of moral lessons that can be drawn from Wildfell Hall and the ambiguity of the positions of the narrators in relation to the truths that they embody or observe. The techniques of ethnographic observation, however, lead to the most startling insights into the working of the novel. In viewing the novel as a sequence of speech events, we become aware of the subtle ambiguities that the narrators often overlook. The techniques of ethnography of communication and interaction ritual foreground an array of paralinguistic features, gestures and silences that give meaning to the dialogues. They also encourage the reader to look at communicative events from within the context of the norms and expectations of the community in which it is situated. Considered from this perspective much of the conflict of *Wildfell Hall* resolves itself into clashing expectations. The accurate description of interaction ritual, communicative events, and cross-cultural misunderstanding can be considered sufficient truth to justify Bronte's claims in the Preface. If many of the specific problems broached in the novel are

no longer problems for us in quite the same way, we are, nonetheless, able to take the truths that do resonate with us and value the novel on the basis of our concerns as much as on hers. Bronte may be claiming that truth can be a product of insights obtained from ethnographic observation, even when those insights are embodied in fictional characters. In this she is similar to most of the great novelists in the nineteenth-century realistic tradition, who claimed to be portraying society as it is although they wrote about fictional characters. Together, chapters 4 through 15 constitute the direct analysis of data from *Wildfell Hall* using perspectives taken from ethnography of communication and related disciplines.

The third and final part of the study centers on some of the applications that we can make of the results of ethnographic observation to the interpretation and teaching of the text. This section includes three chapters. Chapter 16 uses the insights that we have gained about the two narrators to demonstrate their unreliability as a narrators and to demonstrate how ethnographic insights can contribute to a more precise understanding of the events of the novel and thereby contribute insights toward traditional areas of literary criticism. From the first published notices of *Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert Markham provoked irritation among some reviewers. Part of this irritation derived from the assurance of many readers that Gilbert spoke for the author and that he was intended to be taken seriously as an interpreter of the events of the novel. Close reading of the communicative events of the narrative confirms that he cannot be so taken. Gilbert is a comic misreader of events. Helen Graham is also unreliable as a narrator. The unreliability goes back in part to her failure to understand and adhere to the conventions of the various communities

in which she finds herself interacting. But early in the diary section, we see her willfully blinding herself to the reality of Huntingdon and reacting as an adolescent to the counsels of her aunt. The conclusions that we can draw about the two narrators, depending on insights derived from ethnography of communications and related strategies, enable us to re-evaluate the novel. The story that emerges from multiple interactions is far more complex than the one that Gilbert and Helen try to narrate.

Chapter 17 is an overview of the various reader oriented approaches to literature and a discussion of parallelisms between reader response and ethnography of communication as approaches to the teaching of literature. Beginning with a reference to the emotional experience of reading *Wildfell Hall* and the part of the parallel concepts of sympathy and empathy in encouraging reader involvement, the chapter continues with a discussion of the elements of reader response theory, the goals of reader-centered instruction and the role of ethnography of communication in focusing attention on elements that build toward involvement with the text. In *Wildfell Hall*, Bronte used a number of devices clearly intended to undercut the authority of her narrators and to transfer interpretive authority to the reader. By combining close attention to individual communicative events with the individual experience of the reader, ethnography of communication can help the reader to bring a complex reality into being.

Chapter 18 provides an overview of recent trends in the teaching of literature to L2 learners and discusses how ethnography of communication can serve as a unifying framework for L2 literature teaching. Literature has been justified in the L2 curriculum as a source of language, culture, motivation, and experience. The principal approaches to

teaching literature in recent decades have been stylistics, cultural studies, and reader response though each these risks moving the learner away from greater involvement with the story toward focus on secondary aspects of the text or context. In using the situated communicative event as the focus of classroom activity, the attention of the learner, whatever enrichment material may be added, remains focused upon the story. Following the discussion of the use *Wildfell Hall* with L2 learners is a brief recapitulation of the insights of ways ethnography of communication was used to analyze sections of the novel, of insights that were gained from the technique and of ways that the model might be useful as a tool for students in both L1 and L2 literature classes.

In general the analytical tools used in this research encourage us to look at the text from the perspective of the participants. Saville-Troike, in fact, mentions that the ethnographer of communication going into another community, “can not even be sure what a speech community other than his own may consider to be language” (2003, p. 3). Similarly, it is often necessary to understand the social context before it is even possible to recognize the language. Hymes seems to be saying something along these lines when he comments: “Notions of ‘language’ never seem given as findings of a neutral science, ‘linguistics,’ but always seem partly relative to persons, purposes, and predilections.” (1979, p. 307) From a slightly different perspective, Duranti and Goodwin (1992) argue, “What analysts seek to describe is not what they consider context . . . but rather how the subject attends to and organizes his perception of the events and situations that he is navigating through.” By looking at *Wildfell Hall* through the lens of ethnography of communication and related approaches, we can dispense with the overlay of critical

evaluations that have accumulated over the years and concentrate on what is really happening from the characters' point of view as they interact with each other. Voloshinov (1973, p. 45) has written, "at the outset of an investigation, it is not so much the intellectual faculty for making formulas and definitions that leads the way, but rather it is the eyes and hands attempting to get the feel of the actual presence of the subject matter." This statement seems to describe the mindset of ethnography of communication and to indicate why this approach may help us to gain new insights into an old text.

During the past two semesters I have offered a course on ethnographic analysis of literary texts centered on *Wildfell Hall*. The discussions with the students illustrated the excitement that either the text or the analytic system awakens. The discussions have been lively and the exercises and longer papers have been illuminating. *Wildfell Hall* may have directed attention to social problems that had not hitherto been addressed in fiction and it may have registered an early protest against social stereotypes that were to concern the rest of the nineteenth century. But, apart from its social relevance, it remains one of the most compelling novels of the Victorian age, with complex characters, thoroughly believable events, and lively humor. This study may help us to see why the novel stands out so clearly from among the fiction of its time and to understand why critics may have failed for so long to recognize its qualities. Hopefully, it will, at least, suggest how the ethnography of communication can be utilized as an approach to interpreting literature, how it can provide insights into literary texts perhaps not readily apparent through other approaches, and how it can, when used as a teaching approach, unify and focus the

traditional approaches to teaching literature and incorporate the learners' skills in ethnographic observation in the parallel activity of interpreting literature

PART 1: THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1. BY HIS EXPRESS DESIRE

Wildfell Hall, Chapter1: Sentences. 1-5

You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827. My father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer in --shire; and I, by his express desire, succeeded him in the same quiet occupation, not very willingly, for ambition urged me to higher aims, and self-conceit assured me that, in disregarding its voice, I was burying my talent in the earth, and hiding my light under a bushel. My mother had done her utmost to persuade me that I was capable of great achievements; but my father, who thought ambition was the surest road to ruin, and change but another word for destruction, would listen to no scheme for bettering either my own condition, or that of my fellow mortals. He assured me it was all rubbish, and exhorted me, with his dying breath, to continue in the good old way, to follow his steps, and those of his father before him, and let my highest ambition be to walk honestly through the world, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, and to transmit the paternal acres to my children in, at least, as flourishing a condition as he left them to me.

'Well! - an honest and industrious farmer is one of the most useful members of society; and if I devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm, and the improvement of agriculture in general, I shall thereby benefit, not only my own immediate connections and dependents, but in some degree, mankind at large: - hence I shall not have lived in vain.' (Bronte 1966: 17)

Wildfell Hall opens in 1847 or late 1846 as the narrator sits in his study

composing a letter to his brother-in-law, Halford, in which he relates the story of a courtship that occurred twenty years before. He presents himself to us in the first five sentences of the novel through a brief discussion of his background. Understanding his stance in these lines is a necessary basis for interpreting his interactions in the sections that follow. He begins, *in medias res*, peremptorily, telling the reader, “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827”, a command that is literally unintelligible. It can be understood only as a metaphor. Or rather, in semiotic terms, if we try to interpret this sentence on the first level of denotation we will find that it asks us to do something impossible, whereas, if we move to the second level of connotation, it offers several

significations. To get closer to these significations, we need to break the sentence down into several elements.

“Go back” suggests a return, a journey to a previous place but, within the connotation of this sentence, the return occurs in time rather than space and is therefore not literally possible. It is common, however, to speak of going back in time as a representation for the act of remembering. Because Bronte wrote the novel during the fall of 1847 and early 1848 and placed it in the present, we can assume that the opening sentence intends to take us back about twenty years to the fall of 1827. But the suggestion of journeying contained in the sign “go back” aligns this statement with a specific metaphor for time and life. The speaker is picturing life as a journey through time parallel to a journey through space. To speak of going back in time or of returning to a previous time either one assume the metaphor that time moves forward or rather that we move forward through time as we move forward through space on a journey. If the analogy is valid, we should be able to return to previous times just as we can return to previous places when we travel. The signifier “go back” can combine with different contents to form signs. One concept might be described as “return” while another could be called “travel backward in time”. Both of these signifieds may be suggested in this sentence, so that the sign may, in fact be two signs. Neither of the signs is what Barthes would call a first order signification because the denotation of “go back” would operate in space rather than in time. The denotation of “go back” would also suppose physical movement rather than the mental movement involved in memory. “Go back” involves a further

discrepancy that we need to put off until after we look at signs related to the speaker and receiver of the statement.

“You” is the receiver. We do not yet know all the concepts that are included within this sign but one is immediately obvious to us. When the writer refers to someone as “you”, convention requires the readers to assume that he is speaking to us. Within the genres of fiction, the speaker in the text is not necessarily the writer and the audience is not necessarily the readers but the illusion that the writer and the reader are the first and second person is always to some degree present. Any content in the sign that deviates from this basic assumption might, in fact, be considered marked in that it introduces additional entities that complicate the sign.

The “you” of this statement, however, has a name, Halford, that will become apparent by the end of the chapter. He is the brother-in-law of the narrator, Gilbert Markham. The novel is written within the frame of a series of letters from Markham to Halford, whose only importance is as the primary recipient of the letters. He is barely mentioned and plays no part in the story. But some details about him are important for understanding this sentence. Although Markham did not meet him until long after the events of 1827, he now claims to consider Halford his closest friend. As a latecomer to the area, Halford would not necessarily know anything about the events to be discussed but as Markham’s best friend and the husband of Markham’s sister he would no doubt be aware of much background information about the family.

Halford can conceivably return to 1827 but he cannot return to the same 1827 that Markham wishes to revisit because he has never been there before. He passed 1827

somewhere else and, like the reader, he will be hearing this story for the first time. So, whether we take the term to refer to the imaginary recipient of Markham's letters or to the reading public, either of 1848 or of 2006, the "you", taken alone, cannot go back in the sense of "return". This leaves "regress in time" as initially a more probable content for "go back".

But Markham has asked the "you" of the statement to go back "with me". This modification alters the action somewhat. Markham, is not precisely asking his audience to go back to 1827 but rather to accompany him as he goes back to 1827. Halford or we, though we cannot return to a context that we have never visited before, can accompany another who is returning to that space and in that sense we can say that we are returning to a place we have not previously been at.

Before we can continue unpacking the sign "with me", we need to look at two other signs. "The autumn of 1827" is another complex sign. Eco (1976, p. 7) says that the something else that the sign represents "does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which the sign stands for it." "The autumn of 1827" is a sign that represents something that does not exist. It no longer exists because it is now in the past and, outside of representations in human minds, it is present nowhere. Looked at more closely, "the autumn of 1827" never existed in the past either. The sign, "the autumn of 1827", is produced by and possible because of the metaphor discussed earlier that time moves forward. Once we adopt the social convention that time begins at some beginning point and moves forward linearly toward an end point, we can begin to break up the spaces along the line into units. By counting up units from the arbitrary starting

point we can reach a unit that we call the “the autumn of 1827”. This metaphor allows us to construct within it the metaphor that life is a journey but it is not a representation of anything that really exists in the world except as a cultural phenomenon. We could as well see time, as other cultures may have, as circular with the day repeating itself over and over rather than multiple days moving progressively further along a line. Or we could take a God’s-eye view and see all time laid out at once as concurrent rather than circular or linear movement.

But the metaphor of linear time allows us to see each day as a unit occupying a space a little further along the path that reaches from the beginning to the end of time. And it allows us to create signs like “the autumn of 1827” that represent units along the path. And the metaphor of the path allows us to assume that we can walk in either direction along it, thus making possible, “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827.” The sign, “the autumn of 1827”, however, does not simply represent a unit of time. It signifies a particular place at a particular time. Markham is asking Halford and us not merely to go back to “the autumn of 1827” but to go to the places he frequented in “the autumn of 1827” at the moments that events significant to him were taking place. Rather than a unit of time, therefore, “the autumn of 1827” is a package of connotations and memories that are linked together by their co-occurrence within the space represented by the sign “the autumn of 1827”. Nobody but Markham can go back to that specific “autumn of 1827”. Halford and the reading public can only re-imagine the events through Markham’s retelling. And Markham’s retelling is only a re-imagining of the autumn of

1827. Because memory is never complete, he tells Halford about the autumn of 1827 that he creates through selective memory, journals and imagination.

When we consider the distance between us and the content of Markham's phrase, "the autumn of 1827", we might think it odd that he should tell us we "must" go back. We can't go back in any way other than superficially accompanying Markham as he recalls, or rather re-imagines and re-orders the past. So, with "must", Markham cannot intend an imperative direction, moral, emotional or physical. He is stating a condition for hearing the story. "If you want to understand what happened, you will somehow have to recognize from my signs the content I am trying to represent." In other words, the reader must try to imagine Markham's world as it was in the autumn of 1827 from the partial and limited signs he gives us.

Returning to the sign, "with me", it is clear that Markham is inviting us on a journey to a place that exists only inside his head. We cannot really accompany him there but he is asking us to try to follow and perhaps interpret his signs from within the context of our own lives. He's asking us to try to imagine him as he was in the autumn of 1827.

Having looked at some of the implications of the elements of the opening sentence of *Wildfell Hall*, we can put them together again and look at the sentence itself as a sign. The writer (rather than the narrator) has signified several things with this sentence. She has established the time of the events of the novel; she has told us that the events took place in the past (twenty years before), and that they will be narrated from the vantage point of the present. She has established that the narration will be in the first person. Finally she has told us that we are reading a novel. "You must go back with me to

the autumn of 1827,” shares some qualities with “Once upon a time . . .” The latter phrase is more deliberately unspecified and leads in to a different genre, but either declaration prepares the reader for a story.

Barthes (1974, p. 11) argues that we cannot be aware of the plural nature of a text if we look at the elements in large masses. He breaks the text into fragments he calls “lexias”, explaining:

What will be noted is, across these artificial articulations, the shifting and repetition of the signifieds. Discerning these signifieds systematically for each lexia does not aim at establishing the truth of the text (its profound strategic structure), but its plurality (however parsimonious). (Barthes 1974: 14)

As a structure for considering the first three paragraphs of *Wildfell Hall*, Barthes’ concept of lexia enables us to break the paragraphs into manageable groups of signs.

‘My father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer in --shire;’

The second clause shifts to a completely new context. Markham has asked his reader or readers to go back to the autumn of 1827 but he immediately introduces his father, who was no longer alive in 1827 and could not properly form part of the narrative. “Father”, therefore, may serve as another sign for a nonexistent something. The introduction of the father at this point, however, serves several functions. First, it helps to establish the pedigree of the son. We might find it strange for someone to introduce their father into a narrative so early, but early Victorian readers were probably accustomed to this form of introduction. Beyond serving as the initial introduction of the narrator, the reference to the father follows a common format for a nineteenth century novel and thus

reinforces the genre sign from the previous sentence. Finally, the introduction of the father serves to set up one half of the dichotomy that the first paragraphs focus on.

Markham tells us that his father is a farmer. This sign of identity carries many cultural implications, both negative and positive. The term may imply that his father is stable, serious, responsible, productive, or independent. On the other hand, the term may suggest that the elder Markham is countrified, rustic, provincial, or plodding. The concept would seem to derive from the more basic concept of farm but not everyone who lives and works on a farm is a farmer. By calling his father a farmer, he no doubt means to distinguish him from farm hands, tenant farmers, migrant laborers and others who might work on a farm without owning the land. So farmer may be a mark of some status, but not all farmers, apparently, fit into the same concept and he must therefore go farther to place his father somewhere on a hierarchy of farmers.

This he does with the complementary sign “gentleman”, which is to some extent a contradiction of the sign farmer. Gentleman-farmer may connote amateurishness, lack of seriousness, or dilettantism. On the other hand, to call his father a gentleman-farmer tends to downgrade the independent term “farmer”. If we must attach “gentleman” to “farmer”, then “farmer” standing alone may somehow be less than a gentleman. The modifier “gentleman” becomes necessary to make the farmer respectable. To call oneself a gentleman-farmer is to suggest immediately some ambiguity in one’s attitude toward farming. Markham may be embarrassed to call himself a farmer and feel a need to justify himself. The sign “gentleman-farmer” may be even more complex than we have so far implied. We would expect that a man who really was a farmer and a gentleman and who

was comfortable with his identity would call himself a farmer and dispense with modifiers

Markham, however is not comfortable with his occupation as we see in the early paragraphs of the novel. His characterization of his father is complicated by a further hedge when he places “a sort of” before “gentleman”. The “sort of” discounts the “gentleman”. Markham, in effect, tells us that his father is a gentleman farmer but not really. To “sort” is to classify and a sort of gentleman farmer is a category of gentleman farmer. But the connotation of this sign sorts him out of the category rather than into it. The implication is that he was not a gentleman farmer but something close to one. “A sort of gentleman farmer” in one sense is a very precise description of his father’s occupation, doubly modifying farmer but, in another sense, it is intended to be doubly ambiguous, obscuring the boundary of “farmer” with the addition of “gentleman” and then denying “gentleman” with the addition of “a sort of”. Markham may be showing himself to be very concerned about minimal degrees of social hierarchy; he also shows that he is uncomfortable with his place within the hierarchy and that he wishes to obscure his precise relation to farming. The successive denials do not return us to neutral but rather build an increasingly strong portrait of Markham’s ambiguity toward and embarrassment at his position. The degrees of hierarchy being debated by Markham in this sentence may be concepts that are only loosely related to the real world, “Gentleman farmer” may be unrelated to the world, not in the sense that a sign refers to a concept rather than a real object, but in the sense that the concept “gentleman farmer” may not derive from any object in the real world and might not generate agreement between users of the term as to

what it signifies. Readers in 1848, of course, may have felt capable of clearly recognizing and defining a gentleman-farmer, but Markham's hesitation with the word shows that, even then, ambiguities were possible. The phrase, "a sort of gentleman farmer", is an excellent illustration of Saussure's observation that signs are constructed negatively. We are not certain of the ingredients in the original sign "farmer" as it is understood by Markham but the modifiers that are given contribute negatively to the concept. "Gentleman" is intended to de-emphasize the rustic, low elements of farming, while "a sort of" is intended to minimize or deny the genteel elements of "gentleman". The elder Mr. Markham seems to have been left somewhere between the two concepts with a little of each but not entirely either.

Two further signs in this phrase help signal the reader to the nature of the text. When Markham mentions his father he writes the formulaic phrase "as you know". This information cannot be for the reading public because we couldn't possibly know about Markham's father yet. He has to be addressing his imaginary reader, Halford. But the elder Markham had died before 1827 and Halford did not become involved with the family until well after 1827. So the "as you know" is not quite accurate for Halford either. However, it is probable that Halford had heard this detail about the narrator's father though he couldn't precisely "know" it. Markham uses the phrase in the sense of 'as you've heard'. Within the convention of the novel, though, "as you know" performs an explanatory function. The information about the father is necessary for the reading public. This is basic information that the author wants to establish at the beginning. But the fiction that Markham is writing to his brother-in-law who he describes as his closest

friend would make it difficult for him to provide this information. We can hardly assume, after such close friendship and considering that Halford is married to Markham's sister and therefore the son-in-law of the man in question, that he does not know the elder Markham was a farmer. The "as you know" makes the statement, rather than information, a reminder of something already known. Ostensibly, then, the sign "as you know" is a reminder of information that will be background for the following argument but it is more important as a sign to the reading public justifying the inclusion of information that the immediate recipient of the letter should already know.

The phrase concludes with the information that the author's father farmed "in – shire". On the surface, to say "shire" without specifying which shire creates an empty sign. By omitting the name of the place the entire sign becomes meaningless. Halford, the imaginary reader would, of course, know where the family lived and there would be no reason to include this prepositional phrase for him. The general reader doesn't know but, as Markham left out the place name, the prepositional phrase tells him nothing. Or, more precisely, it tells him nothing about Markham's father. It does offer another genre clue though. The practice of giving a place name with the key element omitted is a convention of the Victorian novel. We might take it as a Victorian equivalent of the disclaimer appearing at the beginning of a modern novel asserting that the people, places, and events in this novel are purely fictional with no relation to real people places or events.

'and I, by his express desire, succeeded him in the same quiet occupation, not very willingly,'

“I”, the narrator of this novel, is Gilbert Markham, a farmer of about 44 or 45 when he writes the story in letters to his brother-in-law Halford, but a young farmer of 24 at the time the events occurred. Neither Markham nor Halford ever existed except as fictional characters. The reading public of 1848 knew the writer of the novel as Acton Bell, probably but not certainly a male of unknown age. Charlotte Bronte wrote later that in choosing their pen names the Bronte’s wished to hide that they were women but did not wish to use names that were clearly masculine. The names of the authors were signs intended to signify as little as possible. The problem for the Brontes was that it was difficult to signify personhood without signifying sex as well. Some doubt existed whether Acton, Currer and Ellis Bell were distinct individuals or different pseudonyms for one writer. In July of 1848, the same month that the book was published, Anne Bronte, the writer, disclosed her true identity to her sister’s publisher. She was a 28 year old writer and former governess, the daughter of a curate. ‘I’ is always Gilbert Markham, not Anne Bronte but Bronte’s background sometimes affects Markham’s narrative. The difference between the imagined narrator and the writer may become visible in the references to farming. The “I” of this book deals with farming from an external, abstract perspective and describes the activities of the farm only in the most general terms. He also seems to have a lot of free time for a farmer.

Although Bronte wrote this novel 160 years ago, the novel form was already developed to the extent that she could have simply narrated her story without the distracting construct of letters to an imaginary correspondent. The invention of Halford and the addressing of letters may be intended as another sign. Bronte may have wanted to

distance herself from the material by putting layers of masks between it and her. The novel, in part exploring the effects of alcoholism was written while her brother was dying from alcohol abuse. The text also strongly attacks many conventions of Victorian family life, gender roles, education, and society. In a multiple disassociation, she tells the story of a young woman written by her in a diary but interpreted through the eyes of a young man and then recalled twenty years later by the same man, now middle-aged, in letters to his brother-in-law. She publishes the text using a vaguely masculine pseudonym though she is a young woman.

Within the context of the second sentence of the novel, “and I” performs another function. It links Markham’s occupation as a farmer to the situation of his father and thereby allows him to emphasize his emotional separation from his identity as a farmer. If the second sentence had ended after “—shire”, Markham would still have made clear, his ambiguous attitude toward farming in the third sentence but there would have been a break between the information about his father and his comments about himself. With “and I” he clearly presents his situation as growing out of that of his father.

The implication of “and I” is immediately strengthened by the complementary sign, “by his desire”. Once again, he separates his identity from the label “farmer” by affirming that he is a farmer only in obedience to his father’s wishes. The effect of this claim is greatly augmented by the adjective “express” that modifies desire. “Express”, in this context seems to be another empty sign because it doesn’t add any semantic content to the statement. If his father had not expressed his desire, either in words or through some other sign, Markham could not have known that it was his desire. All desires are

either expressed or undisclosed. But though the sign “express” does not add any information it serves to powerfully reinforce the strength of both the father’s desire and the son’s obligation.

Further tying his situation to that of his father, Markham goes on to tell us that he “succeeded him”. The concept of “succeeded” does not automatically attach to taking over a farm. The term seems to frame the situation as parallel to a king succeeding his father on the throne. Succession of this sort is largely involuntary; the son is expected to assume the social position and activities of the father. By using this frame, Markham portrays his situation deterministically. He has taken his father’s place in the community and does the work that his father did because he is obligated to do so. But, even so, he cannot quite identify himself as a farmer. He says that he succeeded his father “in the same quiet occupation”. Although, his father was a farmer and Markham now attends to the care of the farm, he is not willing to say more than that he follows the same occupation as his father. In calling the occupation (farming) quiet, he seems to be further discounting its importance. “Quiet” is an odd signifier for farming, a labor intensive and time-limited activity that keeps the farmer under pressure. But he may see farming as quiet compared to the exalted dreams he had for his life. Or he may simply be minimizing the excitement of farming compared with the bustle of city-life that his correspondent Halford is accustomed to.

As a final rejection of farming, Markham concludes the phrase with the modification “not very willingly”. He seems to have followed his father’s wishes voluntarily. He discusses the choice and makes no mention of coercion, except to the

extent that his father's advice and desire are forms of coercion, so he can not really say that he chose farming unwillingly. If the act of willing is binary (to will or not to will) and if he chose to take over his father's farm, then he willingly became a farmer. But with "not very" he is able to reduce his statement of willingness almost to the border of unwillingness. The sign "not very" does not function as a contrast or negation of the sign "very" but instead implies a negation of "willing". The overall impact of Markham's words in this clause may simply be to imply modesty or diffidence in discussing his affairs. Yet he clearly implies that he does not wish to be characterized as a farmer and he does wish to separate himself in the reader's imagination from other farmers. At the same time, he either wishes to demonstrate his obedience to his father or wishes to use his father as a justification for his involvement in the occupation of farming.

‘for ambition urged me to higher aims,’

Markham continues his discussion of farming and identity with three further signifiers. First, he uses "ambition" as an agent, suggesting that his rejection of farming was provoked by an influence upon or within him rather than coming from his "self". Second, he uses the verb "urged" implying that this somehow separate agent was insistent and finally with "higher" he indicates that farming is not an occupation that is worthy of him. "Higher aims" suggests that our choices are consciously made on the basis of personal goals and further suggests the existence of a hierarchy of aims of variable value. Within that hierarchy, farming does not rank high in Markham's estimation.

‘and self-conceit assured me that, in disregarding its voice,’

Dialogue, according to Jakobson, is basic to language use. In this discussion, Markham is carrying on a dialogue through letters with Halford but he is also describing a dialogue in his own mind. To the voice of “ambition” he now joins the voice of self-conceit. Ambition and self-conceit agree that Markham should seek higher aims than farming but, whereas ambition urges, self-conceit seems to warn. Unlike ambition, a neutral sign that can contain both positive and negative connotations, self-conceit is negative. With the introduction of this second interior voice, Markham may be questioning the arguments that lead him to disparage farming. Although he portrays self-conceit and ambition as two little counselors urging him on, neither concept exists as an object in the world. He is really talking about himself and the inner dialogue that he is developing. Ambition and self-conceit are labels that he is putting on some of the feelings he is experiencing inside his mind.

That he views his thinking process as a form of dialogue is apparent when he characterizes as a “voice” the urging that he is ignoring. The relation of “in disregarding its voice” to the sentence in which it occurs permits plurality of interpretation. Grammatically, “its voice” seems to refer back to “self conceit”, the immediately preceding noun, but semantically, it seems logical to infer that it refers back to ambition. (Ambition urges and self-conceit assures that in ignoring the voice of ambition) In the first interpretation, two separate voices are contending and each is arguing for its own perspective. In the second interpretation, ambition and self conceit combine to plead the same course with ambition insisting and self-conceit confirming ambition’s perspective.

The choice of antecedent for “its voice” is significant because self-conceit is more clearly negative than ambition and therefore should be a more suspect “voice”. Perhaps Markham is here illustrating his own confusion; he doesn’t know to what extent he is listening to positive or negative voices. The use of “self-conceit” as the sign for one of the voices lets us know that he is aware that these voices are not entirely benign.

‘I was burying my talent in the earth,’

In ignoring the “voice” of the previous paragraph, Markham would come up against two new metaphors, both taken from the words of Christ in the Book of Matthew. The first comes from the parable of the rich man going on a trip and leaving money with each of three servants. The first two invested the money and were able to give the master double what he had left with them when he returned. The third was afraid of risk. “But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money” (Matthew 25:18). When his master returned he gave him back exactly what he had received, explaining, “And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo there thou hast that which is thine.” (Matthew, 25:25). Markham may have chosen this metaphor for its echoes of farming. Farmers work with the earth, digging, planting and irrigating. If we think of “talent” in the Biblical sense, as a measure of money, then the act of planting is precisely what Markham calls it, “burying my talent in the earth”. If we interpret talent in the modern sense, then Markham is limiting himself by working on the farm, dedicating to digging and planting talents that could accomplish more in another setting. Although the metaphor does not depend on the pun, this is an example of two signifiers, “talent”, that use the same oral and written forms. In the parable in Matthew, Christ strongly

condemns the action of the third servant. By extension, Markham is developing a moral argument against dedicating himself to farming.

‘and hiding my light under a bushel.’

The second metaphor, also from Matthew, is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:15-16) As in the previous case, this metaphor contains an image that relates it to farming. Because bushels are containers that farmers use to gather the harvest as well as measures of the production of the land, the admonition seems to reject farming. If he dedicates himself to the work of harvesting he will fail to do good works to illuminate others. By introducing the voice of Christ, Markham has shifted the direction of the argument, making a powerful case against farming but since the allusions to Christ come through the voice of self-conceit they may be false interpretations.

‘My mother had done her utmost to persuade me that I was capable of great achievements;’

To the inner voices arguing against farming, Markham now adds the voice of his mother. Ambition had urged him that he was capable of higher aims; his mother now seeks to persuade him that he is capable of great achievements. The unstated implication is that farming is not a field in which he will be able to achieve greatly. This final argument is forceful because until now it has been the inner voice of his own ambition and self-conceit that has offered justifications for ignoring the desires of his father. The

voice of his mother is a parental authority weighty enough to place in equal opposition to the voice of his father. (Although it is not yet clear, the early chapters of the novel provide evidence that in Markham's community the voice of the mother was probably not equal to the voice of the father. A major motif of the book, in fact, is Markham's gradually growing awareness of the incongruence of the positions of women and men. We see this already in this phrase. Markham says that his Mother has done all she could to convince him to choose another profession but he has already told us that he decided to succeed his father.) On the other hand, we cannot be sure from what Markham says here that his mother actually tried to dissuade him from farming. He says only that she considered him capable of great achievements but does not specify what achievements she would consider great or how she would consider farming. We only suppose that she opposed farming because he places her counsel in opposition to his father's counsel. It is entirely possible that only he disparages farming and that his mother would see productive farming as a great achievement. As his mother's advice is abstract, he may be misapplying it when he assumes that she wanted him to be something better than a farmer. Her responses later in the book show her to be extremely conventional in her ideas and noncommittally supportive of most of the comments her children make.

‘but my father, who thought ambition was the surest road to ruin’

The second half of the sentence contrasts the father's voice to the mother's voice. The signs are approximately the same but the metaphor changes. The father's voice continues the “life is a journey” metaphor that has been in the background since the first sentence but gives the sign “ambition” a very different value within that metaphor when he labels

it “the surest road to ruin”. Ambition in the father’s mind does not seem to be an inner voice, though it may be a temptation leading us astray. He describes it, rather, as a path we might take. This path takes us back to the Book of Matthew (7:13) which warns, “Enter ye in at the strait gate for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat.” Ambition, his father seems to suggest, leads one down the broad way.

‘and change but another word for destruction,’

The frame is then extended by the definition of “change” as “destruction, a perspective on life that is embodied in myths of the golden age and reminisces of the ‘good old days’. This view is the opposite of the theory of progress, substituting gradual decay for gradual amelioration and seeming to discount the likelihood of success for Markham’s schemes of betterment. In relation to the previous clause, if change is detrimental, then ambition, altering the status quo, would necessarily be negative as well.

‘would listen to no scheme for bettering either my own condition, or that of my fellow mortals.’

The term ‘scheme’ can be interpreted in a variety of ways, many of them negative compared with more neutral terms such as ‘plan’. One of the connotations suggested by scheme would be something ill thought out or childish, and we wonder what kinds of schemes Gilbert could have suggested to his father. Supposing Gilbert had told his father what he is telling Halford, that he did not want to be a farmer, what options were left open to him? Landless younger sons generally studied for the church or joined the army or navy. Though less socially acceptable and involving a loss of prestige, it was also

possible to enter a trade or embark on some commercial venture. But as the oldest son, Gilbert would inherit his father's farm. It would be foolish to give up the farm for a lesser occupation. We can imagine the elder Mr. Markham's frustration, listening to his son's naïve speculations about the name he might make for himself with one venture or another and wondering whether he would ever mature.

'Scheme' might also suggest plans that are not completely responsible or ethical. Perhaps some of Gilbert's youthful speculations revolved around ideas that were either risky or ethically ambiguous. Mr. Markham may have worried that his son's Romantic aspirations would distract him from his principal duties and perhaps bring hardship on the whole family. His preoccupation made him wary of Gilbert's imprudent schemes and determined to impress upon him the need for careful husbandry of the family patrimony and adherence to the narrow road of righteousness. When we learn that Gilbert has been entertaining his father with fanciful schemes for bettering his own and the world's condition, we understand the context of Mr. Markham's warnings against ambition and change.

But Gilbert hasn't yet grasped the lesson his father was trying to instill. In his interpretation, his father accepted the argument of Gilbert and his mother that farming is a lower order of aim or achievement. Gilbert believes his father rejected his schemes because he didn't think Gilbert should try to better himself rather than because he feared Gilbert would ruin himself. Gilbert implies that his father accepts that in becoming a farmer his son will need to renounce any hope of advancement or of serving the community. Mr. Markham's comments, on the other hand, suggest that he doubted

Gilbert's schemes would lead to betterment. Markham's sign "bettering", apparently accepted by his father, is loaded. It assumes that there are conditions better than farming, an assumption we have no reason to believe his father shared.

'He assured me it was all rubbish,'

The father's next words, classifying all his son's arguments with the general sign "rubbish", go further in overturning the metaphors that Gilbert has been developing. The harshness of the father's characterization of his son's schemes offers an insight into the acrimony of the debate that has been growing between them as the father, perhaps in declining health, worries that his son will dissipate his inheritance in foolish schemes. The term 'rubbish' may suggest the nature of the relation between the father and son in another way. Mr. Markham may have thought of his son as an immature child and he may have dismissed all his son's suggestions about the farm because he assumed that they were childish. Some of the disagreements between father and son, and perhaps some of the schemes proposed by the son, may have been linked to the son's desire to be seen as mature and capable and the father's inability to see him so.

'and exhorted me, with his dying breath, to continue in the good old way,'

Mr. Markham's anxiety seems to have increased as his health declined to the point where Gilbert's future seems to have been among his principal preoccupations in his last moments. He died urging Gilbert to be responsible and to cleave to "the good old way". Life is not simply a journey; it is a journey that offers a correct path among many detours and false turns. This metaphor takes us back once more to the Book of Matthew and the discussion of the strait gate and broad way in verse 7:13. Matthew 7:14 continues this

warning with “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth into life and few there be that find it.” Mr. Markham’s ‘good old way’ may be the narrow way of Matthew. The combination of “good” and “old” in the father’s vision dismisses the value of innovation and equates traditional with moral and responsible.

‘to follow his steps, and those of his father before him,’

With the succeeding clause, Mr. Markham complicates his metaphor somewhat. He urges his son to follow in the footsteps of his father and his grandfather. To do so, he would need to go over the road that they have already gone over rather than continue on from where they left off. If he were to continue further on the same road, his father and grandfather there would be no steps to follow. The difference between the two metaphors is substantial. Continuing further on the road would imply progress while traveling over the same road suggests that from one generation to another we do not advance. (see Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*) Thus, in depicting each man’s journey as a repetition of, rather than an advance upon, the journeys of those that have gone before, Mr. Markham seems to be returning to his earlier denunciation of change and questioning such concepts as the evolution of society and the betterment of individual lives.

‘and let my highest ambition be to walk honestly through the world, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left,’

To follow the good old road is to “walk honestly”. What Markham and his mother characterized as higher aims or great achievements his father discounts as distraction from the true goal. But the father still admits that there may be higher ambitions than the one he sets out for his son. When he tells him to “let” the course he describes be his

“highest ambition”, he implies that there may be others even higher that he should ignore.

Mr. Markham envisions a life for his son spent on the farm he is leaving him so it may be odd that he should speak of walking honestly through the world. It is possible that his advice is metaphorical, substituting a world of time for one of space and therefore picturing his son journeying through time. When he urges Markham to focus upon the main goal of life “looking neither to the right hand nor to the left”, he seems once more to be returning to Matthew 7:14. If the true way is narrow, then looking to the left or right might distract us toward temptation or turn us on to the paths that deviate toward destruction. The error of looking to the right or the left is considered in Matthew 6: 22, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” In other words, Gilbert should keep his eyes focused straight ahead on the narrow path he must tread. If his eye is not single, if he is looking all about, he will no doubt lose himself on the side roads. If this is the case, then the warning against looking to the left or the right may refer back to the admonition to walk honestly. To walk focused upon the path and the goal rather than glancing off to the sides may be the honest way to walk.

‘and to transmit the paternal acres to my children in, at least, as flourishing a condition as he left them to me.’

The father argues for a substantial reframing of the dichotomy that Markham introduced earlier between farming and ambition. But, in concluding his statement with a more specific description of the aim that Markham should focus upon, he seems to confirm the limits of farming. Farm land needs to be worked or it deteriorates. It wears

out and must be replenished. It develops over many cycles of intensive conservation and cultivation. It requires constant care, occupies enormous amounts of time and leaves little or no time for any secondary aims. If Gilbert is not a competent and vigilant farmer, the land that he passes on to his son will not be flourishing. Though it may be time-consuming, caring for the earth can be seen as an essential purpose of man's life. It is the task assigned to Adam in Genesis, the final conclusion of Voltaire's *Candide*, and the focus of modern theories of sustainable growth. So we may view the conclusion of the sentence as another reframing, expanding the journey with another big metaphor. Essentially Mr. Markham's advice to his son is the lesson that Candide learns by the end of Voltaire's novel: cultivate your garden. The effects of the contrast to Mr. Markham's theory of farming can be seen in the fields that Gilbert will pass through in the opening sentences of chapter 2, which have been left uncared for and allowed to deteriorate.

It is natural that Mr. Markham should be the one to argue that Gilbert's aim must be to continue to cultivate the land. The farm is referred to here as "paternal acres" and the care of the land in the traditional English world view that the father is advocating is the responsibility of the man. The land, in fact, passes from father to oldest son in succession. In other cultures agricultural tasks and land ownership may be entirely associated with women, but not in rural England in the autumn of 1827.

In the first paragraph of *Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert has set up a dichotomy between two ways of looking at the world. With the second paragraph, only one sentence long, he takes up the frames he has attributed to his father and mother and synthesizes them into one of his own. Accepting his father's exhortation concerning farming, he insists on his

mother's desire for great achievements as well. He touches on several themes that have come up in the previous arguments.

'Well! - an honest and industrious farmer is one of the most useful members of society;'

The content of Gilbert's first word, 'Well!' is puzzling. He may be hesitating momentarily before he expresses as his own his father's position, which he still does not accept completely. Or he might be reflecting on his father's ideas, pausing before he finally accepts them. The word may indicate that he knows he's come to the point where he must defend his choice to submit to his father's desire; he announces 'Well, here it is'. The exclamation point, however, seems to argue a more emphatic intent. Gilbert seems to feel defensive about his profession, though he has accepted his father's counsel. He speaks as though he is defending himself, replying fervently to an objection no one has made by insisting on value of farming.

His defense of farming, however, changes both his father's arguments and his own previously stated dreams. He begins with his father's call to 'walk honestly', which he alters to 'an honest and industrious farmer'. His father's exhortation to 'walk honestly' centered on single-minded, undistracted adherence to a narrow path. Gilbert is not yet ready to give up all his Romantic aspirations and so he shifts 'honest' into a modifier for farmer, implying perhaps such conventional concepts as authenticity, fairness, reliability or ethical conduct, but not his father's singleness of purpose. 'Industrious', which he adds to 'honest', substitutes for his earlier 'ambitious'. The two terms have some attributes in common but imply very different characteristics. Though 'industrious' lacks most of the negative connotations of 'ambitious', it has unattractive connotations of its own, such as

trivial busyness. In trading ‘ambitious’ for ‘industrious’, Gilbert seems to have lowered his expectations. He’ll be getting a lot done, or at least keeping busy but he may have discarded the ‘higher aims’ and ‘great achievements’ he spoke of earlier.

The term ‘most useful’ indicates another point at which Gilbert is settling for less. The great expectations, he seems previously to have had for himself went beyond usefulness. And farming isn’t even the most useful occupation; it is only one of them. The words Gilbert chooses tend to be less exalted than in the previous paragraph but we cannot be sure whether this is because he feels he no longer has the opportunity to realize some of his earlier dreams or because he has changed his priorities as he has matured. Though the exclamation mark after ‘well’ seems to make this statement emphatic, it is not clear that he really believes what he is saying. Although now he seeks to identify himself with ‘honest farmers’, it might be difficult for him to be honest, even to himself, about his real feelings towards his occupation.

‘and if I devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm, and the improvement of agriculture in general,’

With the next clause, Gilbert goes back to the admonition not to “bury his talent” and announces that he will “devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm” (which is very nearly the same as ‘burying my talent in the earth’). He had previously used this image from Matthew as an admonition against farming but he now attempts to reinterpret it as positive. He fails to accomplish the reinterpretation because he cannot stop there. When he includes ‘the improvement of agriculture in general’ to his goal, he demonstrates that he has not yet been able to give up making his name in the world. He is

obviously not yet ready to cultivate his own garden. Although the improvement of agriculture may be a more modest aim than his earlier adolescent dreams, his insistence on objectives beyond his own farm shows that he hasn't yet achieved his father's viewpoint.

‘I shall thereby benefit, not only my own immediate connections and dependents, but in some degree, mankind at large.’

In this clause Gilbert once again insists upon going beyond the immediate goals set out by his father. Mr. Markham had warned against desiring to improve either his own or mankind's position but Gilbert finds that in becoming a farmer he can do both. Each time he tries to convince himself he is following his father's advice, he seems to modify the terms to undercut his compliance.

‘hence I shall not have lived in vain.’

In concluding that he will ‘not have lived in vain’, Gilbert is affirming that great achievements are not out of the reach of farmers. But the achievements that he envisions still seem close to what his father would call ‘rubbish’. Altogether, his description of the options open to him as a farmer here are a distorted echo of the objections he earlier made against farming, but he seems not to have developed greatly his concept of what it means to live with a purpose.

When Markham enumerates the conditions he feels he needs to fulfill to avoid living “in vain”, he introduces another perspective on life. He implies that we are expected to make some contribution to the world during the time that we spend in it. This concept of the purpose of life may be grandiloquent. It gives man a significant role to

play in the world and would conflict with many traditional metaphors for human life. Mr. Markham would accept Gilbert's principle but he would certainly define it in ways dissimilar to those of his son. Transmitting the paternal acres in flourishing condition might be his primary measure of contributing to the world. Though the central function of this sentence seems to be the fusion of the two worldviews proposed in the first paragraph into a new inclusive vision of his role as a farmer, Gilbert has not really been able to do so. In attempting to broaden the concept of farmer, he is to a large degree rejecting his father's concept.

Gilbert's defense of farming in this sentence, though fervent, is only half-hearted. He can only justify his choice of occupations by shifting the content of words. He is still unsure whether he can live a purposeful life as a farmer. He seems, in this sentence, to be posturing, perhaps seeking to cover his disappointment. Or he may be talking to himself as much as he is talking to Halford. He is not yet sure whether he has the discipline to continue on this path but he wants to believe that he does.

'With such reflections as these, I was endeavoring to console myself, as I plodded home from the fields, one cold, damp, cloudy evening towards the close of October.'

In the novel, it is the third paragraph that finally leads us into the story. The first sentence of this paragraph begins the task of situating the narrator in the autumn of 1827. But in relation to the argument carried on in the first two paragraphs, this sentence acts as an immediate response to the synthesis proposed in paragraph 2. In contrast to his somewhat artificial posturing in paragraph 2, Markham is now acting on his decision. The journey that was going to benefit mankind has become "plodding home". His

boastful prediction of his future service has become a consoling reflection. And he's cold and wet. There are a lot of adjectives here but the signs nonetheless manage to make concrete an argument that has hitherto been almost completely abstract. The dichotomy has now shifted from abstracts to a contrast between romantic posturing and realistic action in the world. Markham may not be aware of it but Bronte seems to be questioning the ease with which he has reached his synthesis and suggesting that Markham has not yet developed a mature understanding of the terms that the opening paragraphs debated.

Much of what has been said in this passage should be familiar to Halford, who as the narrator's best friend must have talked about these topics with him. The description of his circumstances, his attitude to farming, the considerations that led him nonetheless to become a farmer, are for the reading public.

The initial phase of the dialogue centered on farming and ambition concludes with the sentence we have just considered. We can briefly summarize some of the elements of the dialogue. Like Gilbert, we can assume that this dialogue which he constructs within his own mind reflects the opinions of his parents. The discussion between his parents as described by Gilbert is an attempt to align groups of signs in different patterns. Both parents are attempting to construct paradigms through the manipulation of approximately the same group of binary pairs. The unstable content of the abstract signs is apparent in the ease with which each sign can be assigned to either side of the argument.

Characterizations such as higher aims, great achievements, bettering, rubbish, useful members of society, and benefit, have little or no specific content at all and can be used to describe the paths laid out by both the mother and the father. The position centering on

the mother's comments and the position centering on the father's comments are to a large degree mirror images. The positive member of each binary pair can be easily attached to both sides of the dialogue. Both parents stress responsibility and morality but they assign different contents to the signs.

The purpose of these opening paragraphs may be to define the relation of signs to each other. This will continue to be a major preoccupation throughout the book. Gilbert, the farmer, has chosen his father's rather than his mother's view of the world but only half-heartedly. His mind is filled with Romantic attitudes that he will need to disabuse himself of as he moves toward new paradigms. The narrator seems less willing to accept his father's position than his mother's but ultimately chooses what his father wanted. As the novel develops new alignments will develop that are not closely parallel to either of the paradigms as originally set out. The father's ideas are those of the past. The father is dying when he states them (a circumstance that increases the pressure on his son). Gilbert seeks to combine the virtues of both the new and the old by obeying the commands of his father but still aspiring to something more, or at least something that he would consider more at this moment of his life. The mother's ideas are much more conventional than the opening paragraphs would indicate and within a few lines further on she will begin transforming into a narrow guardian of tradition.

In addition to relating signs to each other, the dialogue is concerned with relating signs to the world. The groups of signs being manipulated on each side of the dialogue can only matter to Markham if they can be shown to tell him something about how the world really is. And, ultimately, the readers of the novel will value it to a large degree for

its insights into the nature of reality. To talk about truth or reality we need to represent them in some way. Bronte has chosen to do this through a series of familiar metaphors. As we look at the techniques used in the dialogue from a semiotic perspective, we can see elements that might not strike us in a first reading. The adjectives used in the arguments, for example, often take away rather than adding to the noun they modify. This demonstrates the negative construction of the sign. Modifiers tell us what is not included in the concept rather than what is.

CHAPTER 2. ETHNOGRAPHY AND FICTION

John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts wrote in the *Sea of Cortez* of two ways of gaining knowledge about a fish. Scholes (1985:130) cites their contrast in a discussion of reader response strategies, using it to distinguish between the type of close reading of the text that the New Critics engaged in and the experience of the text that Rosenblatt advocates. The contrast would serve equally well to distinguish ethnography of communication from the inventories of cultural or linguistic artifacts that earlier anthropologists sometimes constructed. Steinbeck and Rickett describe as well two models of scientific research. The writer of fiction, especially in the nineteenth century heyday of realism, was a social scientist. Charles Horton Cooley, writing early in the twentieth century, argued that the scientist is also a dramatist.

All science may be said to work by a dramatic method when it takes the results of minute observation and tries to build them into fresh wholes of knowledge. This, we know, takes creative imagination; the intelligence must act in sympathy with nature and foresee its operation. (Cooley 1998: 234)

His definition of the task of the scientist reads like a succinct description of the role of the novelist. Eagleton (2003, p. 14) wrote that the novel must present reality so that it is both ‘individual and typical’. In other words, the novelist, and the scientist as well, must accurately observe and report the details of the world but also identify the patterns. The novelist may, however, be better positioned than the scientist to identify the patterns of reality. Cooley argues, “The dramatic element, which in biology is revealed only to a titanic imagination, becomes the most intimate and familiar thing in experience” (1998, p. 235). The ‘dramatic element’ that Cooley says can be more easily found in experience

is comparable to what Steinbeck and Ricketts describe as the difference between catching and dissecting a fish.

Within the social sciences, despite Cooley's claim that all science requires creative imagination, one group of disciplines comes closer to obtaining the results and duplicating the virtues of fiction. Such approaches as ethnography of communication, interaction ritual and interactional sociolinguistics share the concerns of literary realism: accurate observation and identification of patterns. Cooley argued that "Any real study of society must be first, last, and nearly all the time a study of process" (Cooley 1998, p. 235). Understanding process requires exhaustive attention to the details of interaction.

Buzard (2005, p. 8) suggests that an ethnographic analysis of a realist novel might be "unpromisingly obvious". "What realist novel isn't," he asks, "with its 'thick description' of social existence." Buzard argues that:

thinking about the nineteenth-century novel as a determinedly self-interrupting form permits us to grasp its relation to twentieth-century cultural anthropology, with which it participates in a general system of cultural representation whose shape and coherence has been obscured for us by separate disciplinary agendas since the early 1900s.(2005: 7)

He analyzes ethnography through a semiotic rectangle utilizing Pratt's (1992) concept of autoethnography and offering four possibilities. The researcher from the imperial metropolis may study either the metropolis or the colonizable periphery. The dominant form of twentieth century ethnography involves Western researchers studying 'traditional' societies. The second option, which he calls metropolitan autoethnography, involves Western researchers studying their own cultures and is the typical format of the nineteenth century British realist novel. The other two options involve researchers from

the colonial periphery studying either their own cultures or the metropolitan culture. He labels the former with Pratt's term autoethnography and calls the latter reverse ethnography. Thus, for Buzard, the nineteenth century realist novel and twentieth century ethnography, using similar techniques, differ principally in their choice of subjects with the nineteenth century novelists generally focusing on their own cultures.

When we discuss the interaction between ethnography and fiction, we can take either of two perspectives: that of the writer, which offers many examples; and that of the reader, which has been less extensively developed. In other words, writers have frequently developed their fiction much like ethnographers writing up their field notes, but readers have less frequently applied the methodology of ethnography to the analysis of novels. In this discussion we will first look at some of the parallelisms between ethnography and fiction, then consider how anthropological and ethnographic approaches have been utilized in creating fiction focused on the description of exotic cultures, of marked social groups, and of society in general and finally review how ethnography has been used as an analytical tool to facilitate the reading of fiction.

The methods of ethnography of communication have generally been used for the observation and analysis of events occurring in a social setting, Hymes (1974, p. 3) characterizes these studies as "ethnographic in basis and communicative in the range and kind of patterned complexity with which they deal." Hymes argues that it is not possible to combine linguistic material with ethnographic material to form conclusions; rather, the discipline requires the gathering of a new type of material through observation of events within a network or community so that language use is situated within the context of

activities. Though the ethnography of communication combines elements of anthropology and linguistics as well as related disciplines such as sociology and folklore, its innovative feature is the focus on language in activities. Saville-Troike (2003, p. 2) defines the field by citing a central question, “What does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, and how does he or she learn to do so?” The answer to this question leads us to the concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971; & Saville-Troike, 2003). From a slightly different perspective Hymes described his aim as “to help create a study of language that is rooted in the study of social life and that contributes to the transformation of social life.” (1979, p. 316)

Because anthropological research has often been seen to focus upon oral activities more than written documents and upon the actions of people in their daily lives, we might not typically think of fiction as a subject for ethnographic research. Nonetheless, a variety of ethnographical studies have dealt with written texts. Basso (1974) looks at the communicative event of letter writing. Krostenko (2001) reconstructs the meaning of several cultural and social practices of the later Roman republic by looking at the manner in which certain words are used in the writing of Cicero, Catullus and some of their contemporaries. Several ethnographers (Norton, 1987; Gelles, 1989; Warner, 1990 & Freeman, 1995) have researched the social forms and functions of gossip in seventeenth and eighteenth century America through letters, court transcripts, journals, memoirs and fiction.

The relationship between anthropology and fiction has been noted many times. Booth (1983, p. 70) describes the ideal author and the ideal reader as essentially the ideal

ethnographer, seeking to eliminate all bias in his observations to achieve the neutrality that allows him to perceive what is really happening. Clifford (1988, 2003) describing the influences that led him to anthropology singles out William Carlos Williams as a major continuing influence. Hymes SPEAKING grid (Saville-Troike, 2003; Cameron, 2001; & Schriffirin, 1994), developed as an aid to ethnographic observation of events centers on the interrelationship among elements that in some form are also central to fiction: Scene (Setting), Participants (Characters), Ends and Act Sequence (Plot), Key (Tone), Instrumentalities, Norms of Interaction and Interpretation, and Genres.

The development of the modern novel over the past three hundred years has paralleled the growth of anthropology as a discipline. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Ruthven, 2001), interest among folklorist in England in the oral ballad traditions led to the production of spurious ancient texts by such writers as Macpherson and Chatterton, who marketed their original poems as the work of imaginary ancient authors. But Macpherson, though his Ossian never existed, based his work partly upon the collection of authentic oral texts and probably improved upon his sources no more than some legitimate folklorists. Some writers of the time, Sir Walter Scott for example, both gathered traditional ballads and wrote their own imitations. The collection of Saxon and Celtic oral traditions typifies much anthropological research in its focus upon exotic or 'primitive' cultures.

This search for the exotic may be a basis of the anthropological instinct. Iser (1993) and others (Bentley, 1995; Emery, 1996; Wyndham, 2001; Clifford, 2003; & Tarn, 2007) identify the apprehension of the Other as the anthropological element in

fiction. Emery traces the anthropological imagination through a group of twentieth century Latin American indigenist novels, several of them written by anthropologists. She argues that anthropological fiction of this period served widely differing purposes. The surrealist anthropologists (Artaud, 1975; Emery, 1996; & Clifford 1988, 2003) coming out of Paris after the First World War saw the indigenous groups as a resource for the renovation of Western culture while the national governments and official anthropologists saw them as obstacles to national integration and development. Emery argues that the writers associated with Indigenismo and Negrismo never got past their separateness from and often fear of the Other described in their works. Nonetheless, we can see in the development of indigenismo a progressive movement toward an emic view of Native American culture, culminating in the works of Asturias (1967, 1969, 1975), which, rather than viewing Indian society, attempt to view all society through Native American eyes (Malgesini, 1982a). Some professional novelists, Asturias, especially, seem to have come closer to an emic view of culture (Malgesini, 1982b) than even sympathetic anthropologist-novelists, such as Pozas (1948) and Arguedas (1981). Wyndham (2001) argues, however, that writers attempting cross-cultural advocacy, to gain intelligibility, must use many of the terms and concepts already familiar to the audience, and to gain credibility must focus on themes legitimized by anthropological tradition.

The selection of exotic groups as objects of study has been characteristic of realistic fiction in many contexts besides Latin American Indigenismo and Negrismo. In the British Isles we have examples such as the folk-centered Irish National Theater. In

1907, John Millington Synge (1966), for example, published his field notes on The Aran Islands, the locale where he gathered the material on which he based his dramas. Sir James Barrie similarly used Scottish culture in his stories and novels centering on the fictitious weaving community of Thrums. In the United States, the anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1965, 2001) published several ethnographic studies and folklore collections in addition to her novels and stories. Later in the century, Julius Lester also enriched his fiction doing anthropological work collecting folk-tales in black communities. Wyndham (2001) analyzes the ethnographic fictions of four writers coming from marginalized groups but her title refers ironically not to the fictions that these writers wrote but to the anthropological fictions that they submitted to and perpetrated in their writing

In addition to exotic cultures and ethnic groups, ethnographic fiction may focus upon marked social groups or social classes, sometimes the rich (James, Wharton, Waugh) or the poor (Lawrence, Zola, Gogol), sometimes regional cultures. To some degree, however, the nineteenth century realistic novel often resembled an ethnographic enterprise, even when the focus was simply on depicting modern life. Such writers as Austen, Balzac, Tolstoy and Chekhov, documenting their own communities seem, nonetheless, to focus on meticulous observation of cultural practices. Handler and Segal (1990) observe that anthropologists studying other communities must make the strange familiar while those who study familiar cultures must make the familiar strange. They note that though Austen wrote about the small circle of her neighbors and acquaintances, she uses a variety of techniques to defamiliarize and question the underlying principles of

her society. Because the anthropological perspective seems to require that the ethnographer distance himself from the culture he is observing, it is not surprising that Eagleton (1970) finds that the most significant writers in twentieth century English literature have been immigrants who have observed the culture from outside. Buzard argues that nineteenth century realist fiction anticipated but inverted twentieth century anthropological fieldwork by construing narrators and sometimes characters who were enough outside culture to perceive its shape. He calls this “an insider’s outsidersness insistently positioned as the outsidersness of a particular inside” (2005: 12). He locates in the 1840s, the decade of Wildfell Hall, the transformation of the English novel “from a loosely assembled entertainment to a self-reflexive ‘service delivery system’ with aspirations to total formal integration” (Buzard, 2005, p. 13).

Because realistic fiction, especially, was, like anthropology, an attempt to capture reality, it shared with anthropology many of its techniques. Of the forms of anthropology, ethnography of communication with its focus on the dynamic event (in contrast, for example, to earlier anthropological surveys of words or artifacts), is the closest to fiction (and probably also the closest to reality). Ethnographic techniques have not, however, until recently been much used as approaches to literary criticism. Much of this ethnographic work interpreting literature has occurred in the field of ethno-poetics, a discipline that takes us back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century collectors of Celtic oral texts. Ethno-poetics represents a refining of the techniques of early folklorists accomplished principally through closer linguistic analysis of transcribed texts. Although the term was coined by Jerome Rothenberg (Friedrich, 2006), Hymes traces the origins of

ethnopoetics back to Boas's concern with materials for a grammar based on the way language was really used (Hymes, 2003), and beyond that to eighteenth century linguistic analyses of poetry in the Bible.(Hymes, 1981, pp. 46-47). Ethnopoetics seems to derive from both poetry and anthropology. While early collectors of folk traditions frequently "improved" their materials to conform to the literary conventions of the collector's culture, Hymes (1981, 2003) found that even the transcriptions of Boas and Sapir, whose work he praises highly, contained distortions provoked by the conventions of turn-of-the-century American culture. The central misinterpretation that forms the nucleus of his two (1981, 2003) major explorations of ethnopoetics was to record the stories in paragraphs. Through close linguistic analysis of the texts of Boas, Sapir and others as well as transcriptions of stories that he had collected himself, Hymes gradually became convinced that the original tellings of these stories had been poetic recitations organized in lines rather than paragraphs. From this point, working with the same texts over several decades, he has tried to move closer to a faithful representation of the voices of the original storytellers. His research combines painstaking analysis of minor linguistic variation with exhaustive exploration of the context for each of the texts. In discussing his aims, he frequently repeats advice he received from Kenneth Burke, "Use all there is to use."

Hymes' literary analysis has been done principally with extinct or disappearing Columbia River languages and the ethnopoets have generally dealt with Native American tongues. In this sense they can be said to continue the anthropological focus on the Other. They also might be seen to be consuming Native American culture. Gordon (1996)

argues that the wave of interest in collecting and printing folktales in eighteenth century England may have led to the extinction of authentic folk tales by the close of the century. Tarn (2007, p. 39), apparently speaking of both poetry and ethnography, criticizes this “thrust toward *the other*, especially in that it can lead to “under-equipped individuals ripping off traditional knowledge and serving it up to the uninitiated *in competition with* individuals from the ‘tribal and archaic world,’” but he also sees it as a constitutive element in the human condition. Like Iser (1993) and Emery (1996), he observes that “the more closely one looks at the Other, the more he will see his own reflection.”

Hymes, too, frequently emphasizes the Native American’s property rights to his own culture but he sees ethno-poetics as having two purposes: first reconstructing or preserving Native American texts, and secondly, making those texts available to the modern reader. He is very concerned about the accuracy and authenticity of the original transcripts but views translations as expendable, criticizing some readers for treating the translations of earlier anthropologists rather than the field transcripts as the source texts. In creating an authentic text “even genius and native speaker intuition together,” he says, “cannot always substitute for attention to the details of the actual text” (Hymes 1981, p. 76) But he also praises the techniques of poets such as Gary Snyder and Jerome Rothenberg who work to recreate rather than translate the original texts. He notes (1981, p. 61).that Rothenberg retranslates native poems using French texts and literal English translations rather than sources in the original language. Rothenberg. (1990, p. 1) writes “I was looking for what in my own time would make a difference to that time”. This complements Hymes own perspective on the Native American texts: “the point of having

stories was for those who encounter them to make them their own” (Hymes 2003, p. 6). For this reason Hymes welcomes a plurality of translations and laments that, unlike classic Greek texts, many Native American works have not been retranslated since the beginning of the twentieth century or earlier. He also believes that the texts in the corpus of Native American stories and myths are open and need to be constantly reinterpreted

Ethnopoetics as a discipline is an endeavor that brings together the traditions of anthropology and literature and applies them to a common task. Nonetheless, the discourses in texts written by poets (Rothenberg, 1990 & Tarn, 2007) and ethnographers (Hymes, 1981, 1996, 2003) are fairly distinct. Though Tarn and Hymes are both poet-anthropologists, the former uses the style and terms of a poet and the latter of an ethnographer in their discussions of ethnopoetics. On the other hand, the content of their discourse appears to be very similar. While Tarn (2007, p. 189) tells us that “Self is voice fallen into place,” Hymes discusses the stories as situated performances and argues that the final goal of the close linguistic analysis of the text supported by everything we can learn of context and audience may be the discovery of the voice of the storyteller. Ethnopoetic research may seem in many cases to be an intrusion of poets into the field of anthropology or of anthropologists appropriating the tools of poetry for use in their research. Hymes (2003), however, in a study of the measure of Robinson Jeffers poetry, has shown that the techniques of ethnopoetics can also be applied to the field of traditional literary criticism.

Ethnopoetics has not been the only incursion of anthropology into literary criticism. Handler and Segal (1990) chose to do an anthropological study of the rules of

courtship and marriage in the novels of Jane Austen. They discover within the universe of their study, bounded by the covers of Austen's six novels, seven principles informing marital choices. They also discover a multitude of voices negotiating norms and promoting conflicting standards and values. Through the observation of the many courtships within the six novels, they note how norms are either flouted or incorporated into decision making. Handler and Segal learn from their study that Austen neither supports nor opposes nor even describes any moral order. She does, however, create many voices and these voices constantly interact and thereby question standards of conduct. "The mere mention of a principle of propriety by a character," they write, "is an indication that the principle is open to some dispute." They conclude, finally, that the most successful marriages in the novels all take place on the margins of acceptability, that the participants in these marriages do not follow the accustomed courtship practices, and that in concrete situations there are seldom clear signs as to what is the best course among conflicting principles. They move from courtship to family connections and notice that every principle or behavior that a character designates as natural is eventually shown to not to be natural. In looking at social hierarchies they note that agreement is never reached about anyone's place on social scales. In conclusion, with each aspect of society that they explore, they find that Austen's interest is not in defending or attacking social orders but in exploring social norms and showing their contingency in situated action. The authors describe Austen as an ethnographer and use anthropological concepts to interpret her novels. But their analysis leads us to new understanding into what is happening in Austen's novels. The significant insight we can take away from Handler

and Segal is that anthropological observations can lead us to literary insights that we might not have gotten from any other approach.

Anthropology comes into play in two ways in the Handler and Segal's study of marriage in Austen's novels. First they use anthropological theory as a framework for interpretation and secondly they credit Austen with an ethnographic approach to writing fiction. Bentley's (1995) study of the novels of Hawthorne, Wharton and James is both more complex and simpler. Whereas Austen's ethnographic insights were not based on extensive reading of anthropological literature, the three writers in this study were familiar with the anthropological writing of their time. Bentley's first chapter, in fact, develops the parallel lives of James and Malinowski. She pictures them as each arrives in a foreign country determined to master the alien culture. Each, using the technique of ethnological isolation, re-created a traditional genre, the novel of manners for James, travel and customs book for Malinowski. Bentley calls James an ethnographer consciously assuming the stance of an ethnographer in relation to his society. This is somewhat different than Handler and Segal's description of Austen as an ethnographer. Austen may have observed her society closely but she obviously would not have thought of herself as an ethnographer. Wharton, in contrast, called herself a drawing room naturalist. Malinowski, meanwhile, read novels in the Trobriands and dreamed of comparison with Joseph Conrad.

Hawthorne, the first of Bentley's three subjects was the least fortunate in his use of anthropological theory. Living at a time of evolutionary anthropology and racist conceptions of primitive culture, his explicit use of anthropological terms and concepts in

The *Marble Faun* (1860) limit the book's appeal to modern readers. His race-based anthropology of primitive Italy, however, parallels some of the earliest Latin American indigenist novels (see Malgesini, 1982a,b). James and Wharton were part of a new direction in anthropology. Both knew Malinowski and they used anthropological terms in their fictions. James and Malinowski rose to prominence at approximately the same time and each influenced the other's field. Wharton had already read both James and Malinowski when she began writing and so she appropriated anthropological concepts already current. Whereas both James and Wharton used concepts of primitive cultures, they applied them to leisure society of England and New York. The analysis of upper class life through its parallelism with primitive society had already been pioneered by Veblen, whose constructs were utilized by Wharton in *Age of Innocence*. She called the old rich families of New York "aborigines" or "tribes." Propriety became "performative ritual," and the various incidents of the story were made parallel to primitive rites. Bentley calls the technique the ethnographic "savaging" of the leisure class. In another novel, *Custom of the Country*, she portrayed a woman who gained power and independence through frequent divorces. Much of the novel is linked to museums and other spaces that serve to represent museums; the theme is taken from a nineteenth century anthropological precept that in times of transition the anthropologist should watch the women because they are the first to show modifications in behavior. James, in *The Spoils of Poynton*, intertwines filial kinship ties and marriage with property.

Torgerson (2005) employs a related discipline, medical anthropology, in her study of the novels of the Brontës. She looks at attitudes toward disease in the 1840s and the

presence of disease in the lives of the Brontes to focus upon the way each of the Bronte novels uses disease as a sustained metaphor. In Anne Bronte's case, her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, developed parallel metaphors based upon several forms of disease while *Wildfell Hall*, the second, centers on addiction to alcohol as the most fruitful metaphor for analyzing her society. At a time when alcohol use was seen as a problem of the poor, Bronte's novel was one of the first pieces of fiction to explore alcohol use by the middle and upper classes. Living at a time when ideas about alcohol were in transition, Bronte could treat excessive consumption both as a sickness and as an indication of weakness. Though she sometimes treats alcoholism partially as a moral issue, she also provides a detailed portrayal of the progression of the disease. Torgerson's study demonstrates how Bronte used the current constructs of alcoholism of her time as a background for her narrative while also deepening our understanding through close observation of the disease.

We can see a qualitative difference between the ethnography done by Austen or Bronte and that done by Hawthorne, James and Wharton. Austen looked at the community around her and saw things. Her observations were complete, systematic and precise enough to allow later ethnographers to draw conclusions about the society she lived in (or at least about the worlds she created). Bronte, too, derives her narrative from observation of society with only slight theoretical underpinnings. The other authors looked at anthropological theory and created texts to illustrate it or, at least, used primitive cultures as portrayed by anthropology as metaphors for life in the city. We feel that rather than creating worlds they are embodying concepts. Because they knew the

terms and sometimes referred explicitly to the anthropological theory behind their fictional constructs, their novels are now both more ponderous and more dated. Bentley (1995, p. 5) once touches on the issue, saying: “culture is treated here as a problematic but enabling myth, a literal pretext for the work of writing manners.” Although these novels are no doubt equally based on close observation of society, we feel (perhaps unfairly) that they are also distorted by theoretical perspectives. In writing novels so closely tied to the transitory anthropological constructs of their day, the authors have also created period pieces with reduced appeal to later generations. Any observation probably requires some point of view and Austen undoubtedly selected data as much as James, yet we might conclude, from this contrast, that ethnographic observation that anticipates theory is more likely to remain alive than writing that applies theory because it preserves the event with less explicit theoretical distortion.

Bentley’s interpretation of the novels of manners differs noticeably from Handler and Segal’s analysis of Austen’s novels. While they use anthropological categories and concepts to analyze pattern in the cultures created by Austen, Bentley does more traditional literary criticism. Her study compares the world views developed in five novels with discussions taking place in anthropology at the time they were written and shows how the novels were linked to current anthropology. But she does not use anthropological methods to analyze the cultures described or created by Hawthorne, James and Wharton. In short, Handler and Segal use anthropological discourse and methods to interpret works of literature; Bentley, like Emery (1996), uses literary discourse and methods to interpret works of literature and identify their relation to

specific anthropological positions. The use of anthropological theory for literary analysis, in the case of a realistic novel such as those of Austen, offers the reader a fresh perspective for looking at literature and the possibility that this perspective will permit the reader to discover new levels of meaning and a deeper understanding of the events within the text.

Handler and Segal's anthropological study of Austen's novels derives its success in part from the nature of the anthropological tools that they chose to use. Although they postulate certain principles of conduct in the first chapter, their focus is not upon using those principles to categorize events in the novels. Rather they use the situated interchanges of the characters and events in the novels to refine our understanding of how the principles functioned in practice in concrete events. The effect is to increase our awareness of the complexity of the contexts but also to bring to life the characters who are realizing the events. If we are familiar with the stories and the characters their interpretation becomes a kind of aesthetic experience, perhaps not the same as reading a novel, but equal, at least, to recalling past events with someone who also experienced them. We get an idea of what the things they were saying meant to the participants and how those things affected their lives. In their anthropological style, Handler and Segal come close to being ethnographers of communication. Many academic disciplines focus upon facts or numbers; ethnography of communication tells us stories. The stories are used as evidence for the extraction of patterns but we still get the stories. The ethnographer needs to do three things. He must make the stories compelling, the interpretations convincing and the observer a neutral conduit rather than an advocate. It

may be appropriate that there are many ethnographies of communication that observe gossip. In a sense, the ethnographer's tasks are the same as those of the gossip. The stance of the ethnographer recalls that inveterate old gossip, Thomas Jefferson, described by Freeman (1995) laboring over his annas as he struggles to get the goods on his opponents without calling into question his own passive neutrality. We assume that, unlike Jefferson, the ethnographer is not working from a hidden agenda, but both of them are seeking to make sense of human narratives enacted around them. And both of them are after the concrete detail. Neither of them can avoid engaging in fiction either. Ethnography of communication in its compulsion to know everything about the observed event is closely allied to gossip. But ethnography goes beyond gossip in seeking to identify the processes and patterns behind the details. Spacks (1985, p. 90) says that one of the things that makes gossip compelling is that we can never know the whole truth. The same might be said of ethnography.

Ethnography of communication can be a significant tool for literary analysis, because it looks at situated use of language in a genre that is made of language. Realist fiction especially shares parallels in perspective and technique with ethnography. But, as Buzard pointed out, ethnography and the realist novel share so many attributes that an ethnographic analysis of a novel might be too obvious. In his analysis of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* using speech act theory, Fish (1976), argues that any piece of literature could probably be analyzed through speech acts but that there would normally be little point in doing so. The concern of *Coriolanus*, however, was with the same questions that concerned Searle and Austin and speech act theory could accordingly deepen insights

into the play. Nunokawa (2003) similarly uses Goffman's theories of interaction to discuss the self-presentation that is the emphatic concern of the characters of Oscar Wilde. Because Goffman and Wilde focus on closely related aspects of social interaction, Goffman's constructs help the reader to understand Wilde's characters. In the case of *Wildfell Hall*, a narrative that develops through speech events, an ethnographic analysis is especially appropriate because the novel is concerned with many of the same issues that concern the discipline. The reader needs to notice the details of those speech events to become aware of the implications of the novel. Applying anthropological theories such as ethnography of communication or sociological frameworks such as interaction ritual to the analysis *Wildfell Hall* offers the reader insight into the characters that may not be available through other critical frameworks.

CHAPTER 3. "SCARCELY ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN THE READER": CRITICAL RESPONSES TO WILDFELL HALL

Although the two novels of Anne Bronte have remained available to the public, and at least semi-canonical, throughout the more than one hundred and sixty years since they were first published, they have seldom been taken as seriously as they deserve to be. Each novel received several positive critical comments in the reviews and *Wildfell Hall*, an immediate best seller when it was first published in 1848, was the subject of several extensive critical notices. The early reviews sometimes focused on marginal issues, including the gender of the author, a question that had provoked speculation since the publication of *Agnes Grey* in 1847, and the relationships among the various Bells. The issue of gender raised three questions: Was the author male or female? Was the content suitable to be read by women? And was it appropriate to have been written by a woman?

With the republication of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in 1850, speculation on gender was settled by Charlotte Bronte's *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell*, though the suitability of the content continued to be a matter of debate. The certainty that Acton Bell was a woman and the biographical elements provided by the *Biographical Notice* shifted the discussion in two directions, toward the reevaluation of the works on the basis of the writer's gender and toward reinterpretation based upon biographical details of the writer's life and character. Charlotte's *Biographical Notice* and a few related remarks about Anne and her work, later amplified or, at least, disseminated by Elizabeth Gaskell's (1857) biography, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, have remained near the center of discussion of Anne to the present time. Reviewers, critics and biographers

have explored Charlotte's manipulation of Anne's image and through succeeding generations have either repeated or resisted biographical and critical stereotypes first set out by Charlotte. During the first century after the publication of her novels, Anne gradually became more familiar popularly as part of the Bronte myth than as a successful novelist in her own right, and, as a consequence, commentators who do refer to her books sometimes leave the impression they may not have read them. Critics sometimes dismissed Anne's work as meriting attention principally because she was a Bronte or interesting only as a control by which to measure the achievement of Charlotte or Emily. Sinclair's (1922, p. v-vi) introduction to the 1922 edition of Anne's novels, for example, asks what Anne represents besides pious tradition and what place she fills in literature, and then concludes that she fills no place at all

Despite the focus upon Anne's life, few records of it have survived, forcing biographers who wished to go beyond Charlotte's remarks to search for evidence for their theories in the fiction and poems. Because it is not always clear which of the poems were written as expressions of characters in the Gondal cycle that Emily and Anne collaborated on, biographical implications could often be questionable. Nonetheless, a more or less generally accepted biography of Anne, based upon incidents from the poetry and fiction, developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As this biography became accepted, critics began to look at the novels through insights gathered from the biography, seeming to forget that the biography had developed from the fiction. One of the effects of this circular criticism was a tendency to dismiss Anne's writing as thinly

disguised reporting on the events of her life that she had not been able to transform into creative literature.

It was not until the 1970s that Anne's writing began to attract greater critical interest. Since that time two trends have led to greater insight into her work. First researchers focusing on her life and the context of the times in which she lived have produced more evidence of incidents in Anne's life and of her reactions to them. And secondly, critics have focused more directly on details of the work as literature, rather than as a source of information about her life.

From the first reviews to the present day, critics have been concerned with the moral repercussions of all the Bronte novels, but especially those of Anne. Early reviews of *Wildfell Hall* focused upon several aspects of morality. Some found the book itself to be highly immoral and not fit to be read by anyone. Others praised the moral perspective of the book and even recommended it for men, though they might not consider it suitable for women. By the end of the nineteenth century much of the moral distaste for the book had subsided but new critics often criticized it for what they saw as an overbearing focus on morality. Not all the moral outrage was directed at the book. Reviewers sometimes directly attacked the moral qualities of the writer as well. After the publication of the Biographical Notice in 1850 it became more difficult to question Anne's morality and the moral repugnance of the book was more frequently attributed to the effects of misplaced fanaticism or naïve ignorance. Other reviewers directed their moral outrage, not to the book or the author, but to the characters. Arthur Huntingdon was condemned with fairly angry words by several reviewers but both narrators also received their share of attacks.

Although Helen Graham gradually became accepted by later critics, Gilbert Markham continues to be criticized for numerous faults.

By the later nineteenth-century, discussion of the moral and religious aspects of the book began to center on three issues: religious and moral didacticism, religious fervor, and religious orthodoxy. Anne was criticized for sacrificing literary qualities to a didactic agenda that vitiated the novel. Taking her words in the preface to the second edition of *Wildfell Hall* at face value, critics sometimes categorized her as a religious writer who allowed her moral purposes to undermine her fiction. Finally, a number of readers, from the time of first publication to the present have denounced the novel for postulating false or heretical religious doctrines. Although in the past, religious or moral commentary was often simply a vehicle for attacking *Wildfell Hall*, several recent critics have been able to provide useful insights into the novel by exploring the sources of Anne's religious ideas, and identifying ways in which religious frames help us to understand specific characters and events.

Among the technical issues that concerned readers from the time of the first publication were the structure of the plot and the imagination of the writer. In *Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte used two narrative devices more characteristic of the novels of an earlier period: the letter and the diary. The novel is supposedly a few letters that the narrator, Gilbert Markham, sends to his brother-in-law, Halford. Within this framework more than half the book is composed of a diary that Helen Graham kept during the time she was married to Arthur Huntingdon. When Helen returns to her husband, the reader keeps up with events through letters sent by Helen to her brother Frederick. Both the

diary and Helen's letters come to us through Gilbert's letters to Halford. These two devices lead to some awkward moments in the narrative and a fairly sharp break in the plot when Helen's diary is introduced. The epistolary and diary frameworks, in contrast to the direct narrative that Bronte used in her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, tend to distance the readers and the author from the story. These may have contributed to a tradition of viewing Bronte's writing as skilled and original but lacking in force or imagination.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, critics of *Wildfell Hall* began to focus more upon *Wildfell Hall*'s place as a pioneering treatment of many of the social issues of the Victorian period. One of the overriding concerns of Victorian literature was what some have called the woman question. *Wildfell Hall* was among the earliest works of Victorian fiction to deal with a number of issues related to defining the role of women in the family and in society. Although the concept of the Angel in the House developed in its fullest form after the publication of *Wildfell Hall*, Bronte's novel constitutes one of the strongest challenges to the concept in the Victorian period. Her protagonist, Helen, attempts to embody the role of angel in the house and in doing so highlights several of the contradictions in the concept: the relation between influence and power, the contradiction between the roles of wife and mother, and the difference between attending and avenging manifestations of the angel. Bronte also contrasts the angel with the working woman as a possible alternate role for women. *Agnes Grey* was the first realistic treatment of the life of a governess, the principal employment open to middle-class Victorian women. Helen in *Wildfell Hall* supports herself as a professional painter. In making the heroine of *Wildfell Hall* a painter, Bronte was also able to incorporate another major Victorian

motif, the Lady of Shalott. Helen Graham's illegal act in abandoning her husband and taking her child with her places her in a morally ambiguous role. Through this circumstance, she is linked to several Victorian motifs that relate in one way or another to contagion: the foreign woman, the exotic woman, the fallen woman, and the carrier of disease. Finally, although the concept developed some forty years after the publication of *Wildfell Hall*, some critics have seen Helen as a prototype of the New Woman of the later Victorian period.

In the Preface to the Second Edition, Bronte insists that she is not writing to entertain but to instruct and subsequent critics have therefore attempted to describe her social agenda. Among the first reviewers, her agenda was seen as primarily moral reformation. Later critics have pointed out her attack on Victorian marriage and property laws, on the aims and practices of Victorian education, and on the vices of alcoholism and vanity that were the natural outgrowth of the educational system. Beyond criticism of specific institutions and practices, Eagleton (1988) interprets *Wildfell Hall* as an attack on the system as a whole, setting the materialism of Victorian society against the moral constraints of Christianity and the excesses of class-based culture against the essential equality of all humans. Much of the brutality that early reviewers condemned in *Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey* derives from the oppression of the weak by the strong: governesses by employers, wives by husbands, children by adults, the poor by the rich, or animals by humans.

From another perspective Bronte's writing can be seen as an example of reverse ethnography. Her writing is an example of an observer from the periphery studying the

mores of the center. As a Yorkshire writer, she is already removed from the literary center of London, but as an English woman of Irish descent she is even farther removed. Even more, in the Victorian age, being a woman writer removed her from the cultural center. Although much writing by women was published in the nineteenth century, the fact of female authorship almost automatically prevented a book from achieving canonical status. Bronte's marginal status in Victorian literature allows critics to look at *Wildfell Hall* from the viewpoint of culture and imperialism (Said, 1993)

The reader who returns to the first reviews of *Wildfell Hall* of 1848 and 1849 may be surprised to find, after discounting the anger, the bluster, and the inflated language, that many of the early reviewers focused on the same elements and reached similar conclusions to modern readers. The early reviews differ from modern interpretations essentially in substituting general impressions for detailed analysis and in basing their conclusions on different expectations of the novel.

Early Speculation on the Novels and their Authorship

Although Anne Bronte's novels, especially *Wildfell Hall*, received less critical attention than those of her sisters during much of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, there has nonetheless been enough writing about them to identify certain traditions in Anne Bronte criticism. Contemporary critics placed considerable emphasis first on speculation as to whether the Bells were three authors or one, and secondly on whether they were men or women. The reviewer of the *Examiner* (07/29/1848), for

example, admits to occasionally suspecting that all the Bell books were written by the same person “in different states of mind or humor” (Allott 1974, p. 254). The Athenaeum (12/25/1848) observes the books ‘might’ be by the same writer. (Allott, 1974, p. 218). The New Monthly (01/1848) suggests that the names Ellis and Acton Bell are used to indicate two different styles of writing used by one writer (Allott, 1974, p. 229). E.P. Whipple (Allott, 1974, p. 262) in the North American Review (10/1848) and the reviewer (Allott, 1974, p. 257) of the Literary World (08/12/1848), among others, simply assume that one author wrote all the Bronte books and treat them as part of a single oeuvre. The Rambler’s (09/1848) review of *Wildfell Hall* announces that, “The novels lately published by these supposed individuals, or at least those which have the names of the first two of the three [Ellis and Acton], are too palpably the work of one hand to deceive even the unpracticed critic” (Allott, 1974, p. 266). In same month that the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* was published with Charlotte Bronte’s “Biographical Notice”, Sydney Dobell, writing in the Palladium (09/1850), dismissed Charlotte’s earlier claim that she had not written the books by Ellis and Acton Bell. He argued that *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* were earlier, less accomplished works by the author of *Jane Eyre*, who was now unwilling to acknowledge her authorship (Allott, 1974, pp. 277-278).

Speculation on the gender of the author was a major theme in the early criticism of *Wildfell Hall* and the three previous books by the Brontes (*Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.) The vague gender neutrality of the pseudonyms created serious classification problems for many reviewers. Gilbert (1997, p. 7) observes that critics of

the time tended to treat fiction by male writers as art whereas that by female writers was often treated as simple narrative of personal experience. Anne Brontë's reputation, especially, suffered from this tendency to equate fictional narrative with the author's personal experience. Reviewers generally focused upon five issues in discussing this question in relation to *Wildfell Hall*: the force and power of the narratives, the coarseness of the books, the familiarity with men's ways of speaking and thinking, the familiarity with women's ways of speaking and thinking, and the superiority of the women characters.

Early reviewers of the Brontës were often impressed by the narrative force and originality of the books, though, in this respect, Anne's first novel, *Agnes Grey*, was usually considered both less powerful and less repugnant than the others. The *Spectator* (09/18/1847) noted "what it gains in measure is probably lost in power" (Allott, 1974, p. 217). *Athenaeum* (12/25/1847) called *Agnes Grey* "more acceptable to us, though less powerful" (Allott, 1974, p. 219). *Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* (01/15/1848) compares *Agnes Grey* to *Jane Eyre*, discovering "the same fresh, original and unconventional spirit; while the style of composition is, undoubtedly, of the same north-country, Doric school; it is simple, energetic, and apparently disdainful of prettiness and verbal display" (Allott, 1974, p. 227). *Atlas* (01/22/1848), on the other hand, complains of "a want of distinctness in the character of Agnes, which prevents the reader from taking much interest in her fate—but the story though lacking the power and originality of *Wuthering Heights*, is infinitely more agreeable" (Allott, 1974, p. 233).

These early reviewers were concerned with determining the gender of the writer because they considered the books more powerful than convention taught them to expect of a woman writer, yet they often believed they could nonetheless distinguish signs of female authorship. Particularly because the force of the novels involved elements that some critics felt to be inappropriate in the writing of a woman, the reviews frequently tried to resolve these contradictions. Though *Wildfell Hall* was praised for its narrative force, it was often condemned for a corresponding coarseness that called into question the taste if not the character of the author. The coarseness of the novel was such that it was impossible to conceive that a woman could have written it. This criticism had also been applied to the three previous Bronte novels. A *Spectator* review on December 18, 1847 had accused all three of “improbable unpleasing subjects” and “bad choice of matter and theme”.

From the first reviews, most reviewers found all of the Bronte novels to be coarse or vulgar. The *Spectator* (12/18/1847) accuses all three Brontes of using “subjects that are peculiar without being either probable or pleasing,” and argues that the obvious ability displayed in the writing is “insufficient to overcome the injudicious selection of theme and matter” (Allott, 1974, p. 218). *Athenaeum* (12/25/1847) found the books to be filled with depressing detail and warned the authors against “eccentric and unpleasant” (Allott, 1974, p. 219) material. *New Monthly Magazine* (01/1848) excluded *Agnes Grey* from the general condemnation observing that “while its language is less ambitious and less repulsive, it fills the mind with a lasting picture of love and happiness succeeding to scorn and affliction, and teaches us to put every trust into a supreme wisdom and

goodness” (Allott, 1974, p. 229). Though this reviewer doesn’t mention gender, and avoids pronouns that might indicate whether he considers the author male or female, he describes the book as one clearly appropriate for a woman writer or reader.

When *Wildfell Hall* was first published, the *Spectator* (07/08/1848), comparing it to *Wuthering Heights*, observed that *Wildfell Hall* “is pitched in a more natural key than the author’s previous novel, though not without occasional roughness” (Allott, 1974, p. 249). Nonetheless, he still considers the novel a mistaken use of the author’s abilities. As the reviewer continues, he seems to become more disturbed by the novel and to find its coarseness more complex than he initially stated. He perceives “in the writer a morbid love of the course, not to say the brutal” (Allott, 1974, p. 250). The *Spectator* review concludes that beyond the coarse material that seems to attract the writer, “There is a coarseness of tone throughout the writing of all these Bells that puts an offensive subject in its worst point of view” (Allott, 1974, p. 250). The *Literary World* (08/12/1848) agrees, observing that “The mind that conceived them is one of great strength and fervor, but coarse almost to brutality” (Allott, 1974, p. 257). The *Athenaeum* review (07/08/1848), attributed to H.F. Chorley (Allott, 1974, p. 251), while generally very positive, does note that less space should have been devoted to the disagreeable conduct of Huntingdon. In ‘Mr. Bell’s New Novel,’ the *Rambler* (09/1848) initially labels *Jane Eyre* “one of the coarsest books which we ever perused”, lamenting the author’s affinity with “the grosser and more animal portion of our nature” (Allott, 1974, p. 267). The writer then goes on to observe that Gilbert Markham’s level of culture, morals and religion is little different from *Jane Eyre*’s. Nonetheless, despite disliking all the

characters, much of the plot and the general religious and moral perspectives, he finally concludes that the book is not as bad as *Jane Eyre*, that the hero and heroine have better intentions, and that they are more aware of the moral imperatives of their situation.

The Rambler is especially repulsed by Huntingdon and the ‘excessive minuteness’ that the author uses in detailing “the disgusting scenes of debauchery” (Allott, 1974, p. 268). The conduct and language of Huntingdon and companions seem to have offended most early reviewers of *Wildfell Hall*, both because they considered it both coarse and unreal. The *Spectator* (07/08/1848) reviewer thought it might be possible to find such characters “in the early part of George the Third’s reign” (Allott, 1974, p. 250), nearly ninety years before. The reviewer of the *Examiner* (07/29/1848) doesn’t “remember hearing of such “savages . . . as having been tolerated for many years within the pale of civilized society” (Allott, 1974, p. 256). The critic of the *Literary World* (08/12/1848) believes that the writer’s skill at description confuses the reader into accepting such fantastic characters as possible (Allott, 1974, p. 258). Whipple in the *North American Review* (10/1848), though he doesn’t deny the existence of such characters, laments “the prominence given to the brutal element in human nature” (Allott, 1974, p. 261). Even Charles Kingsley (1849, p. 424), who defends the subject of the novel as a necessary exposure of vice, is bothered by the ‘unnecessary’ coarseness. He believes that no wife, such as Helen is presented, could have brought herself to record in her diary such remarks as Huntingdon utters even if she had heard them.

The coarse or scandalous nature of the novel, despite its genius, is sometimes argued as proof that the writer was a man. But the reviewers that mention coarseness are

by no means unanimous in believing this. Showalter (1999, p. 25), in fact, argues that “‘Coarseness’ was the term Victorian readers used to rebuke unconventional language in women’s literature”. The critic of the *Literary World* (08/12/1848), using masculine pronouns throughout his discussion eventually concludes, based partly on the novel’s coarseness, that the author is a woman (and thereafter he uses feminine pronouns to refer to her).

We shrewdly suspect these books to be written by some gifted and retired woman, whose principal notions of men are derived from other books; or who, taking some walking automaton of her native village for a model, throws in certain touches of rascality, of uncouthness or boisterousness, to make her lay figures animated, and as she thinks, masculine. If any one chooses to study her male characters, it will be found that all that is good or attractive about them is or might be womanish . . . (Allott 1974: 259)

This insightful comment was later echoed by Charles Kingsley, who used feminine pronouns to refer to the author throughout his review. He explains his practice in a footnote.

We have spoken of the author in the feminine gender, because, of whatever sex the name ‘Acton Bell’ may be, a woman’s pen seems to us indisputably discernable in every page. The very coarseness and vulgarity is just such as a woman, trying to write like a man, would invent,—second-hand and clumsy, and not such as men do use; the more honor to the writer’s heart if not to her taste. (Kingsley 1849: 426)

The same coarseness was, however, cited by other critics as evidence that the writer could not be a woman because a woman would not have had access to the scenes or thoughts described in *Wildfell Hall*. The reviewer for *Sharpe’s London Magazine* (08/1848) starts from this position “At the first glance we should say, none but a man could have known so intimately each vile, dark fold of the civilized brute’s corrupted nature; none but a man could make so daring an exhibition as this book presents to us”

(Allott, 1974, p. 265). This reviewer actually finds himself conflicted by contradictory attributes of the book. He notes “a thousand trifles which indicate a woman’s mind, and several more important things which show a woman’s peculiar virtues” (Allott, 1974, p. 265). These he contrasts to “a reckless freedom of language, and an apparent familiarity with the sayings and doings of the first style of fast men, in their worst moments”. On the other hand, “no man . . . would have written a work in which all the women, even the worst, are so far superior in every quality, moral and intellectual, to all the men” (Allott, 1974, p. 265). He finally decides that unless the novel was written by a woman with the help of her husband, it had to have been written by a man.

The speculation as to the gender of the author was ended by Charlotte Bronte’s “Biographical Notice” included with the 1850 reissue of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Although the extended discussion of the gender of the author during the first phase of Bronte criticism might seem trivial now, it may have been important to early reviewers as a step toward finding ways to categorize the books. Because men were assumed to write one way and women another, and because women’s writing was usually seen as less significant than men’s writing, critics needed to know the gender of the author before they could confidently make pronouncements. Some recent critics have observed that the discovery that the authors were women, led reviewers after 1850 to reinterpret and devalue all the Bronte books.

Even before the issue of whether the writer was male or female was resolved, however, two other gender issues had provoked discussion among reviewers. Was the material in the Bell books appropriate for treatment by women writers and were the

books acceptable matter for women readers. Anne Bronte, in her preface to the second edition of *Wildfell Hall*, reacted specifically to these questions raised by critics who speculated on the gender of the writer, insisting that gender could play no part in determining the suitability of writing. Critics nonetheless continued to discuss the degree to which the content and the treatment of it in *Wildfell Hall* were appropriate for a woman writer. The reviewer of the *Literary World* (08/12/1848), after bemoaning the brutality of and unreality of *Wildfell Hall*, and though believing the author to be a woman, defends the morality of the book and of the heroine. “We are told”, he writes, “that no woman, unless divested of all those finer sensibilities that constitute the chief graces of her heart, could possibly comport herself towards any man as do the heroines before us, Helen and Jane. Again we doubt all this.” He had earlier claimed that it was impossible that Helen could choose such a boor as Gilbert, but finally concludes that the author cannot be blamed for the follies of the characters and that the fresh truthfulness of *Wildfell Hall* would be preferable, for many, to the sentimental fantasy of Dickens (Allott, 1974, p. 261).

Sharpe’s *London Magazine* (08/1848) found great merits in *Jane Eyre* that compensated for its greater faults but argued that *Wildfell Hall* could not be excused so easily. The editor claimed his comments were not a review but a warning,

indeed, so revolting are many of the scenes, so coarse and disgusting the language put into the mouths of some of the characters, that the reviewer to whom we entrusted it returned it to us, saying it was unfit to be noticed in the pages of Sharpe; and we are so far of the same opinion, that our object in the present paper is to warn our readers, and more especially our lady-readers, against being induced to peruse it, either by the powerful interest of the story, or the talent with which it is written (Allot 1974: 263).

Despite this opening, and his further comment that he mentions the book only because its many good qualities might otherwise seduce unsuspecting reader's into reading it, the editor's remarks tend more toward praise than to censure. He concludes, however,

In taking leave of the work, we cannot but express our deep regret that a book in many respects eminently calculated to advance the cause of religion and right feeling, the moral of which is unimpeachable and most powerfully wrought out, should be rendered unfit for the perusal of the very class of persons to whom it would be most useful, (namely imaginative girls likely to risk their happiness on the forlorn hope of marrying and reforming a captivating rake,) owing to the profane expressions, inconceivably coarse language, and revolting scenes and descriptions by which its pages are disfigured. (Allot 1974: 265)

Both these comments in the Sharpe review imply that while *Wildfell Hall* might be acceptable reading for men, women should not be exposed to it. Kingsley (1849, p. 424), too, though he praises many aspects of the book, calls it “utterly unfit to be put into the hands of girls”. The Rambler (09/1848), considering all the Bell books to be by one author, calls her “a clever and vigorous writer” whose books are “more individual and characteristic”, than ordinary novels, even the good ones (Allott, 1974, p. 267). But he goes on to hope that readers have selected the books for these reasons rather than for their prurient interest.

Biographical Speculation

Since the publication of Charlotte's ‘Biographical Notice’ (1850), much of the criticism of *Wildfell Hall* has been tied to the biography of Anne Bronte. An early and continuing motif has been the relation of Bronte and *Wildfell Hall* to the lives and works of her sisters. Because, until recently, apart from the suspect testimonials of Charlotte,

there was little biographical information available concerning Anne Bronte, those critics who wished to discuss her life often speculated on the basis of material taken from the novels. This fictional biographical data was often then used to interpret the fiction on the basis of the 'facts' of her life. A number of recent studies, however, have been able to introduce new biographical details that may be relevant to understanding Bronte's fiction. Many others have finally sought to move past the biography to analyze the writing. Allott (1974) distinguishes early criticism from that of the present day on the basis of a few variations in style and orientation; mid-nineteenth century writing was more prolix, more focused on moral expansion, and less concerned with the details of the text. Some of the differences she notes are natural results of contrasts between traditional concepts of the function of the text and our own. Tomkins (1980) argues that until the nineteenth century criticism never dealt with the questions of meaning and interpretation that interest modern critics. We can see little interest in interpretive criticism of Anne Bronte before the twentieth century.

Once Acton Bell was identified as Anne Bronte, much writing about her focused on her biography while distracting attention from the novels themselves. Biographical critics looking at her novels have discussed Anne Bronte's life in relation to those of her sisters, to the religious background of her upbringing and later experiences, to the isolation of her life, to her romantic interests, and to the health issues of her family. The relations among the Bronte sisters, though portrayed in many different forms tend to fall into two general structures: those that describe a close-knit family with Charlotte diligently counseling and caring for her younger sisters and those that stress family

rivalries with Emily and Anne generally uniting to exclude Charlotte and her overbearing intrusions. Fanny Ratchford (1960, pp. 363-364), reviewing the Anne Bronte biographies of Gerin, Harrison and Stanford, argues that it has become a cliché for those who defend Emily and Anne to attack Charlotte as the wicked, interfering older sister. The original stereotype, first proposed in Charlotte's 1850 'Biographical Notice' and amplified by Mrs. Gaskell's diffusion of Charlotte's ideas, helped to create a passive image of Anne as the gentle but ineffectual and unimaginative little sister. This interpretation had become a cliché of Bronte criticism and biography by the end of the nineteenth century and was routinely repeated by most critics who mentioned Anne. By this time, however, the alternate interpretation of Charlotte as a manipulating distorter of family history was being espoused by a few critics. According to this view, Anne, who never had a close relation with her sister, was stronger and more socially adept than Charlotte and more successful in her professional activities. Though Charlotte stressed the quiet, reserved natures of both her sisters, a number of more recent critics interpret their silence as secretiveness toward and resistance to Charlotte. Perhaps the culmination of the negative view of Charlotte can be found in Tully's 1999 novel, *The Crimes of Charlotte Bronte*. Tully, usually a writer of non-fiction crime stories, implicates Charlotte in the deaths of her sisters. He claims (questionably) to have developed sufficient evidence to justify his accusations but to have chosen to write the book as fiction to reach a wider audience.

On the whole, however, the recent stereotype of the villainous Charlotte suffers from the same defect as the older one of the gentle Anne: lack of real biographical facts. Recent biographers, like those who came earlier, have used statements from the novels to

reinforce the image that they are creating of Anne and the relationships among the sisters. But, as with the older portraits, there is no reason to believe that the fiction reflects any truths about Anne's life. Goreau (1988, p. 35), for example, argues that Agnes Grey's admission that she was "a close and resolute dissembler" reflects Anne's view of herself as she habitually masked her feelings before Charlotte. Even if it were possible to identify Agnes with Anne, however, there is no reason to believe that the habit of dissembling was developed as a defense against Charlotte rather than as a defense against the circumstances surrounding the situation of being a governess. Nor is there any reason to assume that the comment has any relation at all to Anne. Chitham (1991, p. 5) observes that in many Bronte biographies "the distinctions between proved fact, rational conjecture and wild fancy have not been observed".

The 'Biographical Notice' of 1850, is the ultimate basis for most biographical writing about the Brontes, and Charlotte's comments about Anne as well as the distaste for Wildfell Hall expressed there helped to create and sustain the convention that her novels were somehow less significant than those of Charlotte and Emily, and contributed to the superficial treatment they received even when they were taken up by critics. Although a number of critics (Goreau, 1988, Shattock, 2001) have discussed the impact that Charlotte's negative treatment of Wildfell Hall had on Anne's subsequent reputation, Thompson (1996) has shown that Charlotte's treatment of Emily's novel was also negative. But *Wuthering Heights*, nonetheless, continued to be read and even critically discussed, eventually surpassing *Jane Eyre* among critics, whereas Wildfell Hall was less frequently mentioned during the later nineteenth century. *Wildfell Hall*, of course,

suffered additionally from being suppressed by Charlotte who, after Anne's death, allowed no further reprints during her lifetime, but the novel nonetheless seems to have been widely available at the end of the century. Ratchford (1960, pp. 363-368) observes, "Anne's novels had a fairly wide reading in her own day, and have continued to be printed and read with appreciation by many—with extravagant admiration by some—through the century between".

Although, the initial reaction of the modern reader to *Wildfell Hall* may be that Anne is writing on a different level and in a style very unlike that of her sisters, early critics found the novels by the Brontes to be so similar that they frequently questioned whether they were not all written by the same person. The *Rambler* (09/1848) review of *Wildfell Hall* begins with *Jane Eyre*, arguing "These two are, indeed, so strikingly alike in sentiment, style, and general modes of thought, that the criticisms which apply to one of them are almost equally applicable to the other" (Allott, 1974, p. 267). Many connections can be found between the themes and structures of the novels of the three writers. *Jane Eyre* has been described as a rewrite of *Agnes Grey* and *Wildfell Hall* as a reaction to and criticism of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. There are other parallelisms and similarities of theme as well. Though it grew beyond its original intent, Chitham (1991, p. 142) characterized *Wildfell Hall*, begun before *Wuthering Heights* was finished, as a reaction to Emily's book, concerned with defining the differences "involving matters of realism, morality and indeed differing world views" between the two sisters.

Liddell (1990, p. 9), Levin (1992, pp. 72-73) Goreau (1998) all point out that Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions of the relationships between the Bronte sisters did not reflect reality. Liddell calls Gaskell reckless and suggests she is lucky not to have been sued. Levin argues that Gaskell was guided in her writing by a need for oppositions in character development. Because she depended in her writing on contrasts between pairs of characters, she collapsed Anne and Emily into 'twins' and then contrasted them to Charlotte. Because she typically built character through dyadic contrasts, she then chose to focus on differences between Emily and Charlotte, 'allowing Anne to fade away'. Goreau, on the other hand, assumes that Gaskell simply 'echoed' Charlotte's already distorted portraits of both Emily and Anne. Concerned with the acceptance of her own work, Charlotte, in the Biographical Notice, was anxious to separate herself from her sisters' work and also to demonstrate the superiority of her own writing. When her publishers suggested publishing the unpublished writings of Emily and Anne, Charlotte answered that she could not authorize publication because her sisters would have objected (Goreau, 1998, p. 14). Tradition says that she then burned all the papers of both sisters.

That many critics have sought clues to the events in Anne Bronte's life is understandable. Rosenblatt (1994 p.1379) argues that

Writing is always an event in time, occurring at a particular moment in the writer's biography, in particular circumstances, under particular external as well as internal pressures. In short, the writer is always transacting with a personal, social, and cultural environment. Thus, the writing process must be seen as always embodying both personal and social, or individual and environmental factors.

However in the critical tradition of the Brontes, especially Anne Bronte, biography has often interfered with understanding the text. Chitham (1991, p. 6), admitting that we study biography to gain insights into texts, asks, “but if the major source for that biography is the corpus of those works, how can we avoid a vicious circle in which we read autobiography into the literature and then use our observations to show how the fiction grew from the life”. Several biographers (Harrison & Stanford 1959, Gerin, 1959 & Liddell, 1990) of Anne Bronte followed this process, imagining biography from the writing and then analyzing the writing on the basis of the imagined biography. Gerin (1976/ 1959, p. 230) for example, states that Agnes Grey had originally begun as an autobiography and credits it with ‘startling’ fidelity to Bronte’s experiences as a governess, though she derives much of that experience from the novel. Liddell (1990), though supposedly interpreting the novels of Anne and Emily, reads the books for evidence about the lives, tying the content of the novels to the biography of the Brontes. Ratchford (1960, p. 366) identifies the absence of material as a problem for biographers of Anne Bronte that forces them to fill their books either by giving more space to her family, thereby reducing her individual significance or extracting information from the novels as if they were autobiographical, thereby calling into question her imagination.

The early reviewers and later critics gradually consolidated a stereotype of Anne Bronte as the quiet and unimaginative sister. Allott (1974) accepts these early opinions without question, labels Anne’s books less controversial (less interesting) and calls her combative preface “discreet”.

In contrast to her sisters, Anne was compared to Jane Austen by a number of nineteenth and early twentieth century critics. An early review in *Atlas* (01/22/1848) summed up *Agnes Grey* as “a somewhat coarse imitation of one of Miss Austin’s [sic] charming stories” (Allott, 1974, p. 233). *The Examiner* (07/29/1848) also noted the connection to Jane Austen “We are reminded occasionally of the minute gossip in which Miss Austin [sic] occasionally indulged, but with less of that particular which her dialogues invariably possessed, of illustrating the characters of the speakers.” These early comparisons to Austen help to focus attention on perhaps the most immediately recognizable difference between the writings of Anne Bronte and those of her sisters: the comic wit and lively humor that she uses in contrast to their somber and humorless fiction. Bronte’s first major biographer, Winifred Gerin (1976/1959, p. 235), finds Austen’s influence to be especially notable in the buoyant opening chapters of *Agnes Grey* although she argues that it is absent from *Wildfell Hall*. Scott (1983, p. 73), on the other hand, finds *Wildfell Hall* to be similar to Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, not only in basic genre (cautionary moral tale) but in going well beyond the parameters of the genre. Moore (1924, p. 253) speculates that “if Anne Bronte had lived ten year longer she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen, perhaps even a higher place”. Moore argues that Bronte “had all the qualities of Jane Austen and other qualities; she could write with heat one of the rarest qualities.” He goes on to identify *Sense and Sensibility* and *Wildfell Hall* as the only two pieces of prose narrative in English to “reveal the burning heart”. Liddell (1990), on the other hand links Anne, based on powers of observation and satire, to Mrs.

Gaskell. Moore (1924) suggests comparisons to Turgenev and Balzac, but sets them aside in favor of Austen.

Moral purpose

Early reviewers of both *Agnes Grey* and *Wildfell Hall* were interested in the moral implications of the fiction. Much of the early moral discussion tended to be condemnatory although some reviewers did identify moral purpose in Bronte's writings. The moral discussions tended to center on three types of moral questioning: of the texts of the narrators and of the author. The attacks upon the book as immoral in many cases overlapped with the criticism of coarseness. The review in the *Literary World* (08/12/1848) is careful to distinguish between the two characteristics. The reviewer argues that, "we do not believe one word in the charge of immorality so often brought against these books. An aberration of taste, an ignorance of society, must by no means be confounded with a departure from principle" (Allott, 1974, p. 261). For this reviewer, the truthfulness of the narrative compensates for the disgusting comment. Sharpe's *London Magazine* (08/1848) also praises the freshness and truthfulness of the novel before the introduction of Helen's diary, but finds that the scenes and language of the diary make the novel unreadable (Allot, 1974, p. 264).

In the Preface to the Second Edition, Bronte had insisted on both her desire to tell the truth and her hope to provide moral guidelines for youth. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to do both and where there was a conflict, to the disgust of the reviewers, Anne nearly always chose to tell the truth. This can be seen in the mixture of traits in all

the characters and the multiple voices and events that undercut the pronouncements of the narrators.

The Victorian novel was “saturated with biblical allusions,” according to Jenkins (1995, p. 26) who sees religious language as a significant convention of Victorian fiction. Jenkins argues that the increased use of Biblical allusion, occurring as the religious foundations of the society were being eroded, derived from several causes. First, the Bible was the only book that the Victorian novelist could be sure her reader was familiar with. Unlike earlier religion-oriented writing, though, the religious values of the Victorians were superimposed upon a secular genre in which the characters were forced to make their pilgrimages through mundane events. Cunningham (1975, p. 9) argues instead, that the program of the English novel from the time of Defoe centered on “Puritan background, the diary-keeping habit, [and] the practice of daily self-scrutiny before God”. She notes that most British novelists have come from Dissenting backgrounds, with a focus on the ordinary lives of ordinary people and everyday domestic situations. She describes the perspective of the English novel as “Puritan liberalism, the faith in democratic rule and in the priesthood of all believers, the rights of every man to follow his conscience in politics and religion” (Cunningham 1975, p. 9). Religious fiction became a popular genre during the Victorian period. Within this context, however, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has nonetheless sometimes been seen as a novel with an especially strong moral orientation. There are several additional factors that may have made it so. Anne has generally been characterized by biographers as the Bronte with the strongest religious interests and so she may have found it more natural to

develop her narrative within the context of Scriptural allusion. Yet Bronte was hardly alone in this. Cunningham (1975) argues that the majority of British writers came from Nonconformist backgrounds in which Scriptural authority and parallels were constantly sought for one's actions (see also Rivers, 2005). Similarly, Bronte's inclusion in *Wildfell Hall* of such Methodist occupations as diary-keeping, may be less an indication of Methodist upbringing than a standard Victorian literary custom.

Several interpreters (Cunningham, 1975; Jenkins, 1995; Janssen, 1998; Twycross-Martin, 1998 & Rivers, 2005,) have suggested that mid-nineteenth century feminist writing was especially dependent upon religious discourse for several reasons. First the ideal of the angel in the house promoted the concept of women as the moral guides of the household. Because moral authority was thus, to some degree, granted to women, they were able to speak on moral and religious themes without being so readily criticized for infringing on zones of masculine authority. Rivers (2005, p. 26) suggests that feminist writers took over the domestic ideal and ideals of religious belief and reformulated both as support for their social agenda. Jenkins (1995) approaches this idea from a different direction. She argues that women writers were excluded from the canon in the Victorian age for of any of several characteristics: their values were domesticated, their plots were non-traditional, or their language was non-canonical. By co-opting sacred language, they were able to use it to construct their own plots and values with the authority of myth and the Word. "These writers," she says, "revise not just the literary canon but also its theological foundation" (Jenkins 1995, p. 29). By using the covering language of moral duty, Rivers (2005, p. 30) observes, women writers could define desired opportunities

and rights as duties. Arguments for greater freedom for middle-class women to engage in work for pay were thus constructed on the basis of the moral duty of these women to serve their families and the community. Reframing work as duty permits a woman seeking work to be seen as self-sacrificing and responsible rather than self-aggrandizing and unwomanly.

The Dissenting admonition to actualize oneself, in the sense of developing one's intelligence and abilities to the furthest extent possible, and of following one's conscience focused in feminist writing upon the duty to serve God and fulfill His will. Obedience to God was more important than obedience, for example, to a husband or father (Cunningham, 1975 & Rivers, 2005). In this way, the ideal of feminine moral superiority could be used to critique the attributes of the angel in the house. But women could only challenge the authority of men from a position of faith (Twycross-Martin, 1998 & Wilson, 1998). *Wildfell Hall* is a key text for critics who analyze the development of alternate models of womanhood in the mid-Victorian period (Twycross-Martin, 1998; Janssen, 1998 & Rivers, 2005) because it is the most directly subversive novel of the period.

Considering the different ways in which religious discourse functioned in the mid-Victorian fiction, it becomes clear that, whatever Bronte's personal religious stance may have been, her use of religious allusion and language in *Wildfell Hall* was a necessary narrative strategy. Helen Huntingdon abandoned her husband and stole his child. Whatever Huntingdon may have done before, his wife's action is the most shocking criminal act of the novel. To help the reader accept Helen's act and identify with her

predicament, Bronte needed to clearly establish her moral superiority. Helen's consistently moral positions in relation to the other characters, her familiarity with the Bible, her tendency to measure her acts against Scriptural teaching and her scrutiny of her own thoughts and actions, as recorded in her diary, in relation to her duty to God all contribute to defining her as a praiseworthy moral guide for her family. Rivers (2005, pp. 126-127) argues that Helen must be 'hyper-moral' in her acts, her attitudes and her speech throughout the novel to compensate for the 'transgression of her flight'. She is not a perfect angel; she is ignorant when she begins her diary and she never becomes adept at interacting comfortably with her husband or with others. She does, however, behave morally each time she is tested and even the crime of abandoning her husband is motivated by her concern for the moral danger in which her son is placed by the example and provocation of his father. Without her moral and religious preoccupations, Helen would probably have been subject to much greater condemnation by early readers and critics. Bronte, of course, is taking very controversial and iconoclastic positions in relation to several aspects of Victorian society. She is able to do so only because she uses the discourse of morality and religion to challenge the conventions that she finds objectionable in the society. From another perspective, Gilbert (1997, p. 79), seeking to define the characteristics of the popular but critically disparaged sensation novels of the 1860s, notes that the Brontes novels and those of George Eliot contain much clearly sensational material but were never so classified. She finds the difference in the "morally irreproachable message" of these books. Because Gilbert considers aggressive female characters to be the defining element in the sensation novel, we can see that Helen has

traits that might be considered sensational, were they not clothed in exemplary moral discourse.

As the century progressed and readers turned away from fiction seen as didactically concerned with moral issues, a new set of critics began to turn against Bronte because they perceived didactic intentions. The religious language that made it possible for Bronte to insinuate her subversive ideas came to be an obstacle for many readers. Anne's distaste for the subject and sense of duty that forced her to continue, images created by Charlotte's 1850 Biographical Notice, were standard points of departure for discussions of *Wildfell Hall*. Brimley (1918, p. 186) concludes a brief, not quite negative, discussion of Bronte with "Art, inspired by a sense of duty, need not detain us further". Ratchford (1960, p. 365) is typical when she says of the two novels that "consciously and deliberately shaped as they are toward didactic realism, they lack . . . high imagination and emotional power" Cunningham (1975, p. 9) suggests that throughout the Victorian period, despite the Nonconformist origins of the novel and the Nonconformist background of most practicing novelists, most Dissenting groups were usually treated negatively in fiction. This bias may have contributed to the reaction to Bronte's novels. Although she doesn't label the theological or sectarian orientations of the characters in her novels, she includes many details that make clear their religious perspectives, and her treatment of Low Church and Dissenting viewpoints is uniformly sympathetic.

In the Preface to the Second Edition, Bronte foregrounded the didactic elements in *Wildfell*, urging her readers to learn from the characters' errors. And the novel itself is a narrative of the moral education of the two narrators (Colon, 2004, p. 405). Torgerson

(2005, p. 135) suggests that Bronte's ideas are often dismissed by modern critics because she based her cultural criticism on spiritual values. She argues, however, that Bronte's religious orientation permitted her to examine her culture so penetratingly that she was even able to question its religious beliefs.

Helen may have belonged to one of the more evangelical sects that would have been suspected of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century. Janssen (1998, p. 38) observes that Arthur's position, that women should not be so religious that their duty to God interfered with their subservience to their husbands, is an expression of Victorian orthodoxy, which Bronte, through Helen, is questioning. Helen, on the other hand, in placing duty to God before her duty to her husband is using religious discourse to support her feminist arguments for freedom of conscience. Herrera (1999, p. 68) observes that throughout the Victorian period, the revival of Catholic convents and establishment of Anglican counterparts caused much controversy because women who chose religious vocations were seen as failing to achieve their procreative destiny and to threaten the basis of society: home and family. Within *Wildfell Hall*, Helen's frequent recourse to Scripture indicates greater familiarity with the text than might be appropriate for a typical wife.

Beyond the question of Helen's religious fervor is the further problem of Bronte's religion. Charlotte suggested that she suffered from religious melancholia, a diagnosis that has been repeated by several later critics and has sometimes been used to dismiss *Wildfell Hall*.

Helen is adept at quoting scripture to her companions and she frequently gives religious arguments for her point of view or seeks religious consolation for the hardships she undergoes in her marriage. Some early reviewers (Kingsley, 1849) even praised the religious sentiment of the story. But the religious thoughts she expressed were not universally approved of and *Wildfell Hall* was sometimes condemned for the heterodoxy of her statements. The Rambler (09/1848) calls the religious sentiments “either false or bad, or so vague and unmeaning as to add to the unreality of the scenes” (Allott, 1974, p. 268). Much criticism was directed at the doctrine of universal salvation that Helen expresses several times during the novel. Universal salvation, arguing that all sinners would eventually be saved, either in this life or the next, once they had been purified through suffering for their sins, was rejected not only by the established church but also by nearly all dissenting congregations. Sharpe’s (08/1848) editor assumes that the author is a religious person and finds the moral point of the story excellent except for this error, which he suspects is espoused not only by the character but by the author himself. “The dangerous tendency of such a belief,” he observes, “must be apparent to anyone who gives the subject a moment’s consideration; and it becomes scarcely necessary, in order to convince our readers of the madness of trusting to such forced distortion of the Divine attribute of mercy to add that this doctrine is alike repugnant to Scripture, and in direct opposition to the teaching of the Anglican Church.” That Helen’s belief remains controversial is indicated by Scott, who devoted the last chapter of his book, *Anne Bronte* (1983), to demonstrating that this belief was, in fact, also Anne’s and that it is false and heretical. Gerin’s (1976/1959, p. 186) earlier biography also assumes (but, in this case,

approvingly) that Anne agreed with Helen's doctrines of universal salvation, but Gerin's discussion seems to somewhat misread the novel. She notes the arguments early in the diary between Helen and Aunt Maxwell, "where worldly wisdom and religious convention are routed by the logic and common sense of the heroine". If we take the evidence of Helen's subsequent marriage into account, it might be more accurate to say that Aunt Maxwell's logic and common sense were ignored by Helen's adolescent impetuosity. In fact, at both moments in the novel when Helen brings up the doctrine of universal salvation, during the discussion with Aunt Maxwell about Huntingdon and later at the death of Huntingdon, the events of the novel seem to be contradicting Helen's belief. Although evidence from outside the novel supports the assumption that Anne may have agreed with Helen (Gerin, 1976/1959; Scott, 1983 & Thormahlen, 1999), internal evidence suggests that *Wildfell Hall*, more than affirming the doctrine, merely explores it.

Thormahlen (1999) points out that the terms 'universal salvation' and 'universalism' can both refer to two different sets of beliefs. First is the generally-accepted doctrine that Salvation is available to all humans, in contrast to the Calvinist belief that only a certain group of predestined Elect can be saved. The criteria for salvation vary among sects and denominations but it is potentially attainable by everyone. Second is the belief that unrepentant sinners, after death, will still eventually attain salvation after a period of purgative suffering. It seems clear that Anne believed in both these forms of universal salvation and both forms figure in *Wildfell Hall*, though only the controversial second doctrine provoked negative reactions from critics and reviewers. Within the Methodist movement, the Wesleyan concept of redemption for everyone was

opposed by the Calvinistic followers of the Countess of Huntingdon (Gerin, 1976/1959, Cunningham, 1975). Anne, along with the rest of the Brontes, was sympathetic to the Wesleyan position. Some interpreters (Janssen, 1998), nonetheless, argue that Wildfell Hall demonstrates that redemption may not be possible for some sinners, especially through the limited influence of the Angel of the House. Colon (2004) suggests that the complex issues surrounding redemption led Bronte toward the controversial second form of universalism, as a last hope for sinners.

A number of critics have suggested that Helen's strong personality, her unsubmitive attitude toward her husband and her readiness to insist upon her opinions to others derive from the influence of Nonconformist attitudes on Anne Bronte. Anne's father was an Anglican clergyman (though sympathetic toward the Methodists), but her Aunt Branwell was from an active Methodist family. The Bronte children read Methodist magazines when they were growing up. The dissenting religious groups in nineteenth-century England recognized a much greater role for women in public and private affairs than was true of the society at large (Twycross-Martin, 1998 & Wilson 1998). The articles in the Methodist magazines were often written by women and women preachers were accepted and sometimes influential within the church. Women from Nonconformist denominations were also active in the anti-slavery and temperance movements. Rivers (2005) notes that higher levels of education and more liberal social tendencies among Dissenting women led them dominate these movements (see also Twycross-Martin, 1998; Wilson, 1998 & Cunningham, 1975). These groups were also more likely to encourage women to study, to develop their ideas, to work out side the home, and to

assume leadership roles, and were more likely to support women who defied husbands or parents in following their consciences. Twycross-Martin (1998, p. 15) observes that in the works of Mrs. Ellis “a woman’s conscience provides her with an autonomous power-base no husband or father can challenge”. Similarly, she argues that Helen uses her conscience as a weapon enabling her to free herself and her son from her husband without losing her moral status (Twycross-Martin, 1998, p. 23). Wilson (1998) speaks of the Nonconformist expectation that women would use opportunities provided by social interaction to talk about the Gospel, to preach and teach. This provides a model for Helen’s practice of bringing scriptural reference into her discussions with both Huntingdon and Gilbert. The Nonconformist view of woman’s role, as described by Wilson (1998), Twycross-Martin (1998), Janssen (1998), Hogan and Bradstock (1998), provided a basis for challenging the Victorian concept of Angel in the House. But, as Twycross-Martin (1998, p. 25) points out, it is only as committed Christians that women can exert influence within the family. The duty to act as a moral influence, prescribed by the ideal of the Angel in the House, thus provides a basis for the religious Victorian wife to resist the submissive role envisioned for the Angel and to insist upon the right to follow her own conscience. Janssen (1998, p. 32), argues that Bronte consciously creates an image of Helen as a religious woman to permit her to embody “radical reassessments of the dominant culture”. Although Bronte’s rejection of the conventional conception of the role of wife may go beyond the common models provided by Nonconformist magazines, Wilson (1998) demonstrates that her actions are based on rights (or duties) of women that were recognized by these publications. Both Wolff (1977) and Wilson (1998)

would probably argue that the Victorian reader would immediately recognize the Nonconformist basis for Helen's acts. Helen's diary can be taken as an additional marker of her religious context. Diary-keeping, encouraged by Methodist texts, was seen as a tool for self-improvement and spiritual growth.

Wolff (1977, p. 1) observes that modern readers are somewhat handicapped in reading Victorian novels by their lack of familiarity with the varieties of religious controversy prevalent at the time. He argues that because Victorian language seems so much like ours, we are not even aware of how much we are failing to understand. To illustrate, he cites Bronte's satirical description of Mr. Hatfield, the rector in *Agnes Grey* and asks why Bronte seems to dislike him. He then points out the details indicating Hatfield's High Church orientation which, though many modern readers might fail to notice, would have been immediately significant to Victorian readers (Wolff, 1977, p. 6-7). It may be that Gerin's (1976/1959) previously cited misunderstanding of the quarrel between Helen and Aunt Maxwell derives partly from a lack of familiarity with the nuances of the religious discussion between them.

Like Wolff, several recent studies have looked at the use of religion by Bronte in new ways. Bronte left a number of written indications of her religious ideas and these have been used to deepen understanding of some of the elements in the fiction. Several critics have researched the influence on Anne of Methodist ideas as presented by her aunt and through the Methodist literature that was known to be among her childhood reading materials. There has also been study of Anne's religious affiliations at various stages of

her life. This research provides a useful framework for understanding some of the religious implications of the events of the story.

The Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of *Wildfell Hall* has been frequently bothered readers over the years. George Moore, who considered *Agnes Grey* to be the most perfect prose narrative in English literature (Moore, 1924, p. 257), felt that the diary that forms the second section of *Wildfell Hall* was a mistake. Moore argues that Helen should have told her story to Gilbert rather than letting him take her diary. Not only does the diary break the novel in half, Moore feels that telling the story in person would provide an opportunity for greater passion (Moore 1924, p. 254). Moore's complaint echoes the objections of some early reviewers of *Wildfell Hall*. The reviewer of the *Examiner* (07/29/1848) considered the novel "very inartificially constructed" and noted that the novel consisted of two series of characters with virtually no connection between them (Allott, 1974, p. 255). He complains that no part of the book excites much interest, partially because of the intrusion of the diary.

Just at the time when we begin to feel some interest about Markham and the lady, we are thrown back upon her previous history, which occupies a full half of the three volumes before us. This is a fatal error: for, after so long and so minute a history, we can not go back and recover the enthusiasm which we have been obliged to dismiss a volume and half before. Allott 1974: 255

Later in the same year, Whipple argued in the *North American Review* (10/1848) that *Wildfell Hall* though "less displeasing" than *Wuthering Heights*, is like it "in the excessive clumsiness with which the plot is arranged (Allott, 1974, pp. 261-262).

The modern reader, less accustomed than his Victorian predecessors to distancing from the narrative through epistolary and diary formats, will probably also react to the clumsiness of these devices that the first reviewers noted. The shift from Gilbert's story to Helen's is abrupt and disconcerting at the moment of the break. The adoption of the diary in the second part of *Wildfell Hall* rather than a direct retelling of the story by Helen in conversation with Gilbert is nonetheless useful for a variety of reasons. It permits Bronte to develop the marriage section fully rather than in a summary form as she would have had to do in an oral retelling. It allows her to show Helen developing and changing as events actually happen (Torgerson, 2005) rather than recalling them from the viewpoint of the present. It thereby enables Bronte to present Anne maturing through conflict as a parallel to the opening and closing sections that show Gilbert maturing. The beginning of the diary section is notable partly because the serious, formidable, intimidating Mrs. Graham becomes for a short time a comical foolish girl with a misplaced adolescent crush. The diary allows the reader to experience Helen's perspective as it changes rather than merely receiving her general interpretation of the events after the conclusion of the process. The format also permits Bronte to develop a group of subplots that could not have entered the novel by other means. The marriages of Millicent Hargrave and Hattersley and of Annabella Wilmot and Lord Lowborough which reinforce Bronte's themes, and the harassment by Hargrave, which emphasizes Helen's virtue, could not have formed part of Helen's account to Gilbert. If Helen had spoken of these subplots to Gilbert she would have become, like him, a gossip. And even if she had told Gilbert the whole story contained in the diary, he could hardly have

remembered it twenty years later. As it is, he tells Halford that he is copying Helen's story essentially unchanged from the diary he has before him.

The employment of the diary also allows Bronte to create two separate communities and to include details to make the differences between the two communities clear. It permits us to watch Helen struggle to adapt in two different communities but from opposite perspectives. In the first section her struggle is viewed entirely from the outside; in the second entirely from Helen's own viewpoint. As a vehicle for Helen's perspective, the diary brings the reader closer to an understanding of Helen's character, which otherwise would only be accessible through Gilbert's sometimes inaccurate reporting. The diary also enables Bronte to place the most controversial scenes of the novel further from the contemporary reader by moving them farther back in time and farther away in space from the primary scene of the novel. This allows Bronte to further distance herself from this section of the novel. In addition, the diary may be a convenient alternative for Helen, whose honor has just been called into question not only by the community but also by Gilbert as well. In giving Gilbert the diary, she is relieving both Gilbert and the reader from the need to accept her word about the past. Because the diary was intended by Helen only for herself, it removes the suspicions that both Gilbert and the reader would have entertained that any narrative that Helen had told at that moment may have been distorted by the need to defend her actions and to retain Gilbert's good opinion. Finally the presentation of the diary, admittedly edited, to the reader through the medium of Gilbert's letters strengthens the theme of control of the wife in marriage by allowing Helen to speak to the reader only through the editing of her journal by her

second husband. Gruner (1997, p. 309) calls it “an odd gesture of mastery and authority”, but adds that the critique of marriage is thus authorized by inclusion within a patriarchal narrative.

Given the advantages provided by the diary format, more recent critics have questioned the degree to which the device should be considered clumsy or mistaken. Jansson (1998, p. 32) argues that “The most immediately noticeable, and paradoxically revealing, aspect of *Tenant* is the ‘concealed’ form of its telling”. She notes that the involved apparatus of diary and letters emphasizes the hidden aspect of Helen’s story. Contained in the diary “is a story of degradation, of failure” that is also a protest against the injustice of Helen’s implication in her husband’s degradation and a subversive questioning of the premises of *The Angel in the House*. Jansson focuses upon Helen’s “inability to verbalize it and its shameful nature” (Jansson, 1998, p. 34).

The wish to prohibit communication and the inability to communicate exist even when she is giving Markham the opportunity to read her story. The haste and nervousness in her behavior reveal both a sense of shame and an eagerness to give: she ‘flew’ to her desk, ‘snatching’ at her volume, ‘hastily’ tore out pages, ‘thrust’ the rest at Markham and ‘hurried’ from the room. What were the pages she tore out? We are never enlightened. The secretive nature of the story is inscribed within these acts of concealment. (Jansson 1998: 34)

Hyman (2008), on the other hand, sees the diary as Helen’s version of the testimonials that reformed drinkers wrote for the teetotaler movement. Defeated in her attempt to save Huntingdon, Helen used the diary as an exemplary tale to educate and transform Gilbert into a responsible adult. MacGregor (1992) and Torgerson (2005) both argue that the diary is a necessary part of the silence surrounding addiction. Bronte knew that people living in a world of addiction cannot talk about it, and that people unfamiliar with

addiction don't listen to their stories. Helen chooses to let Gilbert read her diary rather than attempting to narrate her history to him directly and Gilbert then chooses the same course in transcribing the diary for Halford rather than telling the story in person. Gruner (1997, p. 309) suggests that as the target of increasingly intrusive gossip, Helen used her diary to protect her private life by making it public. She loaned the diary to Gilbert to answer the charges that were circulating about her, with the admonition that he was not to tell anyone. He later uses the diary, however, to make up a quarrel with Halford, and thus transmits it to the readers of the novel. Gilbert's decision to transcribe the diary for Halford, according to Jansson (1998), is not sufficiently justified. She argues that the story is Helen's not Gilbert's and that it was not meant to be communicated to others. We might take this as another blatant example of the wife's property being appropriated by the husband. Helen gave Gilbert the diary saying, "Bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being - I trust to your honor" His response is to copy it mostly verbatim into a letter to a friend. That he should react in this way and also supply the admonition of Helen against his doing so might seem inexplicable. On the other hand, Gilbert's whole character in the novel has demonstrated that he was forced to do that. He loves gossip and he can't keep things in forever. It is remarkable that he has waited twenty years to betray Helen's trust. He may feel that the story is no longer so secret and that the essential details are public knowledge at any rate. By the concluding section of the novel, the whole community seems to know at least the general outlines of Helen's story, so by the time he breaks the confidence he may feel the details are no longer important or the detailed story may be for the purpose of

contradicting some of the wilder rumors that may have grown up around a story that took place before Halford ever joined the family. Just as Bronte intended the story as exemplary tale, Helen may now see it as a warning to others. We don't know whether Gilbert checked with Helen to get her permission before telling Halford.

The epistolary format of the enveloping narrative has also received criticism. Among the Bronte sisters, only Anne used direct narration in her first novel; both Emily and Charlotte relied on epistolary frameworks. But whereas Charlotte's second novel, based on Anne's *Agnes Grey*, adopted Anne's direct narrative techniques, Anne's second novel abandoned these techniques followed the lead of her sisters' first novels.

The letter written by Gilbert presents problems very different from those we encounter in the diary of Helen because Gilbert's letter was intended for an outside reader for whom he is tailoring his text whereas Helen has supposedly been writing for herself with no intention to let anyone else see what she had written. The reviewer of the *Spectator* (07/08/1848) does tell us that the diary was composed expressly to give to Gilbert to read (Allott, 1974, p. 250) but the whole structure indicates rather that it was written down bit by bit at more or less the time that the scenes it describes were occurring.

Recent criticism has provided some useful discussion of the motivations for the epistolary framework of the story and its purposes in the structural development of the narrative and the psychological development of the characters. Discussion of the epistolary frame has also helped to clarify the relation of the author to the narrative. Torgerson (2005, p. 36) argues that the diary shows women readers how to strengthen

themselves while Gilbert's enveloping letters teach men readers how to react to strong women.

Charlotte Brontë's Biographical Notice (1850) defended Anne from criticism of her character based on objections to *Wildfell Hall* by suggesting that Anne had been seriously affected by her experiences in nursing her brother Branwell and watching him die from the effects of addictions to alcohol and other substances. She claimed that Anne had hated writing the book but done so under the pressure of her 'religious melancholy' and sense of duty (Brontë, 1963, p. 7). Charlotte argued that the book was "an entire mistake," especially unsuited to the Anne's character and talents; she also disparaged Anne as lacking in fire, power, and originality, and characterized her as long-suffering, uneducated and taciturn. The Biographical Notice not only helped Charlotte to separate herself from Anne's controversial novel, but also gave critics and reviewers clues for subsequent characterizations of Anne.

First, the biographical strain supposedly dominant in her novels indicated that she was unable to imaginatively transform experience. Branwell's addiction, for example, is described by Allott, (1974, p. 33) as probably influencing Charlotte and Emily but definitive for Anne. The character of Mr. Weston in *Agnes Grey* is often described as a portrait of a Haworth curate that several biographers (Gerin, 1976) have identified, with almost no credible evidence, as an object of romantic interest for Anne. On the other hand, much of the marital contention that forms the central conflict of *Wildfell Hall* would probably have been outside Brontë's range of experience. *Wildfell Hall* may have been the earliest Victorian novel to challenge the prevailing Victorian ideals of marriage.

If it is true, as Thaden (1997) argues, that mother-authors are privy to insights about marriage and child-rearing that neither male writers nor non-mother, female authors can grasp, then the creativity that Anne Bronte demonstrated in imagining *Wildfell Hall* becomes even more remarkable. Bronte, who some critics have dismissed as only able to report on events in her own life has created a complex analysis of marriage and motherhood although she neither had a mother nor became one, nor had a sibling nor a parent who she could observe in a married state. The central woman in her household was a maiden aunt and her father remained a widower. Yet she, more than any other childless Victorian author portrayed the relationships between mothers and children as well as the problems of interaction within marriage, exploring relationships that Jane Austen avoided. Bronte, perhaps more than almost any other nineteenth century writer was capable of convincingly imagining and describing lives completely outside her own sphere of experience.

Critics, basing their viewpoints on stereotypes about Anne's experience, have also argued about the nature of her imagination. Allott (1974, p. 33) compiling early reviews of the Bronte novels refers to Anne, "whose lesser imaginative gifts were recognized then as now". This comment refers to such early reviews of Agnes Grey as those in the *Spectator* (12/18/1847), *Athenaeum* (12/25/1847) and *Atlas* (01/22/1848) that find it lacks the power of *Wuthering Heights* or those of *Jerrold's Weekly* (01/15/1848), *New Monthly Magazine* (01/1848) and *Atlas* (01/22/1848) that focus on the novel's realistic portrayal of ordinary events. Although *Wildfell Hall* was more controversial than Agnes Grey, reviewers in such journals as *Spectator* (07/01/1848), (*Athenaeum* (07/08/1848),

Examiner (07/29/1848), *Sharpe's London Magazine* (08/1848), *Rambler* (09/1848), whether praising or blaming, continued to focus upon the natural realism but ordinary events of the novel, sometimes still in contrast to the violence of *Wuthering Heights*.

The Woman Question

What was called the 'Woman Question' in the Victorian period manifested itself in fiction in many forms; Thomson (1956, p. 166) finds that "there is no evidence at all, in the novel, of one widely shared Victorian ideal of womanhood". Barickman, MacDonald and Stark (1982, p. 1) observe that

Recent scholarship . . . has also begun to make clear the complexity of social roles that Victorian women actually performed. What has already emerged is the intensity of the century's debate about the status, the role, the very nature of women. To call it a "debate," however, is a little misleading, for there was nothing structured about it. Rather it was a set of issues, impulse, preoccupations—a pervasive social climate of questioning and change that eventually reached into every class and affected, however slowly, nearly every relationship between men and women in nineteenth-century England. No doubt most people in Victorian England remained unaware of the very existence of such issues; but the "Woman Question," as it was called, became a major preoccupation of Victorian society.

Nestor (1985) argues that concepts of women's role were also complicated in the nineteenth century by the incursion of many women writers into the field of literature, formerly dominated by men, who had previously defined women as literary subjects. Despite the variety and complexity of the roles women played in society, however, a few major images seemed to dominate Victorian ideas of femininity. Victorian men and women lived their lives to a large extent in separate spheres, based upon different values (Hogan & Bradstock, 1998). Twycross-Martin (1998) indicates that some early Victorian writers such as Mrs. Ellis promoted the idea of two separate spheres of influence for men

and women because they felt it gave women more autonomy than they would otherwise have. The dominant images of women, developed by male writers, divided women into two groups, one the pure and self-sacrificing wife and the other any of a variety of contrasts to this ideal (Barickman, MacDonald, & Stark 1982, Twycross-Martin, 1998; Jansson, 1998; Herrera, 1999 & Torgerson, 2005). The ideal Victorian wife was expected to exercise domestic influence as a support to her husband and a moral example to the family. *Wildfell Hall* was published before Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854) defined the conventional Victorian conception of wife and mother, but the model of wifely behavior labeled by the term was already a part of Victorian ideology. Bronte uses the term 'angel' in certain key contexts but she also develops the events of the narrative around a questioning of the concept. Jansson (1998, pp. 31-32), in fact, cites Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell as the two Victorian writers who most directly confronted the image. Three major issues that Bronte raises concern the contradiction between the roles of wife and mother, the extent to which influence can exist in the absence of power, and implications of the role of angel.

Jansson suggests that the ideal of Angel in the House could be used as a tool of seduction; she focuses on Arthur's deliberate attempt to trap Helen through presenting himself in the role of one needing redemption and calling Helen his 'angel' (Jansson, 1998, p. 36). Huntingdon's pose is transparent to Aunt Maxwell and the reader but Helen is foolishly misled by it. Jansson argues that, though Aunt Maxwell presents convincing arguments against Helen's belief that she will be able to influence Huntingdon, these

arguments serve only to strengthen Helen's sense of her mission to reform him and to draw her into an unsatisfactory marriage

The formula for Victorian novels, as for Jane Austen, was to conclude with a marriage, thereby leaving unnarrated any further plot developments that might occur after marriage. Although both *Agnes Grey* and the *Wildfell Hall* follow this pattern, the marriage in *Agnes Grey* is of secondary importance and seems to have been included almost as an afterthought, while the second marriage in *Wildfell Hall*, though a central focus of the enveloping plot, is finally arranged rapidly as a sort of conclusion to the narrative. Both books give the impression that the courtship plot is only used because it is an expected narrative convention but that it is of minor interest to the author. Helen's first marriage, on the other hand, is the central narrative of *Wildfell Hall*. The diary passes fairly quickly through the courtship and early stages of marriage to focus on the gradual disintegration, thus providing one of the few early Victorian portraits of marriage that take the reader beyond the wedding.

With the birth of young Arthur, Helen's concerns shift toward the welfare of her son, thereby providing another plot element rare in Victorian literature. Thaden (1997) notes that few examples of significant mothers exist in Victorian literature. She argues that the absence of mothers as major characters in Victorian fiction might be accounted for in part by the absence of mothers among major nineteenth century novelists (Austen, the Brontes & George Eliot) (Thaden, 1997, pp. 4-5). On the other hand, noting that contemporary tastes may have relegated works that concerned motherhood to minor status, she traces issues related to the role and influence of mothers through the works of

a number of Victorian mother-writers including Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Oliphant, Francis Trollope and others. Despite Thaden's contention that motherhood provided these writers with a unique perspective from which to view themes related to marriage and motherhood, she often turns to the childless, unmarried Anne Bronte, to illustrate points that we might have expected her to exemplify with the works of Mrs. Gaskell or Mrs. Oliphant. She sometimes, in fact, uses the construction, "the mother-authors and Anne Bronte."

Gruner (1997, p. 303) argues that Victorian heroines are rarely mothers because motherhood implies a multiplicity of roles whereas Victorian heroine must be only one thing. Jansson, (1998) interprets Bronte's focus upon Helen as a mother as a strategy for challenging the ideal of the angel in the house by highlighting incompatibilities between the roles of wife and mother. The conflict between these two roles permits Helen to abandon her husband without suffering the general censure that would usually accompany her action. She constantly makes clear that she is forced to leave her home to protect her child; she is motivated not by Huntingdon's drinking or his affairs but by his attempts to corrupt his son. Thus Helen remains the Angel in the House even as she leaves it, because she does so to fulfill her duty to effect the moral education of her son. Even this motivation, however, does not necessarily justify her action. Jansson notes that mid-nineteenth-century advice manuals warned that mothers should not exercise too much influence on their sons because they might undermine the development of normal masculinity.

The professional woman gradually became a possible alternative to the angel in the house during the Victorian age. For middle-class women the issue of work involved a variety of difficulties. On the one hand, work outside the home was considered unwomanly, especially if it involved pay. Women were supposed to be sheltered from the contamination of economic activity, though their money could be used by a husband for his economic activities. Because women were barred from higher education, discouraged or prohibited from earning wages, and separated, upon marriage, from ownership or control of their own property, they were completely dependent upon men (Herrera, 1999). In the early Victorian age, they were also gradually losing some of their public influence as preachers and leaders in some Dissenting sects (Jenkins, 1995). Work outside the home was a destabilizing activity, Rivers (2005) notes, because it gave women power and independence, enabled escape from traditional family structures, blurred conventional definitions, and confused the boundaries between ladies and working class women. Women were also threatening because they could take jobs away from men. Cunningham (1978) suggests however that during much of the Victorian era, working women were largely absent from fiction because almost no work opportunities existed for them. Fictional women were more likely to seek useful occupations than jobs. Though marriage remained the only acceptable career path for women, the demographics of the Victorian age guaranteed that not all women would choose that course. The female population of Victorian England exceeded the male population by more than 500,000, leaving a large group of what were called “excess”, “superfluous”, “redundant” or

“displaced” women (Nestor, 1985; Goreau, 1988; Herrera, 1999; Summers, 2003 & Rivers 2005,)

Nursing, teaching and being governesses, the only professions open to these women, were acceptable activities because they related to women’s role within the family (Rivers, 2005 & Herrera, 1999). Even so, accepting a governess position, called into question one’s social status. Governesses, because of the power they might hold over children and the ambiguity of their social status, were also considered dangerous additions to the household. Both Bronte’s novels were pioneering explorations of the problems of working women. *Agnes Grey*, the first realistic narrative about and also the most polemical treatment of the condition of the governess (Rivers, 2005), helped raise awareness of the realities of governess’s work and was still being recommended twenty years later (Thomson, 1956) to ladies who had governesses. *Wildfell Hall*, one of the first novels to center on a woman who painted professionally, was published just as women were first being admitted into art schools to be trained as art teachers.

Art had long been seen as a talent that young ladies should develop to improve their possibilities of marriage. But beyond its use as a ladylike accomplishment, skill in art was not considered appropriate for women. Serious development of artistic talent encouraged a woman to draw attention to her self as an artist and to focus on her creative production rather than her proper supporting role in the family. Lozano (2008) notes that the viewers gaze in the case of women’s art focused upon the artist rather than the artwork (see also Gilbert, 1997). If the women artist became professional, her position was compromised by the receipt of pay for her work and she was confronted with the

dangers of publicity, sexuality and solitude outside the home (Rivers, 2005). She would also be placed in competition with men who depended upon art as their livelihood. In *Wildfell Hall*, Helen preserves her moral character by remaining humble about her art, by using it to give pleasure to others and by refraining from self-gratification. She worries that her knowledge of artistic technique interferes with her ability to enjoy the beauties that God provides in nature as directly as she should. But she also misuses art to accomplish disobedience and concealment (Gilbert, 1997). On the other hand, Rivers (2005) observes, Helen exposes herself inappropriately through both her art and her diary.

The middle-class woman artist was closely related to another motif of Victorian culture, the Lady of Shallott. The lady in the poem is isolated in a tower, “estranged from nature as from society” (Gribble, 1983, p. 8), forbidden to look directly on the outside world and forced to create her art from images she observes in mirrors. When she does try to look directly upon life, she is destroyed. Gribble (1983) suggests that Tennyson’s poem, in addition, to establishing a central Victorian metaphor for the life of the artist (or writer) was an element in constructing the ideal of the Angel in the House. In detailing Helen’s circumstances in her marriage of her marriage to Huntingdon, Bronte constructs the marriage as a prison, but one which Helen eventually escapes. In escaping, Helen assumes a fairly unique place in Victorian fiction as a woman who abandons her husband without dying in misery. Morris (1990) points out that having a brother who could provide assistance to her but who was unknown to her husband gave Helen an advantage that most wives in Victorian literature did not have.

The alternatives to the Angel in the House included besides working women several such contrasts to the angel as exotic, foreign, fallen and diseased women were common in Victorian fiction. Helen participates in the development of each of these themes. The four terms are closely related by their common implication of existence outside the ideal domestic circle but each of them focuses upon somewhat different attributes. The exotic woman, a figure deriving from nineteenth century imperialism, is highly ornamented, languorous, on display and staring vacantly or defiantly (Pal-Lapinsky, 2005, p. 17). This description does not immediately bring to mind the moral and industrious Helen, unless we think of her as Gilbert first saw her in church, slightly eccentric in her dress and hairstyle, and glancing contemptuously back at him. Though Helen does not precisely embody the exotic woman (she could be better described as tense rather than languorous), she nonetheless appears exotic to the congregation when she makes her first public appearance in Lindenhope, and this exotic touch contributes to her final inability to assimilate into the community.

Button (1999, p. xiii) describes foreignness as alienation from a dominant culture that may derive from national or ethnic difference but may also result from differences in “gender, race, class, ideology, or temperament.” Like the exotic woman, the image of the foreign woman grew out of England’s imperialist activities during the nineteenth century. (Button, 1999; see also Reed, 1999) identify mystery as the salient attribute of the foreign woman. Button (1999, p. xiv) describes her as “alien because of the mystery of her physical self, her marginalized social and political position, and her unleashed strength . . . she is a world to be explored, colonized, inhabited perhaps, and probably subdued”.

(This description seems to summarize Gilbert's thoughts as he watches Helen in church.) Both Button (1999) and Reed (1999) argue that the alienation of the foreign woman often makes her an observer of culture and of herself. Button suggests that she is as much a mystery to herself as to others. Reed argues that the foreign woman, empowered by her alienation from society, is able to develop a greater sense of her own individuality. White's (2002) study of high school students who develop reputations as fast girls is surprisingly parallel to Button's and Reed's descriptions of the image of foreign women in Victorian fiction. Like them, she discusses the importance of mystery and she picks out ethnic, and linguistic distinctions as well as differences in physical appearance or dress as triggers likely to set gossip in motion. Lovesey (1999, p. 117), speaking again of motifs in Victorian fiction, suggests that foreignness "consign[s] her to the "wild zone" of female otherness".

Perhaps the major Victorian contrast to the Angel in the House, the fallen woman was identified as a theme in *Wildfell Hall* from the time of its first publication. Chorley in the *Athenaeum* (07/08/1848) notes that from Gilbert's first description of *Wildfell Hall* the reader is convinced that the occupant "must be a Lady with a 'history'" (Allott, 1974, p. 251). The image of the fallen woman is generally connected with some deficiency in sexual purity though a married woman's abandonment of her husband's house generally converted her into a fallen woman. Because of the prevalence of this character type in Victorian literature and the multiple suspicious details in her life, we can assume that the readers of the time would have readily identified Helen as a fallen woman, at least during the early part of the novel. The implications are clearly there, the neighbors obviously

pick up on them, and the reader would have to as well to understand the comments of the neighbors. When Helen's true history is known, she remains a fallen woman to a degree because she left her husband. Mr. Millward continues to object to her. The reviewer of the *Rambler* (09/1848) may not have suspected Helen's past because he complains of being tricked. "Our sympathies, he says, "are unwittingly engaged for an attachment formed by a married person before death had dissolved the first contracted bond" (Allott, 1974, p. 268).

Questions of health and illness naturally play a part in Bronte's fiction. She was asthmatic and sickly much of her life, and a toddler when her mother and then two older sisters died. Before she died at twenty-nine her brother had died of alcoholism and her closest sister of consumption. Beyond that the town she lived in was one of the unhealthiest places in England with 41% of the children dying before their sixth birthdays and the average adult reaching the age of twenty-five. Her father was instrumental in promoting investigation into the causes Haworth mortality rates (Torgerson, 2005).

Written at a time when attitudes toward disease and contagion were changing, *Wildfell Hall* adopts a unique perspective on questions of society and illness. Torgerson (2005, p. 37) notes that Bronte explored the symbolic use of several types of illness in *Agnes Grey* but that by the time she wrote *Wildfell Hall* she had selected alcoholism as the most effective symbol for "the unhealthy state of a hierarchical society". Torgerson (2005, p. 130) notes two ways in which Bronte's treatment of alcoholism differs from those of other authors. She portrays alcoholism among members of the middle and upper classes and she explores alcoholism as symptom of the "pathology of Victorian gender

ideas.” In contrast, Morris (1990) argues that though domestic violence figures in both Bronte novels, it is treated as a symptom of alcoholism rather than a central theme.

Disease was another Victorian concept tied up with imperialism. Whereas Victorians portrayed their culture as “active, healthy and masculine”, they viewed foreign cultures as “passive, fevered or feminine” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 2). Interaction with the colonial empire acquired by England was seen as a primary source of disease. English women, in fact, were believed to be too delicate to withstand the diseased conditions of colonial life. Perhaps by extension, women were seen to be link through which disease could enter into the family. Gilbert argues that disease makes the body into something other than the person, and a threat to the purity of the home, making the diseased woman, like foreign, exotic, and fallen women, a threat. In both of Bronte’s novels, disease runs a slightly different course. It is the men who suffer illness which then provides the heroines an opportunity for growth. Agnes Grey was able to become a governess because of her father’s sickness and Helen is able to discover her strength through her husband’s alcoholism. We also see a reversal of the common metaphors of disease in Helen’s struggle to protect her son from contagion by his father.

Bronte lived at the beginning of a transitional period, during which the idea of drunkenness as a vice was replaced by that of alcoholism as a disease. *Wildfell Hall* explores both views of drink. The detailed depictions of drunkenness in Bronte’s novels were among the principal grounds for condemnation of the books by the early reviewers. Considerable recent criticism has also focused upon the place of alcoholism in Bronte’s novels. Twycross (1998) notes that participation in the anti-slavery movement in the

early nineteenth century led many women to see parallels to slavery in both drunkenness and marriage. The temperance movement of the early nineteenth century, however, centered almost entirely upon the problems of drinking among the poor. Twycross traces the career of the temperance writer, Sarah Stickney Ellis, who first described scenes of middle-class alcoholism in her domestic fiction of the early 1840s. Twycross considers Ellis, “perhaps the only writer on alcoholism who might provide a plausible influence on Anne Bronte”. A number of writers of the early Victorian period condemned drinking among the working-class poor, but Ellis and Anne and Emily Bronte are the only writers of the 1840s to focus on scenes of drunkenness within the middle- or upper-classes. *Wildfell Hall*, she feels, is the Victorian novel that most fully develops Ellis’s concerns. This shift of focus away from the poor may account for some of the hostility of reviewers to these scenes in Bronte’s books. Despite the Victorian stereotype of alcoholism as a problem of the poor, Hyman (2008) describes Arthur Huntingdon’s alcoholism as a necessary device for affirming his position as a gentleman. According to Hyman, country gentlemen of the Victorian age, constrained by class from dirtying themselves through participation in the productive processes even of their own estates, had become irrelevant elements in society. At the same time their idleness, frivolity and wasteful eating and drinking were the only tools left to them to distinguish themselves from the wealthy but earnest and productive merchants and farmers who could duplicate their other attributes.

In another way Bronte turns the disease metaphors around in her fiction. Contagion from reading was another central concept of the Victorian age. Women were especially susceptible to the contamination of their ideas through reading bad books, just

as they were supposedly more susceptible to the contagion of physical diseases. Books contaminate in three ways. First of all, a concern that worried reviewers throughout the era, was the contamination that comes from the ambiguous or bad ideas implanted by inferior reading material. Second were the physical effects of reading, which Golden (2003) divides into four categories: the biological, including reduced energy levels; the medical including damaged nervous systems, reproductive problems, infertility, insanity, and hysteria; problems of addiction; and moral damages. The third type of contagion that readers were subject too grew to be of greater concern after theories of germs became more widespread. This is the contamination passed on through books by other users of the lending libraries, a preoccupation that led in the later Victorian period to an increase in book purchases, in substitution for library memberships. In *Wildfell Hall*, however, reading always appears as a positive activity in contrast to a series of non-literary alternatives. A final alternative to the ideal of the Angel in the House, the New Woman developed some forty years after the publication of *Wildfell Hall*. The New Woman relates to Helen Huntingdon only in that various writers identified Helen as the precursor to the type of independent heroine that became popular in fiction of the 1890's.

As this short overview indicates, many of the significant issues of Victorian society and themes of Victorian literature appear in *Wildfell Hall*, sometimes for the first time, at others in new manifestations. Nowadays researchers in Victorian fiction routinely refer to the novel. Serious treatments of the book, however, were almost nonexistent before the 1980s. Although it is customary to think of Anne Bronte's novels as comparatively neglected by critics during the later nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, this viewpoint is not entirely accurate. Bronte has existed on the margins of the canon, not quite part of it or quite outside of it. She has often been dismissed by critics who mention her only because of her relation to her sisters but she has seldom been entirely forgotten. If there were 40,000 to 50,000 novels published from 1830 to 1900 and thousands of writers working during this period (very few of whom were ever mentioned in any review), then Anne Bronte, as one of the thirty or so novelists most commented upon, cannot really be considered neglected. While many published novels of the nineteenth century have disappeared leaving no trace beyond a title registered on a booklist, new editions of Bronte's novels have appeared regularly throughout the past century and a half. Throughout the more than one hundred and sixty years between the publication of *Wildfell Hall* and the present, there have always been critics who referred to her work. At times, critics confused the author with the protagonists of her books. Her biography was sometimes given more space than her novels. It was not until the 1970s that a few critical works began to appear that were able to separate the fiction from the biography. Her work was often discussed in relation to the works of her sisters. There were readers like Mary Ward and May Sinclair, who saw Bronte as significant in her relation to the Bronte myth rather than for the importance of her own novels, and there were readers like George Moore, who ranked her near Jane Austen and called her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, the most perfect narrative in the English language. Shattock argues that Bronte's writing didn't quite make it into the canon in the nineteenth century because of "her failure to conform to either of the models of woman novelist which proved to have the most long-lasting appeal: the modest and delicately witty miniaturist, and the

impassioned daughter of the Yorkshire moors” (Shattock, 2001, p. 48). Over the past 30 years critical discussions of her work have become more frequent and more detailed; she may now be among the most frequently discussed Victorian writers. Anne Bronte’s humor, realism and imagination probably do not appeal to the kind of reader who enjoys the novels of the other Brontes. Her relationship to them has certainly led to many discussions of dubious value concerning her work, and may have reduced the critical acclaim they received. It may also be true that her work has continued in print and continued to attract readers and that she has continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to appear in histories of English literature because of her family name. It is possible that just as readers of the nineteenth century recognized Charlotte as the genius among the Brontes and readers of the twentieth century gradually shifted their allegiance to Emily, readers of the twenty-first century will finally recognize Anne as the principal literary genius among the Brontes.

PART 2: ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF A FICTION TEXTS

CHAPTER 4. VASTLY PARTICULAR ON CERTAIN POINTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LINDEN CAR

In reconstructing the Chinook texts, Hymes emphasizes the importance for the interpreter of detailing and understanding the context in which the story was told. Bronte, like Hymes, insists upon close attention to context. Gilbert Markham, writing to his brother-in-law Halford is functioning as an ethnographic participant observer. He doesn't always notice the implications of the details that he is recording but he does provide enough background to permit us to sometimes recognize what may be happening. Following the abstract opening sentences discussed in the first chapter, Bronte rapidly focuses the reader's attention on concrete details.

Sentence 6 places Markham on the pathway to the farmhouse of Linden Car and 7 leaves him at the doorway. The interior of the farmhouse where the family meets for a light evening meal is the fictional setting of sentences 8 to 55. The scene shifts from the stairway to the parlor to the dining table in the course of this sequence. The purpose of this chapter is apparently to introduce the major characters, all of whom are discussed and categorized by the end of the chapter. But as we read it more closely it becomes a series of challenges and encounters for Gilbert. His interactions are not always congruent with the image he is trying to present. The author in fact undercuts him at every turn.

Sentences 6 to 55 of the first chapter divide naturally into six interlocking speech events, with event 4, breaking down into five act sequences and event 5 into four sequences. In the first event, Gilbert reflects on his life (sentences 6-7), suggesting contrasts between his brave words and depressed attitude, between the damp gloomy

climate and the warm cheering fire, and between his theatrical younger self and the more moderate older narrating self. He introduces the themes of life as apprenticeship and control over human nature. With Sentence 8, Gilbert's attention shifts to direct observation of the cultural boundaries that underlie social interaction in his community. He suggests a complex and rigid structure governing simple acts, identifies which details of interaction were considered important and introduces the distinction between façade and substance. Events 2 (sentences 9-11) and 3 (sentence 11) involving Gilbert's encounters, first with his sister Rose and then with his brother Fergus, provide brief descriptions of both, disclose Gilbert's attitudes toward them, illustrate the relation between the brothers, and move the narrative back to 1847 to flatter Halford and fit him retroactively into the family group. Event 4 (sentences 12-23) involves a series of interchanges when Gilbert enters the parlor including a description of the occupants, greetings and queries from Mrs. Markham, interchanges between Gilbert and his mother and between Fergus and his mother, and finally a discussion of Fergus's future, cut off by Rose. The family moves to the table for event 5, a discussion of Gilbert's future initiated by Rose (sentences 24-29) followed by Rose's presentation of her news (sentences 30-51) and Fergus's reaction (sentences 52-54). Event 5 is dominated by Rose who first presents news through a series of brief interchanges with Mrs. Markham and Fergus, then narrates her story more completely, citing her sources, providing additional details about the new tenant and describing the encounter of the neighbors with her. Finally she discusses plans for future action. Fergus concludes the conversation with an intervention that shifts the framework of the discussion. In the final event, still at the table (sentence 55), Gilbert

redirects the reader's attention to himself, while Rose and Mrs. Markham return to discussing the tenant.

We will first look at some of the events just described in somewhat greater detail, focusing especially upon clues about social norms that can be extracted from them. Paragraph 3 of Chapter 1 includes two sentences (6-7), which accomplish a transition from abstract intellectualizing to the concrete circumstances of the story. But, in addition to providing the entrance into the story, they also set out three contrasts that help to frame the first lines of the novel and they introduce a concept of man that is essentially at odds with the Romantic terms he has hitherto been using.

With such reflections as these, I was endeavoring to console myself, as I plodded home from the fields, one cold, damp, cloudy evening towards the close of October. But the gleam of a bright red fire through the parlour window had more effect in cheering my spirits, and rebuking my thankless repinings, than all the sage reflections and good resolutions I had forced my mind to frame; for I was young then, remember – only four and twenty – and had not acquired half the rule over my own spirit, that I now possess – trifling as that may be. (Bronte 1966:17)

The event begins with three contrasts: between the narrators' brave words and depressed reality, between the cold damp gloomy climate outside and the warm cheering fire inside, and between his theatrical younger self and his more moderate narrating self. The first sentence situates him in a real place after his abstract musings and by doing so undercuts the posturing. The situation provides a comic reversal of the earlier posturing, calling it into question, as we see effects of his decision that are quite different from what he had suggested. He acknowledges that he himself did not believe the earlier philosophizing. He was merely endeavoring to console himself. With 'endeavoring' he confesses even that he wasn't quite able to console himself, that the abstract reflections

were inadequate to the task of consoling. In fact, ‘endeavoring’, ‘console’ and ‘forced my mind’ are all expressions that focus upon the insincerity of what he has said before.

‘Sage reflections’, ‘good resolutions’, and ‘thankless repinings’ are all expressions that tend to ridicule the previous statements and to characterize them as theatricality. Perhaps the reflections are ‘sage’ and the resolutions are ‘good’ but his heart is not in them. He has been, as he says, forcing himself and trying to convince Halford and us that he is satisfied with the condition he finds himself in. ‘Thankless repinings’ introduces an additional ambiguity. The repinings may be thankless in two ways. He was failing to be thankful for what he had and the time he was wasting in lamenting his situation could lead to no benefit for him.

Heat and cold are physical realities. To conclude the philosophical meandering with heat and cold serves to emphasize the cloudy insubstantiality of the opening sentences of the novel by bringing us back to something that we can clearly feel. The contrast between the gleam from the fire and the cold damp cloudy gloom outside may also indicate a subtle shift in perspectives. His first comments had utilized Romantic rhetoric to describe his ambitions for himself but when he passes from words to actions he finds that he is more attracted to the warm fire of ordered civilization than to interaction with nature.

Finally ‘plodded’ transforms the journey metaphor. It is one thing to speak of life as a journey and another to start walking down the road. Rather than concerning himself with contributions to mankind, his concern has dwindled to putting one foot in front of the other. Among the range of choices that Gilbert had available to express the concept of

walking, he chose one with several negative implications and no particularly positive connotations. Aside from expressing tiredness, slowness or heaviness in walking, the term has been expanded to indicate such deficiencies as lack of inspiration, insight, originality, or enthusiasm.

The third paragraph has shifted the focus from the meaning to the purpose of the previous statements. Rather than looking at the opening comments as an attempt to describe his beliefs or goals, we now see them as an illustration of his state of mind. With this event, the key of the discourse also changes. The concrete circumstances described here provide ironic comment on the noble aspirations that preceded them. Gilbert the narrator separates himself from the actor in the narrative and assumes a satirical tone to describe his younger self.

The satiric dismissal of Gilbert's early discussion of his life journey and his high ambitions sets the stage for new reflections. In Sentence 7, he suggests a new metaphor to talk about his life, telling us that he had not yet "acquired half the rule over my own spirit, that I now possess". This statement implies that rule over oneself is something that must be acquired and it further implies an interior dialogue. If Gilbert feels that he now has some control over his spirit, then the self that controls the spirit is controlling the self that needs control. If we spend our lives learning how to live, life may not be a journey. It may be an apprenticeship. This metaphor might suggest that the spirit is like an animal that needs to be tamed.

When Gilbert first introduced himself, he proposed a Romantic view of life and debated it in the voices of his mother and father. The image of man that is constructed by

this new metaphor seems to be anti-Romantic. A common Romantic stereotype is the superiority of the natural man uncorrupted by civilization. But Gilbert implies that the natural man is something that must be dominated. His expectations are not those of the Romantics. Gaining control over self is a more modest goal than making contributions to society but it may be a more difficult and more realistic undertaking. Gilbert's comment here is casual and may not bear a large weight of analysis. But Bronte who stated her opposition to Romanticism insisted that "I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths . . . than much soft nonsense." (13) The need to discipline one's impulses is a major theme of the novel and it is likely that Bronte is deliberately introducing it here

With this comment, Gilbert also introduces the idea of his immaturity. This will be a constant for interpreting the events that follow. The admission of immaturity also brings into question his previous reflections, which we can now see were the naïve rambling of an immature youth. The contrasts have been a little exaggerated, perhaps theatrical, and they help to prepare us for Gilbert's conduct at later points in the story. But, though he is young, twenty-four is not so very young. That he thinks he was foolishly young indicates that he believes he has altered greatly since that time. This might merely indicate that he is much older now or it might tell us that he is much different. Or it might simply show us that he continues at the present to think in terms of exaggerated contrasts just as he did when he was twenty four. Gilbert admits that his older self is hardly more credible than the younger one. His control over his own spirit is 'trifling'. He may be telling us he hasn't changed much or he may be showing us that he has; he no longer makes such grandiose claims for himself. Or in expressing modesty he

may be simply engaging in image preservation with Halford. Social convention would not permit him to describe himself as wise.

In a sense the relation between the third paragraph and the two that preceded it may be compared to the relation between seeing a crime in progress on the street and then noticing the cameras and realizing that a movie is being made. He first gives us the lines as if they were real and then lets us know that it was all make-believe. We listen to him describe his place in the world as if it were a simple description –true of his perceptions and beliefs even if it is not a true description of the world. But then we realize that he is only reciting lines to console himself (unsuccessfully at that). He doesn't completely believe what he has been saying and he tells us so.

The contrast contained in these two sentences also highlights a problem that will come up repeatedly in the novel. Reality is always complex and few things turn out as we expect them to beforehand. Because life is both more difficult and more ambiguous than theory, Gilbert and Helen, the narrators of the novel will continually find themselves making pronouncements that Bronte undermines through the details of lived experience.

The fourth paragraph of Chapter 1 is a single sentence, shifting the focus and bringing Gilbert into confrontation with the social structures that organize his life. This is a significant movement for the novel because to a large degree Anne Bronte's purpose may be to question and to condemn much of this social structure. In this first direct presentation she touches upon several anomalies. Gilbert begins by calling the domestic environment inside the farmhouse a 'haven of bliss'. But this may be merely a

conventionalized epithet. Once he enters, at any rate, he will encounter a series of situations that do not seem to fit well with this description.

However, that haven of bliss must not be entered till I had exchanged my miry boots for a clean pair of shoes, and my rough surtout for a respectable coat, and made myself generally presentable before decent society; for my mother, with all her kindness, was vastly particular on certain points. (Bronte 1966:17)

Before he can enter, he must undergo some transformations. He is wearing a long overcoat and boots. He must exchange them for a coat and clean shoes to become presentable. This is a revealing statement. Gilbert is a farmer walking home from a day of farm work. He is dirty, sweaty and smelly. A different coat and clean shoes aren't going to change that. Farmers bathe at night when they come in from the fields. But Gilbert plans only to change his coat and shoes. The shoes seem clean. He has been walking or standing in mire and his boots are muddy while the shoes are clean. He can't track mud into the house so we know he will have to change into the shoes. But the overcoat is another matter. He doesn't tell us it is dirty, only that it is rough. And the other coat is not necessarily clean; it is merely respectable. The whole concept of being worthy of respect, not explained here, is confusing in reference to a piece of clothing. So we have a dichotomy of rough/respectable that obeys a more abstract social constraint because the operative factor here is not cleanness.

The third constraint is presentability. This is stated somewhat ambiguously. Does he mean that he will change his shoes, coat and something else to become presentable or does he mean that he will change his shoes and coat and therefore become presentable?

He indicates that he must make himself 'generally presentable', which may indicate that something more than just the shoes and coat is involved. All we can be sure of is that, though he is dirty, sweaty and smelly, with dirty underwear, pants and shirt, all he needs to do is slip his dirty socks into clean shoes, cover his dirty clothes with a respectable coat and perhaps do one other thing (maybe comb his hair) and he will then become presentable, fit to be introduced to others in 'decent' society.

'Decent' introduces another problem. The dictionary tells us that it is characterized by conformity to recognized standards of propriety and morality but in actual use it is often a code word for something quite different. Decent society, like good people (or, in Spanish, *las buenas conciencias*, *la gente decente*) often has nothing to do with propriety or morality and is used instead to refer to money or social position. 'Decent society' lends itself to irony because it is so often used to designate groups whose lifestyles negate the denotative meaning of the word. Gilbert seems not to use the word ironically but the author is clearly ironic in this sentence.

Finally, Gilbert tells us that his mother 'was vastly particular on certain points'. This phrase is a window on the whole vast structure of control that surrounds Gilbert. He is indicating that there are a whole range of hidden but compelling inhibitions that come between him and a simple act like entering the house to get out of the cold and damp. But this structure of constraint, while unbending on some points is flexible on others. He contrasts 'vastly particular' with 'on certain points' to indicate overwhelming but focused pressure. The whole sentence has illustrated the final point. He must be outwardly presentable as indicated by the clean shoes and respectable coat but he need not bathe or

put on clean clothes. His mother is not particular at all about some things. The expectations of society, then, are outward expectations of face and façade. Though the whole novel is a challenge to and exposé of this structure, the eighth sentence, is the first time that the author presents the problem clearly.

In this event, however, Gilbert doesn't explicitly mention society-at-large. He says that his mother is 'vastly particular'. By doing so, he facilitates two transitions. First, his mother, in the third sentence, had voiced the principles of Romantic ambition. The eighth sentence transforms her into the guardian of social convention and control. Also, in telling us that he must change his shoes because his mother insists upon it, Gilbert is letting us know he is still a child despite his twenty four years. Rather than having interiorized the constraints of society, he has learned to obey his mother. In the previous sentence Gilbert confessed that he was very young at the time of the story; in this one he illustrates his immaturity.

Because Gilbert is standing alone outside the house during this event, we might doubt that it can be considered a speech event at all. Several factors, however, might justify us in calling it one. First, Gilbert deliberately brings Halford back in to the narration by urging him to 'remember'. This reminds us that the description of his physical and mental state form part of an interaction with Halford. Also, by clearly separating his narrative self from his younger self, he has created two voices. At the very least then, Gilbert's thoughts as he stands alone at the doorway, recorded twenty years later in a letter to Halford, represent an interaction among three participants.

At this point Gilbert enters the house and encounters first his sister and then his brother. The second event includes sentences 9-10 and part of 11.

In ascending to my room, I was met upon the stairs by a smart, pretty girl of nineteen, with a tidy, dumpy figure, a round face, bright, blooming cheeks, glossy, clustering curls, and little merry brown eyes. I need not tell you this was my sister Rose. She is, I know, a comely matron still, and, doubtless, no less lovely - in your eyes - than on the happy day you first beheld her. Nothing told me then, that she, a few years hence, would be the wife of one – entirely unknown to me as yet, but destined hereafter, to become a closer friend than even herself, (Bronte 1966:17-18)

This encounter serves to introduce Rose to the readers of the novel but the major focus of the scene is upon the correspondence between Gilbert and Halford. Gilbert meets his sister on the stairs but if any interaction or act of recognition passed between them he does not record it. This becomes notable only in light of the following introduction of Fergus that involves a lot of interaction. His description of Rose appears to be entirely physical. The first adjective he uses, ‘smart’, may address her intellect but in the context seems to refer to her physical style. Altogether the description seems to aim toward a characterization of conventional prettiness. He calls her ‘pretty’, ‘comely’ and ‘lovely’ and lists a number of attributes that seem to be intended as evidence for these characterizations.

The evidence he gives to justify these terms seems for the most part to be meant to conform to the conventions of the time for the meaning of these terms. He says that she has ‘a round face’, ‘bright, blooming cheeks’, ‘glossy clustering curls’, and ‘little merry brown eyes’. None of this seems objectionable although they might not be the same terms or features that would be mentioned today. The problem comes with the ‘tidy

dummy figure'. The context seems to indicate that he means it as praise so 'dummy' which seems to have meant short and stout since the mid-eighteenth century may either have had another meaning in the mid-nineteenth century that it no longer conserves or have once been interpreted as a compliment.

The entire description may be a little odd. He is describing his sister to Halford, his sister's husband. But he says nothing about her personality or character, only her physical appearance. Are these the things about Rose that a brother would be likely to notice? Or is this how Anne Bronte imagines that a brother would describe his sister? An alternative interpretation would be to take this description as an early detail upon which she will later build to develop her discussions and illustrations of the roles of men and women in society. Rose is presented here almost as a point of connection between Gilbert and Halford rather than as an individual important for herself. Gilbert may not yet be ready at this point to think of women, even sisters, as intellectual equals, to be discussed in other terms. Or it may be that there is little he can say about Rose to Halford who has been married to her for many years. Later in the chapter, Gilbert does discuss personality traits of some female neighbors.

Gilbert uses this description as an excuse to shift our attention directly to Halford. We might ask some questions about this shift. The first touches on the relation between Gilbert and Halford. Gilbert is obviously seeking to flatter Halford with these comments. Is this because Halford is angry with him? Or because he is offering this letter as payment to Halford for previous confidences that Halford had given him, and he does not yet know how Halford will react to this form of payment? Does his flattery of Halford cause

him to dismiss Halford's wife, Gilbert's sister? The second question relates to Rose and Halford. Gilbert states that Rose is still a comely matron and that Halford doubtless finds her as lovely as he did nearly twenty years before. Does he mean this compliment to his sister as another piece of indirect flattery for Halford as the husband of his sister? Or does he mean it as an indirect piece of advice to Halford, reminding him that Rose is still pretty and that Halford should continue to see her as lovely? Or is this distraction from the narrative to talk to Halford intended solely for the readers of the novel, to clarify the relationship of Halford to Gilbert and let us know that Rose is the intermediary. The Halford theme is marginal in the novel and once the format of letters to Halford is established as the excuse for writing the narrative, he and the letter framework practically disappear from the novel. On the other hand, understanding the relation between Halford and Gilbert is necessary if we want to accurately interpret Gilbert's narration, which is addressed to Halford. The author may here be emphasizing the Halford-Gilbert connection because the correspondence between them seems to be a slight frame on which to construct a whole novel. What is clear here, in any case, is that Halford is a participant in this speech event despite his absence from the physical setting of the stairway where Gilbert and Rose meet. The flattery of Halford also provides a transition from the encounter with Rose to the following encounter with Fergus.

more intimate than that unmannerly lad of seventeen, by whom I was collared in the passage, on coming down, and well nigh jerked off my equilibrium, and who, in correction for his impudence, received a resounding whack over the sconce, which, however, sustained no serious injury from the infliction; as besides being more than commonly thick, it was protected by a redundant shock of short, reddish curls, that my mother called auburn. (Bronte 1966:18)

Gilbert continues his flattery, assuring Halford that he feels closer to him than to either Rose or Fergus. Fergus moves us into the action of the story, grabbing Gilbert and nearly knocking him off his feet. Gilbert responds by hitting Fergus on the head. On one level, this is an ordinary piece of roughhousing between brothers. But both Fergus' act and Gilbert's response have considerably more significance for Gilbert because of his ambiguous situation within his family. The interaction between Gilbert and Fergus on the stairs discloses much more than the prior encounter with Rose. While Gilbert's reaction to Rose seemed remote and neutral, we are made aware immediately of the tension between the brothers. Neither encounter involves speech, suggesting that the siblings may not communicate verbally much. But whereas Gilbert and Rose seem to give each other space, Gilbert and Fergus challenge each other. While Gilbert's description of Rose is fairly positive (as it must be to her husband), he belittles Fergus, calling him thick-skulled, unmannerly, impudent and even questioning his mother's belief that Fergus has auburn hair. Gilbert also seems to feel justified in striking Fergus, who is younger and smaller. He labels his action in hitting his brother as 'correction', which may disclose a norm of the community. Perhaps older children are expected to supervise or discipline their younger siblings and Gilbert therefore feels that he was simply exercising his authority as an older son. But Gilbert may equally be assuming attributions that do not legitimately belong to him. This brief encounter introduces us to the tendency toward violent reactions that Gilbert will manifest on several occasions during the narrative. It also discloses his willingness to judge others and suggests an undercurrent of rivalry that

calls into question the term ‘haven of bliss’ that Gilbert used earlier to describe the family home.

For the fourth speech event, we move into the smoothly ordered context of the parlor, which is presented as the spatial center of the family home. Gilbert first details the setting.

On entering the parlour, we found that honoured lady seated in her armchair at the fireside, working away at her knitting, according to her usual custom, when she had nothing else to do. She had swept the hearth, and made a bright blazing fire for our reception; the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy from the cupboard in the black, oak sideboard, that shone like polished ebony in the cheerful parlour twilight. (Bronte 1966:18)

The bright blazing fire, which Gilbert has already contrasted to the cold and gloom outside, dominates the room. The physical objects that he mentions are all props for rituals of social convention: ‘the tea-tray’, ‘the sugar-basin’, the ‘tea-caddy’ and ‘the black, oak sideboard, that shone like polished ebony’. Although the occasion is only the four members of the family gathering for tea, it is set up as a smoothly-functioning ceremony of civilization.

His mother is sitting calmly by the fire knitting and supervising the organization of the household apparatus. Her position in the armchair can be seen as somewhat monarchical. She is seated at the focus of the room waiting to receive those who enter. Although she is inactive apart from the knitting, she seems to be the force that governs the activity occurring around her, She gives no overt directions, but the servant has brought in the tea tray and Rose is making preparations for tea. The anonymity of the silent servant who is never given a name but who seems necessary to the smooth flow of

family activity hints at complications in the family structure. Rose will soon directly complain to her mother about the conventions that require her to concern herself with preparing and serving food to her brothers. But, at this moment, everything seems to be in order, perhaps confirming Gilbert's original characterization of the farmhouse as a 'haven of bliss'.

The mother has swept the hearth, a safety measure because the fire is burning, but also a symbolic action that corresponds to her requirement that Gilbert put on clean shoes and a respectable coat before he enters the parlor. We can see that the gathering is routine because the mother is following 'her usual custom'. There are two minor questions that the scene might suggest. We might wonder about the epithet 'honoured' that Gilbert uses to describe his mother. It could be just a conventional adjective to use for a mother and Gilbert may not be telling us anything with the word. If it means something we may wonder as the narrative continues why she is honored, who honors her or how they do it. Does the word refer to her position in the family or to her position in the larger community? The second question concerns work. The mother is 'working away'. Although she is really only sitting by the fire knitting, she is nonetheless using her time productively. In fact the group of people mentioned in this scene can be divided into workers (Rose, her mother and the servant) and non-workers (Gilbert and Fergus). This division is tied to social conventions and constraints that the novel will explicitly challenge.

'Well! here they both are,' cried my mother, looking round upon us without retarding the motion of her nimble fingers and glittering needles. 'Now shut the door, and come to the fire, while Rose gets the tea ready; I'm sure you must be starved; - and tell me what

you've been about all day; I like to know what my children have been about.' (Bronte 1966:17)

The mother acknowledges the entrance of Gilbert and Fergus with the first spoken discourse of the novel. The mother's speech includes eight speech acts: three observations, four commands and one example. First she observes that her two sons have arrived. This observation is not addressed to anyone in particular but it serves a number of purposes. For the sons it is a recognition and serves indirectly as a greeting as well. There may be an additional trace of reprimand: 'they're finally here'. The mother chooses to use the pronoun 'they' rather than 'you', perhaps indicating that the observation continues a conversation that was going on before they entered the room. If so, the previous remark would have been approximately: 'Where can they be?' or 'Why haven't they gotten here yet?' This would make the observation part of an ongoing conversation with Rose as the addressee. But the remark is obviously intended to be heard by Gilbert and Fergus as well. For Rose it is also an indirect imperative: 'They're here, hurry up and get the things on the table'.

The mother has made a declaration, a reprimand and a request with her first remark. It clearly performs a referential function but since all the possible addressees were already aware of the information, the referential content may be secondary. There is also a clear phatic function in the remark, acknowledging the entrance of the sons. We don't know the tone that the mother used in uttering the remark except that she didn't slow her knitting as she spoke. But the remark could easily have expressed the emotive

function as well. There is also a clear conative function directed toward Rose and a possible one directed toward Gilbert and Fergus.

At the same time the mother utters her first comment, she continues to knit. The knitting, her second speech act, is an example of industry directed toward all of her children. It may also be a defensive gesture to explain her failure to help her daughter set up the tea table. She insists upon productivity from Rose and remains productive herself although she may expect Rose to handle the preparations for tea.

The next six phrases are continuations of the mother's original speaking turn. She makes three commands, one observation, then another command and one more observation. The first command is to shut the door. The second is to come to the fire. These two commands are addressed to the sons. To shut the door, brings us back to Gilbert's original contrast between the haven of bliss indoors and the gloomy cold outside. The fire is on and the mother simply wants to keep the warm air in the room. Come to the fire may have different purposes. Perhaps the mother merely means that sons should come into the warmth because they have been out in the cold. Or she may mean to come closer so that we can talk more comfortably. Or she may be summoning them to a more formal interrogation.

The mother's fifth speech act is phrased as an observation but intended as a command. She tells the boys to come to the fire 'while Rose gets the tea ready'. In part, she is defining the time that her conversation with her sons will take, telling them how long she intends to talk with them. But, though she is speaking to her sons, she is also directing a command to her daughter, telling her to get the tea ready. She then makes an

observation to the sons: 'I'm sure you must be starved'. This remark is intended to show motherly concern and understanding toward the sons but it is also sign to her daughter to get a move on. In addition, she may be letting the sons know that they are barely on time. She is rigid about punctuality for meals. Her last command is to the sons to tell her what they have been doing. She accompanies this with an observation that she likes to know 'what my children have been about'. This series of speech acts is predominantly conative, intended to direct the behavior of her children but the mother is doing some other things as well. She is clearly establishing who governs the household.

The fourth speech event continues in sentences 14-23 through three act sequences, the first between Gilbert and his mother, the second between Fergus and his mother and the third a quarrel between Fergus and Gilbert resolved by their mother. This series of speech acts will be the focus of the following chapter. For the present we might note that the conflicts within the 'haven of bliss' suggested in the stairway encounter become more emphatic here. The speech event reconfirms the dominant authority of Mrs. Markham and the rivalry between Gilbert and Fergus. Gilbert also discloses his insecurity and combativeness, not only in bickering with Fergus but in his unnecessary criticism of the ploughboy. That Rose must call them to tea three times before they respond suggests that she may struggle to have her voice heard within the family. The event also touches on norms of the Markhams lives. We learn something of the activities that a farmer might engage in at the end of the season of active harvesting. Fergus's dilemma introduces the problem of younger sons in a society where inheritance was often on the basis of primogeniture. Fergus has little incentive to work on the farm which will belong to

Gilbert. As a younger son, his principal career options, as he recognizes, will be the military or the church.

The family group sits at the table for the fifth event.

'Now take your tea,' said she; 'and I'll tell you what I've been doing. I've been to call on the Wilsons; and it's a thousand pities you didn't go with me, Gilbert, for Eliza Millward was there!'

'Well! what of her?'

'Oh nothing! - I'm not going to tell you about her; - only that she's a nice, amusing little thing, when she is in a merry humour, and I shouldn't mind calling her --'

'Hush, hush, my dear! your brother has no such idea!' whispered my mother, earnestly, holding up her finger. (Bronte 1966:19)

The mother has directed her questions to the boys, with one directly to Fergus but no one has asked Rose about her day, so she has to announce herself that she has something to tell. Although they were both in the house before the boys, it is apparent that her mother has not questioned her because the news she has is new to all the members of the family. This calls into question Mrs. Markham's previous statement, that she likes to know what her children are about. Rose's activity is slight, like that of Fergus; she has been to visit friends. But before she actually announces the news she uses the opportunity to tease Gilbert, and in the process bothers her mother even more than Gilbert. This brief interchange discloses another set of conflicts within the family and again demonstrates Mrs. Markham's command style. Just as she had previous encoded directives for Rose in her comments to Gilbert, she now gives directives to Gilbert in comments directed to Rose. The routines of social life of the community become clear in Rose's description of her day. She has walked to a neighboring farm and found another neighbor there as well.

'Well,' resumed Rose; 'I was going to tell you an important piece of news I heard there – I've been bursting with it ever since. You know it was reported a month ago, that somebody was going to take Wildfell Hall - and – what do you think? It has actually been inhabited above a week! – and we never knew!'

'Impossible!' cried my mother.

'Preposterous!!!' shrieked Fergus.

'It has indeed! - and by a single lady!'

'Good gracious, my dear! The place is in ruins!'

'She has had two or three rooms made habitable; and there she lives, all alone - except an old woman for a servant!'

'Oh dear! that spoils it – I'd hoped she was a witch,' observed Fergus, while carving his inch-thick slice of bread and butter.

'Nonsense, Fergus! But isn't it strange, mamma?'

'Strange! I can hardly believe it.' (Bronte 1966:19)

As Mrs. Markham reacts so strongly to Rose's teasing of Gilbert, Rose moves back from the conflict and turns the conversation back to the information she was waiting to share. It's not an important piece of news but by characterizing it as important, Rose tells us much about the community that the family lives in. Very little happens so they must make much out of little. We cannot really know whether the motor of the community is gossip but we do know that the whole Markham family is very involved in it. Rose gives herself away telling us that she is bursting with news. It is revealing that both Rose and Mrs. Markham are surprised that a tenant has occupied Wildfell Hall for a week without their knowledge. Mrs. Markham calls it impossible but then corrects herself to say that the house is uninhabitable, suggesting that it would be impossible for anyone to live there rather than impossible for someone to move in unknown to the Markhams.

The interchange introduces several questions. If Rose was bursting to tell, why did she wait until all the family was there? Why hadn't she already told her mother? One explanation might be that she has waited for the moment of maximum impact. She may have kept the story to herself until she had a larger audience because she couldn't risk

letting her mother get the story from her to pass it on to the others. Fergus is playing but he is also involved. His cry of ‘Preposterous!!!’ is an exaggerated imitation of his mother yet so similar that they might not even have perceived that he is playing. He brings in the witch to make clear his intention and when Rose silences him he is satisfied that he has conveyed his satirical intent to the others.

'But you may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her.

She is called Mrs. Graham, and she is in mourning – not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning – and she is quite young, they say, - not above five or six and twenty, - but so reserved!

They tried all they could to find out who she was, and where she came from, and all about her, but neither Mrs. Wilson, with her pertinacious and impertinent home thrusts, nor Miss Wilson, with her skilful manoeuvring, could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connexions.

Moreover, she was barely civil to them, and evidently better pleased to say "good-bye," than "how do you do." (Bronte 1966:19)

Rose next provides a detailed summary of her news combined with several indicators about the community hierarchy of gossip. She substantiates her claims by citing Jane Wilson as her source, thereby assuring her family of the reliability of the information and simultaneously letting the reader know Jane Wilson is a recognized gossip. She tells us that Mrs. Wilson was ‘on pins and needles’, thus establishing Mrs. Wilson’s reputation as an inveterate gossip. In making these comments, of course, Rose is gossiping about the gossipers and in passing them on to Halford and through him to us Gilbert becomes the greatest gossip of the group. In discussing the Wilsons’ visit to Wildfell Hall Rose is direct about their motives. They visit to extract all the information that they can get and for no other reason. They conduct the interrogation as a warlike

gamer of strategy and may even be proud of their rudeness. At least, as Rose describes them, they seem relentless (pertinacious and impertinent home thrusts, skillful maneuvering) in their search for information. Mrs. Graham, unfortunately, doesn't seem to know the code and does not react as they might have expected. Or she might know the code and be deliberately hiding things from her neighbors. From one point of view, the behavior of the new tenant, though it seems both rude and suspect, may be more proper than that of her visitors. Nonetheless, in failing to participate fully in the exchange of information she already shows evidence of the peculiarity in social interaction that will eventually alienate her from the community. She exaggerates her reserve to the point of secretiveness and allows the visitors to intuit that she is happy to see them go. Even her dress is calculated to suggest without clearly indicating mourning, thereby leaving her neighbors confused about her actual state. The comments that Rose heard at the Wilsons were sufficient to confirm that Mrs. Graham did not handle her first contact with the neighbors successfully.

At this point, Rose announces Eliza Millward's plans for a visit and suggests a plan of her own, that Mrs. Markham readily accepts.

But Eliza Millward says her father intends to call upon her soon, to offer some pastoral advice, which he fears she needs, as though she is known to have entered the neighbourhood early last week, she did not make her appearance at church on Sunday; and she - Eliza, that is - will beg to accompany him, and is sure she can succeed in wheedling something out of her - you know, Gilbert, she can do anything. And we should call sometime, mamma; it's only proper, you know.'

'Of course, my dear. Poor thing! How lonely she must feel!' (Bronte 1966:19-20)

Rose's descriptions of the visit by the Wilsons and of Eliza's plans demonstrate that she is aware that visits to newcomers are primarily for the purpose of extracting information.

Yet, when she suggests to her mother that they should also make a visit, she makes no mention of this purpose. "It's only proper," she claims, though her description of the Wilsons' actions and Eliza's plans might seem improper. Mrs. Markham adds that the newcomer must feel 'lonely', though the intrusive visits described by Rose could hardly be welcome to a newcomer.. These reactions indicate the presence of another norm. Although the purpose of visiting new neighbors is known to everyone, the visitors should not make their motives public. Rose, Jane and Eliza, speaking among themselves, could perhaps be open about their purposes but Mrs. Markham felt the need to provide an altruistic motive for a visit.

Mr. Millward, the minister, also produces an altruistic purpose for his intended visit, though Eliza's description of his motives suggests that he has already been gossiping about Mrs. Graham, with his family at least. Pastoral guidance, propriety and relief of solitude, the motivations suggested by Eliza, Rose and Mrs. Markham may be recognized in the community as legitimate needs and the neighbors who visit the new arrival are not necessarily hypocritical in suggesting such motives. Nonetheless, they clearly expect to receive information in exchange and they feel justified in employing strategies for extracting as much of that information as they can. The people of the community, in addition, may take gathering information partly as a social responsibility. They seem willing to protect each others moral integrity. Mr. Millward is provoked to visit the new neighbor because he is aware that she had not attended church the previous Sunday despite having already arrived in the community. The surprise deriving from her failure to attend church suggests that regular church attendance is an obligatory element

in community membership and that missing even one Sunday may be cause for concerned comment within the community. Although no group from the church had apparently visited Mrs. Graham before the previous Sunday to welcome her, the minister is already planning to visit her to bring to her attention the importance being in church.

Rose and Mrs. Markham may not entirely recognize the mixture of motives in their desire to visit the new tenant. Fergus interrupts at this moment to clarify.

'And pray be quick about it; and mind you bring me word how much sugar she puts in her tea, and what sort of caps and aprons she wears, and all about it; for I don't know how I can live till I know,' said Fergus, very gravely.

But if he intended the speech to be hailed as a master-stroke of wit, he signally failed, for nobody laughed. However, he was not much disconcerted at that; for when he had taken a mouthful of bread and butter, and was about to swallow a gulp of tea, the humour of the thing burst upon him with such irresistible force, that he was obliged to jump up from the table, and rush snorting and choking from the room; and a minute after, was heard screaming in fearful agony in the garden. (Bronte 1966:17)

Fergus, once again, takes advantage of his age to ridicule the conversation at the table.

His demand for details directly undercuts the pious statements of Rose and Mrs.

Markham about propriety and loneliness and shows them that he is clearly aware of their true motivations in wishing to visit Mrs. Graham. In satirically listing things he wants to know, he identifies the types of details that would probably be considered trivial and uninteresting to the gossips. The author uses the comment by Fergus to affirm, for readers who may have missed it, the concern with gossip that Mrs. Markham downplays in her response to Rose. The adults fail to laugh because they do not wish to foreground the underlying motives for their sociable actions. Fergus is nonetheless satisfied with his comments. In his description of the scene to Halford, Gilbert continues to belittle Fergus

and to display the rivalry that has been apparent each time he mentions him in this chapter.

With the departure of Fergus, Gilbert redirects attention to himself and, though he continues to sit at the table and listen to the gossip, we are no longer provided details.

As for me, I was hungry, and contented myself with silently demolishing the tea, ham, and toast, while my mother and sister went on talking, and continued to discuss the apparent, or non-apparent circumstances, and probable, or improbable history of the mysterious lady; but I must confess that, after my brother's misadventure, I once or twice raised the cup to my lips, and put it down again without daring to taste the contents, lest I should injure my dignity by a similar explosion. (Bronte 1966: 20)

In suggesting that he was in danger of choking on his own food as Fergus had done, Gilbert validates the framework that Fergus has applied to the visits to the new tenant. He also cites his hunger as an excuse for continuing to sit in on the gossip. But as Gilbert obviously relishes gossip, his attempts to downplay his interest may indicate that the men of his community, more than the women, were expected to dissemble their interest in their neighbor's affairs.

In his selection of details to note, as he enters the Markham house and joins the family in the evening meal, Gilbert has contextualized the rhetoric of the opening sentences of the book. He has exposed some of the norms of conduct that underlie life at Linden Car, indicated how the members of the family interact among themselves in concrete situations, and provided clues for the interpretation routine events. But much of the detail of the scene that he relates undercuts the arrangement of his life that he tried to develop in the opening lines of the chapter. Hymes (1981, p. 307) observes that "the drive to order is also a drive to get stuck in the mud." In contrast, he states:

There must, it seems to me, be some human activity which serves to break up orientations, to weaken and frustrate the tyrannous drive to order, to prepare the individual to observe what the orientations tell him is irrelevant, but what may very well be highly relevant. That activity, I believe, is the activity of artistic perception.

This insight helps us to understand what Gilbert does in this scene and those that follow.

The book opens as Gilbert walks toward the highly ordered household of Mrs. Markham and from that point on the order of the community is always under assault. Gilbert, for the most part, accepts the orientations of his household and his community but he consistently undercuts his conventional postures by providing contradictory details that allow the reader to reach conclusions different from those that he suggests. The power relationships and internal rivalries among the family members are embodied in the speech events he chooses to describe. Above all, the sequence of speech events serves to make clear Mrs. Markham's control over the family and the ways each of the three children asserts his or her independence or displeasure with the rules. In the following chapter we will consider what we learn about Gilbert through the interactions that occur in the speech events

CHAPTER 5. 'I LIKE TO KNOW WHAT MY CHILDREN ARE ABOUT': GILBERT MARKHAM'S INCONCLUSIVE FACE WORK

In the early paragraphs of chapter 1 of *Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert participates in a series of interactions with his siblings and his mother. Each of these interactions involves a challenge to the image of himself that Gilbert has tried to create in the opening lines of the chapter. As Gilbert descends the stairs on his way to the parlor, he is nearly knocked over by Fergus who he hits on the head in response. On one level, this is an ordinary piece of roughhousing between two brothers. But for Gilbert it involves a challenge to the position he claims within the family and a challenge to the line that he seeks to maintain. Goffman (1974) argues that every interaction involves a situation created possibly by society but not by the participants themselves. To interact successfully, the participants in an interaction need to accurately assess their situation. In the encounter between Gilbert and Fergus, either one or both of the participants seems to be misconstruing the situation. Goffman suggests that individuals organize their experience through what he calls frames. When a participant identifies his situation he applies a particular frame to give it meaning.

At some time in the not too distant past Gilbert's father died leaving Gilbert to assume his father's role and responsibilities in managing the farm. Gilbert now sees himself as a responsible farmer and a member of the adult community. But Fergus continues to see Gilbert as the brother he has quarreled and played with all his life. His action in the hallway was a normal interaction between two brothers. Goffman believes that though we negotiate the arrangements under which we live, we tend thereafter to

assume that these arrangements are permanent. We observe Gilbert and Fergus in a transitional moment in their relationship as Gilbert struggles to assume a new role and Fergus fails to adequately interpret Gilbert's actions. Gilbert sees Fergus's rough behavior as a challenge. Rather than respecting him as a mature adult, Fergus insists on treating him as another adolescent. But Gilbert, new at being dignified, responds, just as he would have before he became dignified, hitting Fergus and thereby demonstrating that Fergus was right in his interpretation of Gilbert. There are at least two explanations for Fergus's initial act. He may simply have acted as he normally does without realizing that Gilbert's attitudes have changed. Or he may have noticed that Gilbert seems to be behaving strangely and his action was a deliberate challenge intended to call attention to Gilbert's aberrant behavior. In either case, his action was effective, provoking the expected reaction from Gilbert.

For Gilbert the encounter was less successful. He chose to interpret Fergus's action as inappropriate conduct on the part of his brother and to present his reaction as discipline of an offender. But he is not satisfied with the act of discipline and he finds it necessary to carefully set out the incident within the frame he is using. He first turns to the structure of social constraints that he mentioned earlier in the chapter to call his brother's conduct 'unmannerly'. In categorizing his brother's behavior as bad manners, he is partially assuming a role as an appropriate arbiter of social order. Gilbert interprets his own roughhousing differently. He whacked his brother 'in correction for his impudence'. He uses two terms in this phrase to reinforce the frame of unmannerly conduct. Rather than fooling around like an older brother, he is 'correcting' Fergus as an

adult authority would. And he calls his brother's conduct 'impudence', suggesting that Fergus has been disrespectful to him, and by extension reaffirming that he, Gilbert, should be treated with respect because of his adult status. Fergus would not see the encounter in these terms. For him, the interaction has been a playful contest between two brothers, different in age but otherwise equal in social position within the family. Or alternatively it may have been an example of ill-temper on the part of an older brother who reacted with unjustifiable aggression in response to a slight collision.

Goffman (1967) uses the concept of interaction ritual to interpret the social encounters that people engage in. Each participant in an interaction has a view of the situation and the participants, which Goffman calls a 'line'. The positive social value that each participant claims for himself, Goffman refers to as 'face'. A participant will experience positive feelings if other participants in an interaction value him higher than he expects and will be angry or frustrated if other participants assign him a lesser value than he expects. As a condition of normal interaction, the participants seek to maintain their own face and the face of the other participants so that no one is incommoded by a discrepancy between the face he seeks to present and the face that is assigned to him by the other participants. At times, a breakdown may occur in an interaction with one participant failing to maintain his own face or, inadvertently or otherwise, questioning another participant's face. Such misconduct may be challenged requiring an adjustment in the interaction, often through a two- or four-part interchange involving challenge, offering, acceptance and thanks. The challenge calls attention to the misconduct. This is answered by the offering, an opportunity for the offender to correct his error. The two

initial steps may be followed by acceptance of the offering by other participants and finally an indication of gratitude by the participant who made the offering.

The interchange between Gilbert and Fergus, though capable of different interpretations, is incomplete. We might take Fergus's initial contact with Gilbert as an instance of misconduct and Gilbert's subsequent blow as a challenge. Gilbert obviously interprets the interaction thus as he claims to 'correct' Fergus with the blow. On the other hand, Fergus may have deliberately challenged Gilbert by knocking into him. If this is the case, Gilbert's response must be taken as a counter-challenge rather than an offering. However we interpret the initial moves the interchange breaks down at this point with no resolution. Gilbert is unhappy with this unsatisfactorily resolved face encounter. Though he retaliated against his brother, he was not able to win an acknowledgement of the line he wished to take.

Recounting the incident to Halford, Gilbert presents his own actions positively as corrective and turns to a deficiency model to explain the outcome. He suggests that Fergus is not very bright. His skull is 'more than commonly thick'. Although this characterization may be a standard element in the sibling rivalry between the two brothers, Gilbert here uses the claim to explain Fergus's failure to recognize his adult status and treat him accordingly. The reader, however, may view this scene differently than Gilbert does. Despite the posturing early in the chapter, Gilbert comes off as an adolescent in this encounter. He fights with his younger brother like any adolescent and, like any adolescent, he disparages the mental abilities of his younger brother. In his account, he is unable to adequately reinterpret the events. Coming so soon after Gilbert's

auto-assessment that he was only twenty-four at the time and that he had not yet acquired control over himself, this encounter serves as a confirmation of his immaturity. We can also see that he has not yet been successful at transforming his image within the family. As Goffman predicted, he is left at the end of the scene irritated and frustrated by the dissonance between the face he wishes to present and the response that he provoked.

From this encounter, Gilbert moves into the parlor, where his mother issues the series of orders and observations discussed in the previous chapter, concluding, "I like to know what my children have been about." Mrs. Markham's plural designation of Gilbert and Fergus as her children rather than her sons undercuts the image Gilbert offered of himself in the first sentences of the chapter. A dimension of childishness exists in children that may be absent in son or daughter. This scene suggests the same complications that arose in the encounter with Fergus. The children are growing and seeking new ways of relating to the family structure while the mother is careful to insist upon the preservation of established interactional norms.

Gilbert, perhaps as the oldest child, is the first to respond to his mother's commands. He lists three things he has done during the day. His response calls into question his image as a mature independent farmer. He has some freedom but he must report his actions to his mother. He doesn't really seem to have a lot of farm work, though this may be natural at the end of October. He breaks in the new colt but is only indirectly involved in the other activities that he mentions. This may help to explain his defensiveness as he describes his activities. He describes breaking in the grey colt as 'no easy business', thereby affirming the difficulty of the task and reinforcing the idea that he

is doing a lot of work. He describes the ploughboy as not having ‘the sense to direct himself’, thereby affirming the need for close supervision and reinforcing the idea that he is doing a lot of work. He describes the plan for draining the meadow lands as ‘extensive and efficient’, thereby affirming the difficulty and excellence of his project and reinforcing the idea that he is doing a lot of work. The impression produced by his comments, however, is not entirely what he hopes. In focusing so much on the difficulty of his tasks, he seems to be complaining that they are too hard for him. He may thereby be calling into question his ability to undertake the responsibilities of his father. In belittling the ploughboy, he may hope to reinforce his competence but he gives the impression of complaining. In using the adjectives “extensive and efficient” rather than simply saying ‘draining’ he is congratulating himself. In basing his self-worth on the deficiencies of others, complaining about the difficulty of the tasks and praising himself, Gilbert is showing his insecurity. Though he tries to sound like an efficient executive, he comes across as a bit whiny. The overall impression that he leaves with us is inexperience.

But he is relating his activities to his mother, who hasn’t even been listening. When he concludes, she says ‘That’s my brave boy!’ Nothing that he described was brave. The mother is giving a stock answer such as she would give to a child to show that she is listening, but giving little importance to the activities he described. She also contrives to put him clearly into place affirming that he is her ‘boy’, and asserting her control even as she discounts his maturity. For Gilbert, this experience must be frustrating. His mother has not responded as he expected to his line and once again he has

been denied the place that he wants to occupy within the family. His comments, designed to demonstrate that he is an adult who should be treated with respect, have probably served more in this context to reinforce his position as a child. Even had his attitude been less defensive, the context of his comments, reporting on his activities to his mother, calls into question both his independence and his maturity.

Then, abruptly dismissing Gilbert mid-sentence, she turns to Fergus to ask what he has been doing. Fergus responds 'badger-baiting', deliberately challenging Gilbert by contrasting his sport with Gilbert's work. His detailed account of the day's activity is meant to provoke Gilbert's anger. Gilbert is naturally upset that Fergus ignores the work to be done, and probably feels the situation is unfair. As Fergus describes the sport and his mother pretends to listen, Gilbert lets his anger and jealousy show. The mother seems to give equal importance to each son but Gilbert believes he is being mistreated, that his productive labor should be praised more than his brother's games. He doesn't think that Fergus should be encouraged to waste time or that his mother should show admiration for Fergus's activities. He claims she is only pretending to listen to Fergus, but she only pretended to listen to Gilbert too. The mother is obviously mothering the children, giving equal attention to each, perhaps a bit more to the younger one as the baby of the family. But Gilbert sees his mother's equal treatment of Fergus as belittling to himself and feels she doesn't take him (Gilbert) seriously as a responsible adult. Goffman (1967) would explain Gilbert's anger as a natural response to the string of interactions that have failed to confirm his view of himself.

Gilbert finally breaks in to challenge his brother because he is irritated both that Fergus so shameless brags about his useless pastimes and that Mrs. Markham seems to receive the two accounts with equal approval. Though it's a childish interruption provoked by jealousy, Gilbert sees it as responsible adult intervention to correct his brother's errors. Gilbert challenges Fergus with the tone of an adult authority setting guidelines for a wayward child. This is another attempt by Gilbert to assert his position as the head of the farm and a person of authority within the family. He feels that he must do this because his mother seems either unaware that Fergus is behaving inappropriately or too fond to guide him properly. But because nobody recognizes Gilbert as head of the household, his attempts to assert this line lead to challenges and he isn't able to sustain his view of the encounter. When Gilbert challenges his brother, Fergus accepts it as a challenge and reframes the situation to show that far from being irresponsible he is engaged in principled behavior modification to persuade his mother to permit him to seek his destiny. The outcome of this challenge is not what Gilbert would have wanted. Fergus acknowledges that he needs his mother's permission to leave but seems to ignore Gilbert's wishes. Even worse, Mrs. Markham seems clearly to take Fergus's side, comforting him rather than adding her admonitions to Gilbert's. Fergus who has obviously won the encounter, basks in his victory, trying to appear 'sulky' as his mother soothes him.

The brief interaction between Mrs. Markham and her two sons might be interpreted as three speech events. Even if we consider the responses of Gilbert and Fergus to Mrs. Markham's questions as one speech event, we recognize three phases. The

first phase involves Gilbert's response to his mother in which he presents a line that his mother effectively dismisses by ignoring the content of his remarks and reaffirming that he is a child in her response. In the second phase Fergus presents a line that his mother accepts because it conforms to her line, although her response to Fergus, ignoring content and reaffirming that he is a child, is very similar to her response to Gilbert. In the third phase Gilbert challenges Fergus's line only to find that Fergus and Mrs. Markham unite to sustain it. In this sequence, as Gilbert's line is rejected and then his challenge to Fergus's line is also rejected, Mrs. Markham successfully sustains her own line, reaffirming her position as the supreme authority in the household. These interchanges should leave Gilbert feeling frustrated and angry, but he reveals his anger only to Halford in describing his reactions to Fergus's remarks.

As the family sits down at the table Rose announces that she has news and takes the opportunity to tease Gilbert by mentioning Eliza Millward. By treating him as a brother to tease not an adult to respect, Rose is also challenging his view of himself. Gilbert accepts her remark as a challenge and deflects it with 'Well, what of her?' Rose's reply of 'Oh, nothing' is a second challenge. Because Gilbert failed to react with enough enthusiasm to her remark, Rose threatens to drop the subject with no further information. She even affirms that Eliza is not part of the news, hoping to provoke a response from Gilbert who seems unskilled at withstanding her teasing. She then reverses herself and is about to explicitly refer to Gilbert's interest in marrying Eliza when her mother cuts her off. Mrs. Markham is quick to express her concern each time the name of Eliza comes up. She doesn't want to make anything of it but she would not so quickly deny Gilbert's

interest in Eliza were she not worried that there is indeed something there. She defends Gilbert from Rose's teasing because the topic is of genuine concern to her. But Mrs. Markham is not really talking to Rose when she denies Gilbert's intentions. She is sending a message to Gilbert and, in a sense challenging him too. The message is that she knows he's attracted to Eliza, that she is not at all pleased by this turn of events and that she does not want anything to come of it. Neither Rose nor Mrs. Markham is giving Gilbert the respect he wants. Both treat him as an adolescent: Rose as a brother to tease, his mother as a young person to guide and govern. Some of the challenges may come because he presents an entertaining target. Through this series of encounters he has already begun to seem thin-skinned.

Rose reacts to Mrs' Markham's objection by turning to the news that she has promised and relating it to the family but she doesn't leave Gilbert completely in peace. A few sentences later she again refers to Eliza's influence on him when she speaks of her plan to visit the new tenant and adds, "you know, Gilbert, she can do anything" (Bronte 1966, p. 20). Rose thus continues her teasing of Gilbert despite her mother's censorship of the theme. This teasing forms a second theme of gossip as she lets Gilbert know that she is aware of his feelings whether he voices them or not. Gilbert is allowed only one brief response in this sequence but he finds his line doubly challenged. He seems to deny involvement with Eliza. Rose challenges him by asserting that she knows he's attracted to Eliza and that she believes he is seriously considering marriage. Mrs. Markham directly contradicts Rose's speculation but in a manner that indicates that she agrees with Rose and that she does not approve of Gilbert's interests in that direction. Rather than advising

him, she speaks for him to Rose, implying that she has authority to determine her son's friendships. As we will later learn, Gilbert customarily hides his intentions even from himself, so that he may not yet be consciously aware of all the implications of his attraction to Eliza.

This brief series of routine family encounters has undermined the image that Gilbert attempted to present of himself in the opening lines of the chapter. His line was challenged in four interchanges. First, Fergus challenged his mature dignity in the non-oral encounter by the stairway. Then Mrs. Markham dismissed his description of himself as a productive farmer when he reported his day's activities to her. Fergus and Mrs. Markham combined to reject his assumption of a mentoring role over Fergus. Finally Rose challenged his dignity by teasing him about Eliza Millward. Each of the encounters is incomplete because they do not go beyond challenge to offering but the challenges are clearly effective in that they correct Gilbert's line and establish his relative face within the family unit.

The discrepancy between Gilbert's image of himself and the face that the family recognizes has been created in part by Gilbert's recent ascension to responsibility for the farm. He imagines that he occupies a different position relative to members of his immediate family than they are, in fact, willing to recognize. Family interactions may involve a range of power relationships. Gilbert seems to view his new relationship with his siblings to be somewhat hierarchical, with power distributed unequally in his favor as an adult among adolescents. He may already have somewhat greater power as the older and stronger brother but the essential relationship has hitherto been one of solidarity.

Fergus doesn't recognize Gilbert as a superior power and rejects Gilbert's attempt to counsel him. In the first encounter with Fergus, Gilbert was defeated by his own inability to maintain adult behavior. In the second case he was defeated by the refusal of both Fergus and his mother to validate his claims. Rose also sees her relationship with Gilbert as one of equal power and she feels that she can tease him. Gilbert's reaction, his inability to maintain adult behavior, seems to confirm her assessment. The conversation between the two once more undermines Gilbert's pretension for an adult status. The intervention of his mother further erodes his line by demonstrating that she continues to see him as a child that she needs to direct. On the other hand, he attempts to assume a position of greater solidarity with his mother, reducing the concentration of power in her favor. As the person now responsible for the operation of the farm, he sees himself as an adult capable of exercising a voice in family decisions. His mother does not even appear to listen to his comments and her answer clearly puts him in the position of a child. To make the loss of face more damaging, she does not even appear to notice a difference between his work and Fergus's play. Neither Mrs. Markham nor her children recognize as valid Gilbert's attempts to adjust power relationships within the family. The series of interactions leaves Gilbert frustrated because he is unable in each case to maintain his line and because his challenges to the lines of others are largely dismissed.

These interchanges demonstrate that there are many ways to challenge another person's line. Fergus did so once physically and once through direct contradiction of Gilbert's admonition. Rose's challenge was made playfully as teasing. Mrs. Markham did not apparently contradict Gilbert but, through her motherly behavior and impartiality

toward her sons, she forced him into a subservient position that contradicted his claims to adult status. The four encounters help the reader to move beyond Gilbert's assessments of his position to achieve a clearer insight into his character. Although the interactions that take place when Gilbert first enters his home in the first chapter are clearly designed to introduce the reader to the members of his family they are even more important as measures by which to judge Gilbert as a narrator. The author has used these brief interchanges to call into question the narrator's perspective and to alert the reader to the multiple viewpoints and the undercurrents of conflict that his narrative voice tends to obscure.

CHAPTER 6. CHATTERING SILENCE: COMMUNICATING IN CHURCH

A brief passage (Chapter 1, sentences 73 to 85) from *Wildfell Hall* may serve to illustrate how the ethnography of communication can provide useful tools for the analysis of literary texts. These thirteen sentences are combined into seven paragraphs (Paragraphs 43 to 49). They can also be analyzed as a sequence of six speech events separated into various speech acts. The excerpt is taken from the first chapter and serves as part of the preliminary introduction of the characters and the setting. The fictional genre would then be the epistolary novel while the general speech situation is the personal letter. Within this novel/letter, though, these thirteen sentences describe the narrator's participation in a specific church service on October 28, 1827. We can consider the speech situation, then, to be the church service. As the church ritual develops, the members of the congregation engage in a variety of individual interactions among shifting groups of participants. We assume that, when someone new joins a conversation, it becomes a different conversation with a new set of social relations among the participants. Thus, within the service we can identify six speech events: interactions between Gilbert and Mrs. Graham, Gilbert and the congregation, Gilbert and Eliza and Gilbert and Fergus as well as two types of interior dialogue. At the same time, Gilbert is posturing to Halford throughout the description and in this sense the excerpt might be taken as one long, complex identity act

The excerpt begins with a two-sentence paragraph directed by Gilbert to the reader, ostensibly Halford, defining both the time and place of the speech situation. The following paragraph provides a semiotic interaction between Mrs. Graham and Gilbert

concluding with Gilbert's first internal dialogue. The fourth paragraph continues more directly the interaction between Gilbert and Mrs. Graham. Gilbert next returns to his interior dialogue concerning Mrs. Graham and then interrupts himself to reflect on the cultural norms that he is failing to conform to. Gilbert then initiates an interaction with the congregation that is interrupted by a brief interaction with Eliza. This interaction is, in turn, interrupted by an exchange with Fergus that concludes the description. All of this becomes part of a single speech act twenty years later when Gilbert writes it down in a letter to his brother-in-law.

We don't have direct access to this series of speech acts because, as is always the case when we read ethnographic studies, we approach them through the written text. We do, however, know how they came to be recorded. Gilbert later mentions to Halford that in the period being described he kept a journal which he later consulted in writing the letter. Gilbert's action therefore is somewhat parallel to that of an ethnographer who has collected field notes and later used them to prepare a monograph. We will first briefly analyze his narrative using Hymes' grid as developed by Saville-Troike (2003). Using Jakobson's (1960) model of the speech event, we will then extract further details of the situation. Finally we will briefly consider the role of silence in the series of interactions.

Components of Communication

1. Scene: genre/topic/purpose/setting

The genre is participation in the Sunday worship service of the established Church of England (Anglican). Though the account ranges through several topics, the attendance

of the new neighbor is the principal focus of attention throughout this sequence. The flirtation between Eliza Millward and Gilbert and the rivalry between Gilbert and his younger brother are also salient topics.

The Sunday worship serves several functions. On a formal level, it provides an opportunity for worshipping God and ideally establishing communion with Him. It is also an opportunity for the parishioners to reflect upon and to receive guidance towards their spiritual development. On a less formal level, the Sunday service provides an opportunity for observing the neighbors and perhaps gathering material for later gossip. The participants are also demonstrating their conformity to social norms because they are aware that, even as they are watching their neighbors, they are, in turn, being watched. Another function of the church service is to provide the community with an opportunity for social interaction. For many participants the concrete purpose of this specific gathering is to observe the newcomer to the community.

The gathering occurs on a Sunday morning at the end of October or beginning of November of 1827 inside the established church of a rural community in England. Although the climate is not mentioned here we know that during the week it has been fairly cold and damp. The church building itself is old (indicated by the “many years” that the cushions have not been renewed and the fact that a pew is set aside for the inhabitants of Wildfell Hall although the building is in ruin and has been abandoned for at least fifteen years). We know little about the organization except that the arrangement of the pews is such that the participants are able to see each other’s faces and exchange glances during the service. The chapel may be laid out in the form of a cross or perhaps

in a semi-circular arrangement. At least some of the seating is assigned by residence and families may not necessarily sit together. (Gilbert is seated next to his brother but seems to be able to look out toward his mother and sister.)

Failure to attend the Sunday morning service would constitute extremely marked behavior. The new neighbor is believed to have arrived in the community before the previous Sunday and her failure to appear in church the previous week has already been the focus of considerable discussion and has provoked an admonitory visit to her home from the vicar.

2. Key

The multiple voices of the narration create a complex tone in this sequence. We assume that the appropriate emotional key, whether somber or joyful, would be serious. A large part of the congregation, however, seems focused upon more mundane concerns, with a high level of curiosity directed toward the new neighbor. Gilbert affects an intimate but slightly ironic tone in recounting the event to Halford but we can see that he is attracted to Mrs. Graham. Anne Bronte is a satirist and the development of the situation is funny. But Gilbert, the narrator, may not be completely aware of the humor.

3. Participants

Although He is not mentioned, much of the congregation is aware that they are in the presence of God. His participation is a constraint on the development of the speech events.

P1: The congregation: This is a community event and everyone in the congregation is a participant, though not all the participations are described.

P2: The Vicar: Mr. Millward: The elderly vicar is the principal organizer of the formal activities of the service and the principal formal speaker. Though Gilbert does not report his participation, we can see his influence in the attendance of the new neighbor and the expectations of the congregation.

P3: Gilbert Markham: The twenty-four-year-old narrator, he focuses his report upon the events that he directly participates in.

P4: Mrs. Graham: The new neighbor, a widow, about twenty-five years old.

P5: Mrs. Markham: Gilbert's widowed mother,.

P6: Rose Markham: Gilbert's nineteen-year-old sister.

P7: Mrs. Wilson: A widowed neighbor that Gilbert often criticizes

P8: Jane Wilson: Her accomplished twenty-six-year-old daughter who Gilbert resents

P9: Eliza Millward: Gilbert's informal girlfriend, she is the younger daughter of the vicar.

P10: Fergus Markham: Gilbert's seventeen year old brother.

P11: Halford: Gilbert's friend and Rose Markham's husband, to whom the letter written twenty years later is addressed.

4. Message Form and Content

Using Saville-Troike's visualization of the four-way distinctions among verbal-nonverbal and vocal-nonvocal channels, we can classify all the interaction occurring in this sequence as nonverbal-nonvocal. We assume that the interaction occurs within a

context of more formal verbal, vocal liturgy but none of this background sound is mentioned. Gesture, facial expression and eye contact are among the principal forms of communication.

5. Act Sequence

P3 address P11 to define setting

P3 confesses excitement

P3 describes Wildfell family pew

P3 observes and evaluates P4

P4 signals identity

P3 engages in intenal dialogue concerning P4

P3 and P4 make eye contact

P3 challenges P4

P4 expresses scorn and cuts off interaction

P3 reacts angrily, threatens P4 and seeks to question her importance and establish his superiority

P3b (P3's superego or conscience) intervenes to reprimand P3 for engaging in behavior inappropriate for church during a Sunday service

P3 guiltily looks around the congregation to see whether anyone has seen his behavior

P1 divides attention between attending to the service and observing P4

P5, P6, P7, P8, all observing P4

P9 guiltily observing P4

P9 and P3 make eye contact.

P9 acknowledges P3

P9 smiles, expresses embarrassment, confusion

P9 blushes

P9 cuts off interaction returning attention to the service

P9 attempts to recover her composure

P3 observes Eliza as she goes through sequence of acts

P3b interrupts to remind P3 that his conduct is inappropriate

P10 interrupts P3 to point out that his conduct is inappropriate

P3 indicates to P10 that he does not accept his perspective on the interaction

P3 plans to harm P10 at a more appropriate moment (when they have left the church)

6. Rules for interaction

Within the context of a church service some forms of interaction should ideally be limited. Members of the congregation are expected to listen to the words of the preacher and to meditate upon the application of those words to their own lives. Acceptable behaviors, in addition to listening, might include reflecting upon one's life, communing with God, participating in liturgical responses, praying, perhaps singing, and reading from the prayer book or the Bible at appropriate moments in the liturgy. Informally, however, much of what is happening in this speech situation is probably typical if not necessarily entirely appropriate. Gilbert's reactions let us know that roughhousing is not permitted. The altercation between Gilbert and Fergus must be kept to a minimum until

they are outside the church. Staring is not appropriate and should never be blatant. Mrs. Graham let Gilbert know that his aggressive staring was inappropriate. Eliza Millward's confusion when she realized that Gilbert was looking at her may have been partially because she realized that he had seen her staring at Mrs. Graham. Gilbert realizes on at least two occasions that he has been behaving inappropriately in looking at members of the congregation rather than attending to the service. Fergus also indicates that Gilbert has transgressed the rule when he pokes him in the side.

Gilbert's inappropriate behavior, in fact, extends to thoughts. He lets us know that there are limits to what we may think in church by his reactions to his own mundane thoughts. Blatant flirting is another activity that would be inappropriate in this context. The partly flirtatious exchange between Gilbert and Eliza causes Eliza to blush in part because she is aware that flirtation is inappropriate in this context. Her behavior, however, also conforms to the rules for flirtatious interaction. She simpers, blushes and looks away. Fergus's reaction to Gilbert is partly in response to the impropriety of flirting in church. That the members of the congregation were generally staring at Mrs. Graham, while certainly not appropriate, may be more typical and therefore acceptable behavior. Mrs. Graham comes close to observing the rules of what people should do. She sits in the pew that corresponds to her residence. She generally focuses upon the service rather than the congregation and seems to follow the liturgical sequence in her prayer book.

7. Norms of interpretation

Among the norms of interpretation operating in this situation are some that would have been apparent to readers of 1848 but may not be equally accessible to modern readers. Anne Bronte, the youngest daughter of an Anglican clergyman, would have been very familiar with the context described in this passage. However, several critics, (Frawley, 1996, 2001) (Chitham, 1999) (Kemp, 2001) (Talley, 2001) have focused upon the ways in which dissenting Methodist doctrine also influenced her. The Methodists placed more emphasis upon an individual's personal relation with God, on constant reflection and self-improvement and on education than did the community at large. They also tended to recognize women as equals to men and to give them equal place as preachers of the Word. (Kemp, 2001) These beliefs can be seen as background premises that function as norms of interpretation for understanding the interactions in the church. Mrs. Graham, as the spokesman for and embodiment of religious values in the novel, is presented as engaged in appropriate conduct from a Methodist point of view. Gilbert's description of her also suggests that she will be independent and intelligent. The conduct of the other participants, especially the narrator, may be a target for Bronte's Methodist satire of Anglican laxity. The scene is comical because the rules of interaction are being breached by most of the congregation.

From the point of view of the members of the congregation there may be conflicting rules of interaction. The parish is a farming community. The author never mentions the existence of any nearby town that might provide a space for social interaction. The Sunday church service, the only regular gathering of the community, is both a spiritual event and a social event. Somehow, the parishioners may be expected to

recognize both aspects of the event. Some of the apparent distraction that occurs may be valid compliance with social expectations. The specific mixture of social and spiritual would vary from congregation to congregation or from denomination to denomination. This congregation in this interaction seems to give priority to the social functions. The presence of a new parishioner, however, creates a special situation which explains and may justify the degree of distraction within the congregation.

Gender is a significant factor in determining permissible deviation from involvement in the liturgy. Subdued roughhousing may be marginally accepted from adolescent or young adult males, as in the case of Fergus and Gilbert, but would not be permissible for adolescent or young adult females. Similarly, women are expected to be more seriously involved in the liturgy. Eliza's confusion when she exchanged glances with Gilbert may have been partially caused by the greater investment she would have in demonstrating her piety and involvement.

Exchanges of glances between members of the congregation should be fleeting and arguably accidental. Elaborate non-verbal communication might verge on being disruptive. Among the participants in this scene, in fact, Gilbert engages in the most seriously inappropriate behavior. His staring at other members of the congregation is the most prolonged and intent. His conduct towards Fergus is more inappropriate than that of Fergus because we would expect Gilbert to be more mature. Fergus's surface motive (calling attention to rules of behavior) is also more justifiable than that of Gilbert (pique).

The Speech Event

Jakobson (1960) analyzes a speech event somewhat differently than Hymes and, though the two formats consider approximately the same aspects of communication, we may be able to extract additional content from this situation by reinterpreting it using Jakobson's model. An act of communication, according to Jakobson (1960, p. 54) includes six factors: addresser, addressee, context, message, code and contact. Each of these factors is associated with a different function of language. Jakobson argues that language focusing upon the addresser is emotive and language focusing upon the addressee is conative. He describes language focusing upon the context as referential, the message as poetic, the code as metalingual and the contact as phatic. We can observe each of the factors of communication and each of the corresponding functions of language in this act sequence.

Before looking at the individual acts, we need to deal with aspects of the context, made explicit earlier in the text, that underlie this sequence but may not be directly referred to. Through various signs, this text has already disclosed itself to be a novel. In sentences 1-5, the narrator presented himself to us as a young farmer with a self-image of himself as something more than a farmer. In sentences 6-55, members of the immediate family of the narrator were introduced through their participation in conversation surrounding a light evening meal. During this conversation the participants also reveal that new occupants (a young widow, a small child and an old servant) had moved into a long vacant and seriously deteriorated mansion situated on the wild margin of the small farming community and had in fact been living there for several days. The conversation

focused upon gossip and upon the surprise that someone could have been living near the community for nearly a week before being discovered. We learn that, although the new neighbor had apparently arrived before the previous Sunday (it was now Thursday), she had not attended church. Several ladies had already been to call on her without extracting much information. We observe that Gilbert Markham is an avid gossip but that he wishes to downplay his interest in the affairs of others, that he is self-important but that his brother and sister challenge his poses and that he is not completely objective or forthcoming in describing the events around him or his feelings about them. Gilbert and Fergus, the narrator's younger brother, quarrel frequently. We also learn that Gilbert is romantically attached to Eliza Millward, and that Eliza's father, the vicar, will be visiting the new neighbor to bring to her attention the importance of attending the Sunday church services. Finally, Fergus serves as a foil to expose both the narrator's smugness and the community's obsession with gossip. Sentences 56 to 72 deal with further conversation between the narrator, his mother and his sister Rose on Friday as they report to him after they had visited the new neighbor.

The sequence we are interpreting begins by situating the story in a new context after the events of Friday. On the surface the major function of this statement is referential.

The next day was Saturday; and, on Sunday, everybody wondered whether or not the fair unknown would profit by the vicar's remonstrance, and come to church. 73

“The next day was Saturday” serves to situate both the previous conversation which we now know to have occurred on Friday and the events to follow, which will

occur on Sunday. In referring to days of the week, the author is not simply creating a chronological sequence and moving the narrative a little further along. She is also determining the cultural context of the event. Days of the week, in themselves a cultural construct, have different cultural values. In a basically agricultural society before the invention of the forty-hour week, the value of Saturday might not be much different than any other day. It would be special nonetheless in being the last workday before Sunday. Saturday only concerns the story in that it tells us that we are close to Sunday, a day that in one way or another, is certain to heighten the excitement provoked by the new members of the community. Mentioning Saturday at all focuses our attention on the anticipation that the members of the community were feeling as they waited to see what would happen in church. If the narrator had begun the sentence with “On Sunday” the building excitement of the wait would have been lost. All of this information remains primarily referential although it has obvious emotive elements because the narrator is indicating his own excitement when he speaks of the excitement in the community.

With the rest of the sentence the referential element remains strong but other elements also become more important. First there is an obvious ambiguity here with the phrase “on Sunday”. Syntactically the sentence tells that the wondering occurred on Sunday but the previous phrase has strongly suggested that the wondering has been going on since the people learned that the new tenant had occupied the house and that she had not attended church the previous Sunday. At the very least, we suppose that they were wondering on Saturday. The phrase “on Sunday”, then, should logically occur after “church” rather than before “everybody”. Because a discrepancy occurs within the

sentence, expectations are raised and then contradicted. This makes the placement of the prepositional phrase marked and encourages us to probe for reasons. Gilbert's indirection and subjectivity have already become apparent to us earlier in the chapter and we might assume that he is once more attempting to downplay his own eager anticipation by denying the excitement that he had suggested with the previous phrase. If this is the case, then the shifting of the prepositional phrase to an earlier position in the sentence performs an emotive function.

The following term, "everybody" brings new ambiguities to the description. We suspect it is not literally true that the whole community or the whole congregation has been wondering about this point. The community is very small; not much seems to happen and many people seem to have a lot of free time on their hands. So it is possible that "everybody" is a true statement. On the other hand, it may be an exaggeration. There may be members of the community with other concerns who have not even heard yet about the new neighbor or others that having heard returned to their own affairs and forgot about her. Maybe he means only everybody in his circle of gossipers or in his family. Or maybe he is adding another emotive function to what is ostensibly a referential statement. Perhaps, "everybody" is used to shift attention from his own excitement and attribute it to the entire community through metonymy.

The simple object and referential import of wondered is "whether she would come to church". The sentence is complicated, however, by several additions. First he calls her "the fair unknown". Both aspects of this attribution are essentially emotive. He seems to intend "fair" as a descriptor indicating attractiveness rather than paleness or impartiality.

Whether or not she is attractive is a question of personal taste and this information is essentially emotive. She is unknown to the writer but not to his mother or sister or many other members of the congregation so this attribution basically refers back to the addresser as well.

It is possible to take these terms in other ways. "Fair" may be an empty term used merely to indicate that she was female and "unknown" may refer to the fact that she is a stranger. Though many members of the congregation have met her, they cannot be said to know her well or to know a great deal about her. The use of these fairly abstract and conventional terms to substitute for direct statement also suggests a focus upon the message. We will come back to the poetic function in the next sentence.

The narrator also adds to the basic doubt, "whether she would come to church", the question of "whether she would profit by the vicar's remonstrance". This question is still referential but it is less straightforward than the principal question. Beyond simply asking, "will she come," he is asking about her motivations and about the effects of the vicar's words. He is also implying that whether she comes or does not come are not equally appropriate responses and thereby suggesting that her actions are being evaluated according to specific social and moral codes accepted by the members of the community. We can assume that the vicar, to some extent at least, embodies these codes because her acceptance of his advice would 'profit' her.

I confess, I looked with some interest myself towards the old family pew, appertaining to Wildfell Hall,

The second sentence begins with purely emotive content. The addresser is talking about himself. Only the words “the old family pew, appertaining to Wildfell Hall,” are clearly referential. Gilbert is describing and substantially distorting his feelings. In describing his interest, however, he is making an emotive statement that is also referential. The overall tone of the information seems to suggest that everyone was very interested in seeing whether the new tenant would be in church and that even Gilbert had some curiosity. What he is actually saying is that he was very interested, more so than he would like to admit. With his imaginary correspondent, Gilbert attempts to maintain the illusion that he does not quite approve of gossip, though in practice he seems very anxious to hear all the details. The term, “I confess”, admits to his ambiguous feelings toward gossip, and may be conative in seeking to influence his addressee’s reaction. The term, “some”, before “interest” creates another ambiguity. It may be intended to attenuate the level of interest that he is admitting to. In the phrase, “I looked with some interest”, however, “some” may also function as an intensifier, depending upon the tone that the speaker uses. Gilbert continues to downplay his interest, saying that he looked toward the pew, rather than directly stating that he looked for the new tenant. His meaning, though, is clear to us and his statement seems a little coy as is the remainder of the sentence.

where the faded crimson cushions and lining had been unpressed and unrenewed so many years, and the grim escutcheons, with their lugubrious borders of rusty black cloth, frowned so sternly from the wall above. 74

Two things strike us immediately about the second half of the sentence. First, the narrator has paused to describe the condition of the Wildfell pew when we believed he was going to look for the tenant. He has been waiting since Friday to see if she would

come and with this last minute deviation, he seems to be playing with us and postponing the satisfaction of our curiosity. Secondly, the strongly referential and emotive description is itself to some degree comic, containing an excess of somber dilapidation (faded crimson, unpressed, unrenewed so many years, grim, lugubrious, rusty black, frowned so sternly) in a fairly small space. The term “lugubrious”, mournful to the point of being ridiculous, gives away the satirical intent of the sentence. The narrator seems to be sharing a small joke with Halford or perhaps it is the author who is sharing the joke with the readers of the novel.

To fully participate in the joke we may need to leave the church for a moment and focus upon the difference among the Bronte sisters. Where Charlotte and Emily tended to be Romantic, Anne was more Classical in tone and realistic in description. She reportedly disapproved of *Wuthering Heights* and several critics (Gordon, 1989) (Steward, 2001) (Morse, 2001) (Talley, 2001) (Wescott, 2001) have described *Wildfell Hall* as a criticism of Emily’s book. Bell (1992) in contrast sees the close parallels between *Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights* as evidence of the “empathy of spirit [and] literary thought” (35) between Anne and Emily. Critics have also argued that Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* (Talley, 2001) was another target of Bronte’s ridicule in the novel. In this description of the *Wildfell* pew, we see an example of Romantic imagery carried to absurdity. In this group of clauses, Bronte makes manifest a function that has been a constant element throughout the excerpt, the poetic. The text we are looking at, a work of fiction, is probably by definition focused upon the message in the sense that the focus in literature is upon the selection and arrangement of the words more than upon any of the other functions

mentioned by Jakobson. In *Linguistics and Poetics*, Jakobson interprets a comment by Majakovskij to mean, “poeticalness is not a supplementation of discourse with rhetorical adornment but a total re-evaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever.” (1960, p. 61) When we step back from the illusory world created by Anne Bronte to recall that it is only a story, we might reinterpret the entire text as an example of the poetic function of language. While we look at the text as though it portrayed “true” linguistic events, however, we can distinguish the various functions of language in the imaginary conversations it presents.

Although the entire text illustrates the poetic function of language, the poetic is not generally the dominant function. There are, however, instants that are explicitly poetic. The description of the Wildfell pew is one such instance. The use of the description to delay satisfying the reader’s curiosity and the oblique referral to the tenant as the “fair unknown” are others. The generally indirect and self-consciously literary tone that Gilbert uses in what we are told is a letter to a close friend is yet another. Waugh (58) argues that within the context of the six functions of language postulated by Jakobson, the referential function is unmarked and the others are marked. The devices we are considering here serve to draw our attention to the message and thereby to mark it as something more than simply referential.

But the description of the pew also provides information about the world, thereby employing the referential function of language. And in using loaded adjectives such as ‘grim’ and ‘sternly’ to describe commonplace objects, Gilbert is drawing attention to his feelings and thus the emotive function.

The first two sentences of the excerpt are intended as comments made by Gilbert in the letter that he is writing to Halford. In this communication act Gilbert is the addresser and Halford is the addressee. Through Gilbert, Anne Bronte is also addressing the reader who becomes the ultimate addressee of this act. These addressers and addressees will remain constant throughout this selection but there will be further complications of the addresser-addressee relation as we move to the next act.

And there I beheld a tall, lady-like figure, clad in black. 75

Sentence 75 initiates a series of communication acts between Gilbert and the new neighbor, whose name is Mrs. Graham. At the same time Gilbert is still communicating with Halford and he is also communicating with himself. Sentence 75, obviously directed at Halford, continues the themes developed immediately before but adds a new voice. With “And there”, Gilbert situates Mrs. Graham in the pew he has just finished describing. His description is echoed at the close of this sentence by “clad in black”. So Mrs. Graham is there in the grim pew and she complements the dark surrounding with her own dark clothing. This correspondence between the setting and the person will continue to develop in the following sentence. Besides being in the pew, Mrs. Graham has three attributes –tall, lady-like and clad in black. “Tall” is a straightforward description, though it may imply attractive as well. “Lady-like” is a highly ambiguous term. It may imply proper, refined or delicate. It might just mean that she looked like a woman rather than a man. His choice of this word is probably partially emotive in that it indicates his opinion rather reporting on the world. The statement then is essentially referential with the word “lady-like” suggesting an emotive element. The use of “clad in

black” to echo the “rusty black cloth” of the previous sentence returns the focus to the message and adds a poetic layer to the referential function. The correspondence between the appearance of the pew and the appearance of Mrs. Graham may have suggested to Gilbert that she was a Romantic heroine appropriate for the Romantic setting of the pew. Despite his satirical description of the pew Gilbert does suffer from Romantic confusion at times.

The same sentence can be looked at in another way however. Though Gilbert is interpreting Mrs. Graham’s appearance, he is also describing some signs that she has deliberately made. ‘Clad in black’ tells us she is a widow or at least she wishes to advertise that she is (falsely, we later learn). ‘Lady-like’ may also be a sign that she is consciously projecting rather than an interpretation given by Gilbert. As the story progresses we also find that Mrs. Graham has strong religious convictions and that her beliefs tend toward low-church simplicity. So the “clad in black” may be an early indicator of her religious tendencies. Both lady-like” and “clad in black” can be seen as emotive public statements. Given the number of signs that Mrs. Graham is projecting, this communication act might be seen as a dialogue between Gilbert and her rather than a monologue by Gilbert intended as part of a dialogue with Halford.

Her face was towards me, and there was something in it, which, once seen, invited me to look again. 76

Sentence 76 continues the same interaction between Gilbert and Mrs. Graham. Although Gilbert does not specify what sort of signs he has received from Mrs. Graham, he does indicate that he has entered a sort of dialogue with her by telling us that

something in her invited him to look again. “Invited” suggests that she (something in her) was the agent and it suggests a more amiable interaction than would alternate options such as provoked, caused, made, compelled or forced. ‘Invited’ also suggests a conative aspect to the message displayed on Mrs. Graham’s face.

Her hair was raven black, and disposed in long glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days, but always graceful and becoming;

In sentence 77 Gilbert becomes more specific about what he noticed and conducts a brief semiotic analysis beginning with her hair. Her hair repeats the black motif of the pew and the dress. He chooses to characterize the shade of black as “raven”, a term that intensifies the blackness but also introduces connotations associated with ravens. In the days before Poe, ravens may not have been quite as gothic as they are now, but they were nonetheless associated with lawlessness, hardihood and, even as far back as Anglo-Saxon writing, with war, death and battlefields. Gilbert may not have been associating Mrs. Graham with these concepts but he can hardly have been unaware of the ideas associated with ravens. The severe image introduced by raven, is contradicted in the following clause, “disposed in long glossy ringlets”. The two adjectives and the object of the preposition give different information about the hair but all of them combine to suggest that it was both striking and attractive. “Disposed” suggests that Mrs. Graham may have deliberately arranged her hair to create such an impression. Gilbert is perhaps dwelling more on her hair than is strictly necessary for his correspondence with Halford and may be disclosing more about the direction of his interest than he intends. (Or perhaps not. At the time he is supposedly writing this letter he has been married to Mrs

Graham for many years but the reader does not learn this until the final pages of the novel.) The sentence so far is clearly referential yet the emotive function is clearly present as well. The next two phrases are more strongly emotive but from different perspectives. When Gilbert describes her hair as “a style of coiffure”, he emphasizes its artificial, planned and, therefore, semiotic aspect and reinforces the suggestion previously made with “disposed”. “Rather unusual” tells us many things about Mrs. Graham. She is independent, not a follower of fashion and capable to some degree of designing her own appearance. We will soon learn that she is an artist. The fact that the coiffure is rather unusual, suggests that it may be deliberate and, if this is so, it is a sign constructed by Mrs. Graham to say something about herself, an emotive statement. The addition of “in those days” lets us know that Mrs. Graham was ahead of her time by suggesting that the style she chose is nowadays far more common. The following qualification, “always graceful and becoming”, is an emotive expression by Gilbert, telling us about his reaction to the hair rather than saying anything about the hair itself.

her complexion was clear and pale; her eyes I could not see, for being bent upon, her prayer-book they were concealed by their drooping lids and long black lashes, but the brows above were expressive and well defined, the forehead was lofty and intellectual, the nose, a perfect aquiline, and the features in general, unexceptionable

As Gilbert continues to analyze Mrs. Graham, he adds a large number of details, all intended to emphasize that she is beautiful. But there are three details here that warrant comment. First, her eyes were bent upon her prayer-book. This focuses our attention upon her piety or seriousness which will soon be seen to contrast sharply with the attitude of much of the congregation. Secondly, “the forehead was lofty and intellectual”, is an interpretation of her appearance that foreshadows one of the dominant

aspects of Mrs. Graham and also one dimension of her character that might distinguish her from a traditional Romantic heroine. Finally, “unexceptionable” seems to introduce a contradiction to the generally positive portrait that Gilbert is drawing. Today, we might interpret Gilbert to mean that there was nothing that stood out in her appearance, that she was plain. Gilbert was more likely stating that there was nothing to criticize, to take exception to. Overall this part of the sentence continues to combine the referential and emotive functions of language.

- only there was a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes, and the lips, though finely formed, were a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed, and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper

After the dash, Gilbert’s still emotive and referential observations become more critical and he notes some more disturbing details in Mrs. Graham’s face. He interprets the hollowness and thinness as signs of inflexibility or harshness. His evaluation of Mrs. Graham’s face at this point possibly crosses the border into insult as he evaluates her cheeks and lips looking for what he might consider defects. He does not come across as entirely pleasant himself as he makes this appraisal. The signs of tension that he notes in Mrs. Graham provide foreshadowing for the things we learn about her past sufferings and present difficulties in the latter part of the novel. At this time though they serve mainly to reinforce the image of strength, independence and possibly limited tolerance for foolishness that recurs in the general portrait that he has been drawing. From the slightly hollow cheeks and lips “a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed” he infers that she would have “no very soft or amiable temper”. With these words he is indicating a social code that woman should conform to and questioning whether Mrs. Graham in fact does.

“Soft” and “amiable” seem to be among Gilbert’s expectations for women. As insistence on equal education and treatment for and equal expectations of men and women is a central focus of the novel, we can assume that Gilbert is disclosing his still unenlightened notions about the world more than he is describing it.

We see from these observations that Mrs. Graham is saying things she may not wish to say through her appearance. On the other hand, these details are principally aesthetic evaluations and say more about Gilbert’s thoughts than they do about the object of his attention. The emotive element in the description remains high. Sentence 76 and the first part of sentence 77 together form a conversation between Mrs. Graham and Gilbert that has been so far somewhat indirect. Mrs. Graham has made statements through her appearance that Gilbert has attempted to interpret. Throughout this exchange the referential and emotive (and the underlying poetic) functions have dominated. In the next exchange Gilbert converses with himself.

and I said in my heart – ‘I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home.’ 77

“I said in my heart” involves a conventional metaphor and metonymy through which we use the heart to stand for our intimate or intuitive thoughts. What Gilbert really means is that he is carrying on an interior dialogue. The content of this dialogue is somewhat surprising. He decides that he would not like to be married to her. He has never seen her before and he is staring at her from across the room during a church service. It might seem to be too soon for him to be thinking about marriage. Gilbert is disclosing more than he intends about the impression that Mrs. Graham has made upon him when he makes this comment. He is denying an interest that no one has suggested he

has. He combines this odd denial with “admire” and a repetition of “fair”. Though he will state his dislike of Mrs. Graham a number of times in the early chapters of the novel, and although he thinks he may be in love with Eliza Millward at this time, the direction of his thoughts is foreshadowed by this small emotive dialogue.

Just then, she happened to raise her eyes, and they met mine; I did not choose to withdraw my gaze, and she turned again to her book, but with a momentary, indefinable expression of quiet scorn, that was inexpressibly provoking to me. 78

Sentence 78 contains the first real direct interaction between Gilbert and Mrs. Graham. It is a six part sequence. Gilbert is looking at her. She looks up and their eyes meet. He does not look away. She makes a facial expression and looks down at her book again as she does so. He is angered by her expression. This interchange (like all interaction) depends a great deal upon the context for its meaning. He is clearly behaving inappropriately by staring at Mrs. Graham rather than focusing his attention upon his own prayer-book and following the service. When she looks up she sees him staring rudely at her. His act is rude partly because she is new to the community and obviously on display in the church where much of the congregation may not have seen her before. The polite response to meeting her eyes would have been to look away. That he does not do so can be interpreted as challenging or defiant. Perhaps, aware that he has been caught misbehaving, he continues looking as a way of saying, “I’m not sorry,” or “So?” More likely, the word “choose” is an after thought. He did not look away because he was so confused by her sudden discovery of him staring that he could not react quickly. Before he could do anything, it became too late to turn away and by then she had looked down anyway. It is also possible that he wishes to establish contact with her and his failure to

turn away is less hostile than we would be likely to interpret it. Mrs. Graham would naturally interpret it as prying however and her reaction is what we would expect. Gilbert has committed two errors in staring inappropriately and in failing to acknowledge his error. When Mrs. Graham reacts predictably to these actions Gilbert becomes angry. If we were to look at this episode from the point of view of Erving Goffman's (1999, p. 308) work on face encounters, we can see what has happened. Gilbert's is discovered in inappropriate behavior. When Mrs. Graham looked up, he could have looked away as an offering and she could have accepted this and turned back to her prayer book. By not looking away, he answered her accidental challenge with another challenge. Because he made no offering, she could not close the incident with an acceptance and she turned back to the book. Her look of scorn discloses the natural reaction that she would have to his failure to interact appropriately in the face ritual. His anger is a natural reaction to his failure to be accepted by her on the terms that he expected; in other words, he is angry about his loss of face with her. He found her response "inexpressibly provoking" because he knows that he has somehow been dismissed but, not having read Goffman, he is not really sure what has happened and he would not be able to describe it to Halford. Mrs. Graham's scorn, of course, is reported by Gilbert and it may actually have been present or it may have been a projection by Gilbert provoked by his own awareness of the inadequacy of his responses. There are two details that lead us to suspect it somewhat. First it is quiet and then it is indefinable. We can assume that the look of scorn is probably not deliberate and probably not intended for Gilbert to observe. He may not be

able to define the expression because it occurred in his imagination. If so, then the communication here has been complicated by misunderstanding between the participants.

Another way to look at this interchange might be through the lens of power and solidarity. Tannen (1992) describes how directness and indirectness can function on a number of levels to indicate either power or closeness. Indirectness is often associated with powerlessness, although in situations where one participant is clearly more powerful, he or she may choose to phrase imperatives indirectly. Gilbert's direct staring at Mrs. Graham may have been intended to establish superiority or he may conversely have wished to offer solidarity. In either case, her 'scornful' dismissal effectively rejected his move. Goffman (1967, p. 113-114) describes the ways in which conversation develops its own momentum so that involvement is expected and an absence of involvement might be alienating. Mrs. Graham's abrupt dismissal might therefore cause Gilbert discomfort. On Gilbert's side, the communication within this cluster of acts is predominantly emotive, almost to the exclusion of other functions. For Mrs. Graham, there may have been no deliberate communication at all. But if there was, it too was emotive.

'She thinks me an impudent puppy,' thought I. 'Humph! - she shall change her mind before long, if I think it worthwhile.'

Gilbert follows his interaction with Mrs. Graham with another dialogue with himself. In this dialogue, he tries to adapt the insult he believes he has just received from her. His response is in four parts. First he interprets to himself the meaning of her expression. "Puppy" is degrading from two perspectives. The metaphor compares him to

an animal, less than human, and to a baby of that species, less than mature. He modifies puppy with impudent, making the criticism more severe. The implication may be that she dismissed him as too insignificant to worry about. But the words are his own judgment upon himself because Mrs. Graham said nothing. “Impudent”, he realizes is an accurate description of his action. He was disrespectful. He throws in “puppy” out of irritation, as much with his own behavior as with her reaction. He then utters a grunt of rejection or dismissal, aimed either at his actions or the entire interchange he has just participated in. Although he seems to know that his actions were the improper ones, he also seems to be shifting his irritation from himself to Mrs. Graham. He states that he will make her change her mind about him and then, thinking better, hedges his boast by adding “if I think it worthwhile”. The last two comments are ambiguous. He wants to tell himself that her opinion doesn’t matter, that he can easily change it if wants to. He comes close to vowing to win her over, but that is close to courting and he is already courting somebody else. So he hedges that vow with the “if” clause. Because he feels she has belittled him, he seeks to belittle her and the “if” clause allows him to do that, in his own mind. It also allows him to dismiss her. It’s not even worthwhile to try to change her mind about him. Incidentally, this clause also protects him from the obligation of what might become another failed attempt at communication with her. This sequence of ideas passing through his mind are the process by which he recovers from the loss of face he has just experienced. He is focused upon himself and the language strongly emotive. The referential content is very secondary here.

But then, it flashed upon me that these were very improper thoughts for a place of worship, and that my behaviour, on the present occasion, was anything but what it ought to be.

Now Gilbert interrupts his inner dialogue about Mrs. Graham to begin a new dialogue focused upon the code. Jakobson calls this language function metalingual but in this case the language is made of social norms rather than sounds or markings. (In Transactional Analysis, this would be a dialogue between his father and his child) He has been behaving improperly in several ways: first in his appraisal of Mrs. Graham, then in his impudent conduct toward her and finally in his inappropriate thoughts after the encounter. He interrupts himself with a sort of internal censor that tells him to transfer his attention to the Sunday service where it ought to be. This new emotive voice in his interior dialogue labels his thoughts “improper” and his behavior unlike what “it ought to be”. He has admonished himself twice in vaguely parallel repetition. It is noteworthy that the social context of this inner dialogue is a Sunday church service. Focusing on the poetic function, he imitates the Old Testament by using repetition with variation as a rhetorical device. In doing this, he is perhaps giving his inner censor a Biblical authority. We should not misunderstand the nature of his interior reprimand, however. He is not necessarily telling himself that his conduct was wrong. He only indicates that it was wrong for the context. He specifies that his thoughts are improper “for a place of worship” and that his behavior was not correct “on the present occasion”. He does not seem to be concerned that he has failed to attend to the message of the minister in the church. Rather he is worried about the social code. He has broken the rules. Because this interior dialogue focuses on the time and place, we might call it referential. But the

element within the time and place that is significant is the relation to the social code. In his self-rebuke he is recalling the code and interpreting his actions as falling outside of accepted behavioral norms. This interpretation of the code is a metalingual activity. We can see this clearly in his next act.

Previous, however, to directing my mind to the service, I glanced round the church to see if anyone had been observing me;

With this emotive and referential remark, he lets us know that he is not so much concerned with failing to observe the code as with being found out. His reaction recalls a popular definition of conscience as “that small inner voice that tells us that someone might be looking”. In looking around the church, he confirms for us that his concern was not with being distracted from thoughts of God but with whether anyone saw him. He worries about how his behavior will look in the eyes of the congregation rather than how it will look in the eyes of God. The process of turning away from his improper thoughts is complicated. He has realized (told himself) that he was behaving improperly and he has determined to turn his attention back to the service but before “directing” his mind he looks around the church. This delayed action is an indication of the double nature of the mind. If he can direct his mind, there is a will or something behind the mind that can direct it. And if this is the case there are already at least two voices inside our heads. But we don’t know exactly what is happening here as he refocuses his attention on the service because he is telling the story to his brother-in-law, Halford. He says that he glanced round the church. This is probably true but as he describes the moment to Halford, it sounds more casual than it may have been. In fact, it may be more accurate to say he

glanced furtively at the congregation. He admits that he was checking to see if anyone had seen him and he is hardly likely at this point to wish to draw attention to himself by openly looking about the room. Before he finishes this sentence, he will use substantially different words to describe someone else doing more or less what he is doing here. This communication act is focused upon adapting his actions to the code and checking to see how serious his deviation from the code has been.

but no, - all who were not attending to their prayer-books, were attending to the strange lady, -

Set off by a dash on each side, Gilbert writes “—but no—”. This brief emotive statement first of all indicates his relief at having gone unobserved. He really means “no problem”. The other members of the congregation are either participating in the service or they are doing just what Gilbert has been doing. He feels so vindicated by this observation that he forgets his intention to direct his mind to the service and begins making a mental census of who is watching Mrs. Graham, who he refers to as “the strange lady”. “Strange” is an ambiguous sign. Mrs. Graham hasn’t done anything particularly strange in the service but she has failed to give Gilbert the face he expected so he is resentful still. Her appearance is a little out of the ordinary but not seriously so, her hair-do is a bit ahead of fashion, but not so much that we would call her strange. She is new to the village and therefore a stranger, but it is not quite the same thing to be a stranger or to be a strange lady. Gilbert seems to be othering her to some extent. After his unpleasant encounter, he is seeking comfort in solidarity with the community and, by

excluding her, he reduces the importance of the opinion she has (he assumes) expressed of him.

my good mother and sister among the rest, and Mrs. Wilson and her daughter;

As Gilbert catalogues the members of the congregation that he has discovered misdirecting their attention toward Mrs. Graham rather than toward the prayer book, he notices his mother. When he describes his mother's actions he often implies that she does not behave like the other members of the community though what she is doing usually does not differ from what they do. For example, his mother gossips as avidly as Mrs. Wilson but he implies that Mrs. Wilson should be censured while finding nothing to criticize in his mother's gossip. In this reference, "good" is partially conventional, the expected characterization of a dutiful son, but it is also a subtle distinction between his mother and the other churchgoers. He may also be engaging in a little self-justification here. If his mother, who is good, is staring at Mrs. Graham, then it not so bad for him to have been doing the same thing. There is no reason to mention Mrs. Wilson and her daughter except that he wishes to reaffirm their tendency to gossip and prying. The distraction of so many members of the congregation helps us to understand another possible motive for Mrs. Graham's scornful expression when she saw Gilbert. She can hardly be unaware that she is the object of much attention and Gilbert is simply a little less courteous than the other watchers. Her scorn may have been directed toward the churchgoers in general rather than specifically toward him.

She knew, in fact, that this visit to church would be a rite of passage. The vicar, Mr. Millward has already visited her to stress the necessity of attending church. If she

had not come her absence would have created greater scandal. In a sense, simply coming to church and attending to the service has been for Mrs. Graham, a deliberate phatic act. She knows that she must conform to the expectations of the community if she wishes to live there in peace and this church attendance is part of her adjustment to community expectations. By attending the Sunday worship service, she establishes contact with the community and opens channels of communication that will be essential if she hopes to fit in or at least not to stand out. Even as she conforms to the expectations of the community, her presence causes many churchgoers to alter their behavior. The behavior of these people, including Gilbert, is marked. In church, attention to the sermon would be unmarked behavior and anything else would be marked. Since many people in the church are inattentive at this moment, the act may not be so serious but it is nonetheless marked. Mrs. Graham's behavior, in focusing upon her prayer-book rather than the other members of the congregation, is unmarked, but so much about her is marked at the moment that she could not afford to deviate from the norms in this respect.

and even Eliza Millward was slyly glancing from the corners of her eyes towards the object of general attraction. Then, she glanced at me, simpered a little, and blushed, modestly looked at her prayer-book, and endeavoured to compose her features.

“Even Eliza” tells us that Gilbert wouldn't expect this conduct from her although everything we know about her tells us that he should have expected it. Eliza, in earlier scenes has been as intimately involved in the process of gossip in the community as Gilbert himself. In Rose's earlier narratives, Eliza and Jane Wilson have both been characterized as skilled at extracting information from others. Both have been described as planning to obtain material for gossip. Gilbert chooses to interpret Eliza's actions

differently from Jane's but he gives no justification for his distinction between the two. This event, however, will help to transform Eliza gradually from a sympathetic to an unsympathetic figure in Gilbert's estimation. Her act of staring is described more precisely than that of anyone else. She "was glancing slyly" rather than just glancing and she was looking "from the corners of her eyes". These two modifications make her act seem sneakier, less casual than Gilbert's act of glancing. In fact, her action is almost certainly no sneakier than Gilbert's as he surveys the church to see if he is being watched. To the extent that she behaves differently, she seems to be more discreet and thereby perhaps less condemnable than Gilbert. But when he describes her action, it sounds more sinister.

The difference between Gilbert's descriptions of himself glancing and Eliza glancing as well as his insertion of "good" to modify "mother" when she was also staring illustrate Gilbert's tendency to be somewhat evasive in his descriptions of his own or his family's conduct. He willfully interprets fairly similar conduct quite differently when he or his mother engage in it.

As Gilbert observes Eliza, she glances at him. This scene precisely repeats the earlier encounter with Mrs. Graham but the phases of the interaction lead to very different results. It is obvious that, as in the earlier case, Gilbert fails to turn away when he is caught staring. If he had turned away he would not be able to describe Eliza's subsequent actions. His lapse in this case is not so serious because he knows Eliza and she can interpret his action in several ways, some of which she might consider flattering. There is an element of phatic communication in this encounter. Eliza responds to meeting

Gilbert's eyes with a smile albeit a silly and self-conscious one. This is preferable to the scorn that he believes he has received from Mrs. Graham. Although neither has made any direct declarations, Eliza knows that Gilbert is courting her and Gilbert knows that she is encouraging him. So the exchange of smiles or glances can be interpreted positively as interest in and acknowledgement of each other, the equivalent of saying "Hi" and smiling when one encounters a neighbor, but indicating a closer degree of relation. Eliza's smile is a bit more complicated though. Unlike Gilbert she was caught staring so she is naturally a little disconcerted. She may also interpret his stare as admiring or flirtatious and be reacting in an appropriately coy manner. The smile is not necessarily voluntary and it may express her confusion as well as her acknowledgement of Gilbert. Eliza goes through a process of several steps. She looks at Mrs. Graham, then discovers she is being watched. She simpers, then blushes, and finally looks back to her prayer-book (exactly as Mrs. Graham had done) and, finally attempts to compose her features. Gilbert observes that she "endeavored" to compose, suggesting that she was not able to do so adequately. These reactions do two things. First they are an acknowledgement of Gilbert. She lets him know inadvertently and perhaps unwillingly that his opinion is important to her. In this her reaction is quite unlike that of Mrs. Graham. Although both women glanced at Gilbert and quickly turned back to their prayer-books, their actions are interpreted very differently by Gilbert. Mrs. Graham barely notices Gilbert and, to the extent that she does, she does not seem to have received a very favorable impression. Eliza is completely disoriented by the encounter, loses control of her expressions and becomes flustered. If she had easily controlled her response rather than only endeavoring to do so Gilbert

would not have liked it so well. Her actions reinforce Gilbert's idea of his own importance thereby validating his line and compensating for his previous loss of face. His description of the interaction is a referential account of the emotive communication acts of another person.

This exchange marks the third time that people have disclosed things they did not wish to disclose through their facial expressions. Gilbert learned things about Mrs. Graham that she did not wish to express by looking at her compressed lips and hollow cheeks. He gave signals back to her that he did not wish to when she glanced at him, as her reaction demonstrates, and now Eliza may be unable to prevent herself from sending out a series of signs confirming her confusion. We cannot, however, dismiss the possibility that Eliza's acts are at least partly deliberate acts of flirtation.

This sequence suggests that making masks is a special social grace and also perhaps that failure to make masks (appearing to be openly and spontaneously revealing emotive content) on certain occasions is an endearing quality. If making masks is a social grace then features are obviously signs and appearance is deliberate. This insight reflects back on the previous encounter with Mrs. Graham leading us to believe that the some of what Gilbert read in her appearance was the consequence of signs deliberately expressed by her.

Here I was transgressing again; and this time I was made sensible of it by a sudden dig in the ribs, from the elbow of my pert brother.

As he communicates with Eliza, Gilbert has forgotten completely about the church again and this time he is enjoying himself much more. But now he turns his

attention once more to the code of conduct, this time with help from his brother. Gilbert directly tells us that he was transgressing so he seems to be interrupting himself with admonition again but this may not be the case as the reminder came from his brother. “I was transgressing again” seems to be a confirmation by him of brother’s viewpoint. In saying that he is transgressing, Gilbert is returning our attention to the social norms and engaging in metalingual speculation. When Fergus digs his elbow into Gilbert’s ribs, he is also commenting upon the social norms but the dominant function of his action is conative. He is telling his brother to straighten up and he intended his dig to produce a reaction in Gilbert. Although Gilbert has himself been impudent very recently, he interprets his brother’s act as “pert”. Since he knows he is at fault he reacts angrily to the call to attention. The description the event in which Fergus and Gilbert interact is a referential description of a conative act by another.

For the present, I could only resent the insult by pressing my foot upon his toes, deferring further vengeance till we got out of church.

In responding Gilbert is very much aware of the social norms which he acknowledges both with “for the present” and with “till we got out of church”. But he nonetheless engages in some childish horseplay, much more inappropriate for a twenty-four-year-old man than for a seventeen-year-old boy. He also expresses his intent to teach Fergus a lesson as soon as they get out of church.

Gilbert uses the word “resent” (both referential and emotive) somewhat oddly to mean “show his resentment” but in any case he has no obvious reason for resentment. He admits that he was behaving improperly and that Fergus brought his attention to the error.

He also speaks of the insult but there was no insult except in his own mind. Fergus is merely pointing out what is true. Gilbert may wish to continue other behavior and not want to be reminded of the norms. The more important consideration is that Fergus is younger and Gilbert does not wish to acknowledge that he is right about anything. This interchange is an extension of the sibling rivalry that has already characterized their relationship. Gilbert's reaction here seems childish. He has been deviating more and more from established norms as the service progressed and has now engaged in rudeness, distraction, flirting and horseplay and has involved different churchgoers in each of his deviations. Stepping on toes is a conative reaction to Fergus's conative statement. He is saying don't try that again. Yet he acknowledges the code that operates in the context by plotting vengeance when they leave the church. Vengeance is not called for by the situation but Gilbert has entangled himself in a number of transgressions in a short period, he has been discovered by his brother, and he only wants to get out of church to give his anger free rein.

As we have considered this short description of a part of a Sunday church service, we have been able to observe all of Jakobson's language functions. Many more acts must have been occurring but Gilbert has not chosen to inform us about them. We know nothing of the primary ritual of the church service for example because Gilbert has not referred to it. It does underlie the whole communication event, however, and deserves a brief mention. Not only for Mrs. Graham but for the entire congregation, church attendance is a piece of phatic communication for the people of the community. They are

keeping the channels open for communication with their neighbors and signaling that all is well. Going to church and participating in the service shows that they are adhering to community norms and allows them to watch each other as well. This excerpt hints that the Sunday service is predominantly phatic. Though participation in the service is expected, the only person who seems to have actually participated among those mentioned by the narrator is Mrs. Graham. Gilbert was distracted as were his mother and sister, Mrs. Wilson and her daughter and Eliza. Fergus must have been distracted or he would not have noticed that Gilbert was distracted. Although Mrs. Graham does seem to follow the service at least part of the time, her principal reason for attending on this Sunday was to affirm her acceptance of the norms and establish contact with the people of the community. To have become distracted while she was the center of attention would have defeated her purpose.

Silence

This series of communication events is notable for being conducted entirely without sound, although, as we have previously observed, we can assume that it played out against a backdrop of at least intermittent sound. The speech situation is structured, at least to some degree, by verbal and vocal speech but the focus of the recorded events is so far removed from the verbal activity that we are given almost no indication of what may have been happening in the sermon or the liturgy at the time. The sound (words of the sermon and phases of the liturgy) forms the unrecorded backdrop to all the silent chattering of the congregation. We might ask why Gilbert never mentions this. Several

possibilities present themselves. The sermon may be unmarked, so much expected that it simply doesn't occur to Gilbert to mention it. The silent interaction, transgressing norms, being marked is more worthy of comment. It may be that Gilbert's own focus so distracted him that he didn't attend to the service and would not be able to report the details. Perhaps in choosing what to report to Halford, Gilbert decided that the content of the service was outside the scope of his narrative. Whatever might be the cause of his omission of all voiced interaction, we need to be aware that this sequence of communication events probably occurred within a context characterized by ongoing verbal and vocal activity and that the reported acts may have occurred as they did through the influence of the unreported vocal acts. Twice Gilbert observes other participants looking at their prayer-books but the circumstances surrounding each of these acts are ambiguous enough to leave us uncertain whether looking at the prayer book was called for at that moment by the development of the service.

This presumed backdrop of sound may be a necessary factor in the study of silence. Bruneau (1973, p. 18) observes that "significations of various loci, intensities, durations, and frequencies of imposed silence are possible because of their interdependence with speech". He cites Susan Sontag to say, "one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence."

Within the context of church ritual in general, silence may play a significant role. Szuchewycz (1997, p. 239) observes that "Silence is used in religious contexts to express reverence, awe or respect". Among the "places objects and events to which silence is the expected response", Bruneau (1973, p. 41) first mentions churches. He finds that,

“Religious rituals in many Christian orders . . . are replete with movement toward silence”. (Bruneau, 1973, p.37) Silence is a frequent theme among writers exploring religious ritual. Teahan (1981, p. 364) asks:

Can scholarly analysis hope to lure silence into language, to convince it to speak? Faced with silence are we not perhaps condemned to be silent? Is it possible to say anything intelligible about a dimension that is set over against language? How might we adjudicate between meaningful and vacuous expressions of silence?

With these questions, he makes a strong statement about the nature of silence.

Although he tells us later that within the context of religion, silence is understood as a positive act, his questions seem to posit a deficit model of silence as an absence of language. He then goes on to dissect silence in various ways. He first separates religious silence from speechlessness and then distinguishes three varieties: public or ritual silence, ascetic silence and meditative silence (Teahan, 1981, p. 365). Beyond this, he describes two levels of silence: shallow (tranquility and passivity) and deep (mystical experience) (Teahan, 1981, p. 366). Silence can also be characterized as either exterior (absence of sound) or interior (stilling of thought, desire and judgment) (Teahan, 1981, p. 370). Teahan refers to a wide range of thinkers who have reflected on silence and religious experience stretching from the early Church fathers through modern theologians, novelists and poets.

Flanagan (1985) describes silence as an element in the transformation of a social act into a spiritual one. “Silence,” he writes, “enables the mysterious to be felt” (Flanagan, 1985, p. 214). This echoes Saville-Troike, “Silence creates space within which God may work” (1985, p. 3). Silence is also one of the ways that the congregation allows for the repair of errors or ambiguities in the ritual and it is used to develop the pacing of

the liturgy. Flanagan describes a multitude of interpretations that can be put on silence, some as transcendent as those of Teahan but many more socially focused. Flanagan discusses the ambiguity in silence which can provide resonance to ritual or leave it empty. This dichotomy seems to ignore other possible effects of silence. We might ask, for example, whether silence can be as filled with chatter as speech.

The silence described in the short excerpt from Bronte's novel that we are considering occurs within the context of religion. It does not, however, appear to fit into either of Teahan's categories of external/internal or shallow/deep; it is not ritual or ascetic and it is probably not meditative in any sense that Teahan would accept. It is certainly not speechless. But neither is it silence that supports the development of the ritual either spiritually or socially. Perhaps the significance of silence in religious ritual adds resonance to the experience of watching this congregation use silence to engage in mundane pursuits that directly contradict the supposed purposes of the religious gathering. The participant-observer, Gilbert Markham, focuses upon a relatively small number of speech events and acts from what we must assume would have been a multiplicity of similar simultaneously occurring events and acts. Within the culture that he is observing, the church service would be a communicative situation that involved strong constraints on verbal behavior. Participants would be expected not only to maintain silence but to engage in physical behavior focused upon enacting concentrated attention to the sermon and liturgy. But, in actual practice not only in England in 1827 but also in the United States today, the enacting of silence by a church congregation would be far more varied than simple liturgical requirements might suggest.

Gilbert's report is a brief impressionistic review of a few of the acts that occurred. If he had focused upon more minute details we might be able to identify specific interpretable acts with clear functions. Gilbert chooses from among hundreds of simultaneous communication acts but records only a small number and chooses to mention only highlights that related directly to his interests. Every member of the congregation is communicating in one way or another but Gilbert mentions only eight individuals. Only three participants other than Gilbert himself perform communication acts described in some detail. Also, Gilbert was not watching himself and has not recorded his outward acts as they may have appeared from the outside. We can observe Gilbert's interpretation of the reactions of Mrs. Graham, Eliza and Fergus to his acts but we cannot describe how these acts may have provoked those reactions. Most of the acts that Gilbert described are listed on the following table. The table is somewhat misleading first in minimizing the degree of overlap between acts and secondly in assigning only one or two functions to acts that function on a variety of levels. As this report is ostensibly written as personal correspondence, the reader is always part of the audience but has been included only in the opening acts, where the writing seems more clearly directed to the absent reader.

TABLE 1: Act Sequence

	Communication Act	Function	Form	Audience	
1	P3 states time, place and background info	Defines setting	Written report of background information	P11 (the reader)	Y
2	P3 confesses	Establishes tone	Written report of	P11 (the	Y

	excitement		emotive data	reader)	
3	P3 describes pew	Elaborates setting	Written report of visual activity	P11 (the reader)	Y
4	P3 observes and evaluates	Discloses interest	Head and eye movement	P11 (the reader)	Y
5	P4 wears black	Confirms widowhood, asserts seriousness,	Dress	P1	Y
6	P4 wears her hair in long glossy ringlets	Asserts independence, sense of style	Arrangement of hair	P1	Y
7	P4 looks at prayer book	Participates in liturgy Demonstrates community membership	Head and eye movement	P1 (God)	?
8	P4 expressive eyebrows, lofty forehead	Disclose intellectuality	Movement of brows,	P3/P1	?
9	P3 ∅	expresses admiration	Interior dialogue	P3/P11	Y
10	P3 ∅	evaluates and criticizes	Interior dialogue	P3/P11	Y
11	P4 hollow cheeks, thin, compressed lips	discloses stress/rigidity	Facial expressions	P1/P3	N
12	P3 ∅	judges P4/protects self	Interior dialogue	P3	Y
13	P4 raises eyes	Rests	Head and eye movement	P3	
14	P4/P3 make eye contact		Eye movement	P3/P4	
15	P3 maintains gaze	Challenges or covers	Lack of eye movement	P4	Y
16	P4 alters expression	Expresses scorn	Facial expression	P3	?
17	P4 looks at book	Cuts off communication	Head and eye movement	P3	Y
18	P3 ∅	Shows anger	Interior dialogue	P3	?
19	P3 ∅	Threatens revenge	Interior dialogue	P3	?
20	P3 ∅	Belittles Mrs. Graham	Interior dialogue	P3	?

21	P3C Ø	Interrupts self	Interior dialogue	P3	?
22	P3 looks around church	Sees who's observing	Head and eye movement	P1	Y
23	P3 looks at P5,6,7,8,9	observes their acts	Head and eye movement	P1	Y
24	P9 looks at P3	Sees who's observing	Head and eye movement	P3	Y
25	P9 simpers	Acknowledges P3	Movement of mouth area	P3	Y
26	P9 blushes	Shows confusion	Coloring of face	P3	?
27	P9 looks at book	Shows propriety	Head and eye movement	P3	Y
28	P9 composes features	Recovers from confusion	Facial expressions	P3	Y
29	P3 observes P9	Indicates interest	Eye movement	P9/P10	Y
30	P3C interrupts	Reprimands	Interior dialogue	P3	Y
31	P10 jabs P3	Challenges	Hand movement	P3	Y
32	P3 steps on P10	Rejects, intimidates	Foot movement	P10	Y
33	P3 Ø	Plans vengeance	Interior dialogue	P3	Y

The zero markers on this chart probably indicate unobserved rather than unobservable acts. If we can communicate with ourselves through interior dialogue then it follows that some communication acts would not be observable from the outside and should be indicated with a zero marker. Unobservable interior dialogue would be problematic as a communication event. Keene (1997, p. 47) argues that “the observer can only have access to other people’s experiences and beliefs through objective manifestations.” In this case however the more likely interpretation is that Gilbert’s interior dialogue may have produced some visible indicators in his movements and facial expressions but that Gilbert would not be able observe these visible signs from his vantage point. The final column indicates whether the communication act was intentional or not.

Perhaps the first level of communication act in this situation is semiotic. In Act 8, for example, Mrs Graham wears a black dress. This is both a deliberately deceptive identity act and a true reflection of her identity. Mrs. Graham is hiding at Wildfell Hall under an assumed name and posing as a widow. The black dress reinforces this imposture. On the other hand, it also reflects the seriousness and religious austerity that are important elements of her character. Likewise the arrangement of her hair in a style not commonly used is an early indication of her independence and perhaps a reflection of her artistic temperament. Gilbert reads these signs, which are to some degree intentional, and reaches conclusions about Mrs. Graham that are limited but approximately correct. Nonetheless, this type of interaction is fairly indirect. The more direct exchange that begins with Act 13 provides a useful contrast. The interaction continues to be silent but Markham and Mrs. Graham engage in a complex exchange of opinion. When she again looks down at her prayer-book, cutting off communication, the indirect communication that follows is different from that that preceded their eye contact. Whereas she hadn't looked at Markham, before she was now actively not looking at him, at least for an instant. In this brief set of acts we have seen several levels of silent communication. First, Markham gathered information through signs presented to the public by Mrs. Graham. Then they interacted directly with Markham challenging Mrs. Graham and she dismissing him. With her scornful dismissal, she reduces the intensity of interaction to a level somewhere between the initial indirect interaction and the following direct interaction. On the other hand, her dismissive act also intensified Markham's emotional investment in the interaction, forcing him to react to a challenge to face. Bruneau comments that "the

stranger or person who is viewed as strange” is usually at a disadvantage in interaction but that “the stranger appears to have advantages too, if he can control his own interactive silences for some necessary reason.” (Bruneau, 1973, p. 32) Mrs. Graham has clearly triumphed in her first encounter with Gilbert through the use of silence. By reducing the intensity of communication we might claim that she is moving toward greater silence within an already silent communication event. By looking away she is cutting off the interaction and imposing silence upon both Gilbert and herself. Gilbert’s angry reaction demonstrates that he interpreted her act as dismissive. With this action she provides an example of how silence can be used even within silent interactions.

The interaction between Eliza and Gilbert beginning with Act 24 is revealing in several ways. Gilbert has been courting Eliza informally and she is aware of his interest although neither has acknowledged the nature of their relation to the other. Silent communication may be more ambiguous and dependent upon context than spoken communication but in this case we are already dealing with a highly ambiguous situation. Moreover, Gilbert has observed Eliza staring “slyly” at Mrs. Graham. She can be embarrassed at being caught or flattered at attracting his attention. Her series of communication acts could be interpreted from either perspective and probably contains elements of both. Within this context however, the act of looking down at her prayer-book, the same act that Mrs. Graham used to distance herself from Markham, carries much different implications. The greater familiarity and greater ambiguity in this relationship permit Eliza to combine a more varied and extensive repertoire of messages within their brief interaction.

As the analysis in the previous section demonstrates, the sequence of communication acts in this speech situation has been fairly complex. Yet the entire sequence of acts would be grouped as non-verbal, non-vocal in an analysis of code and channel (see Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 116). Because communication acts conducted in a non-verbal, non-vocal mode do not involve sound they may easily be overlooked by outside observer. Although there is an extensive literature dealing with silence, it is often viewed as a boundary between speech events or as an element in a speech event occurring primarily through sound. Also, studies focusing on silence often interpret it negatively as absence. When silence is treated as an active performance, it is commonly associated with only a limited range of topics. Greene (1940), for example, divides silence into two types: reflection and religion. Kurzon (1997), though he calls his study *The Discourse of Silence*, seems consistently to contrast silence to “saying something”. Nakane (2006) posits three kinds of silence: “temporary or total avoidance of communication”, “avoidance of certain speech acts”, and “turn-constituting silences with illocutionary force”. Dauenhauer (1980, p. 181-184) uses the concept “Silence as Active Performance” and Jaworski (1993) discusses “interactive silences”. But neither of them seems to envision silence as an instrument for complex interactions such as the one described in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Szuchewycz (1997), on the other hand, observes three parallels between noise and silence: they involve many kinds, meanings and degrees; they are arbitrary; and they are functional equivalents. This summary seems to come closer to explaining the complexity and the degrees of silence that we can observe in these silent interactions. The scene

described by Anne Bronte is probably recognizable to many people in our culture. Such interactions may occur in church settings but we can find them in many other social contexts as well (school assemblies and public ceremonies, for example). They demonstrate clearly that silence is not an absence of speech. Nor is it an act. Rather it is a space within which multiple non-verbal, non-vocal speech acts can occur as interconnected interactions with no need for intervening sound.

CHAPTER 7. THE WAY TO WILDFELL HALL

The Social Interaction

The first chapter of *Wildfell Hall* has established the epistolary framework and introduced all the significant characters of, and suggested the major conflicts that will play out in, the enveloping narrative. Chapter 2 moves us forward to Tuesday, October 30, 1827. The opening sentence reminds the reader of the overall conceit that the novel is contained within the structure of a series of letters between the narrator, Gilbert Markham and his brother-in-law, Halford. It indicates, though it does not directly confirm that Halford has answered Gilbert's previous letter, encouraging him to continue narrating the story begun in Chapter 1. Thus the initial social interaction is between the Gilbert Markham of 1847 and Halford. This primary interaction, though rarely alluded to explicitly, will continue to be implicit in all the action of the book. Even as Gilbert enters into the story in the second paragraph, he refers back to his previous letter to Halford, thereby anchoring the narrative to the relation with Halford. The direct address to Halford also lets us know that some time has passed since the previous chapter which concluded with Gilbert asking Halford whether he wanted to learn the rest of the story. Within the narrative, Chapter 1 takes place October 25-28, 1827 with Chapter 2 occurring two days later. However, within the enveloping frame of the letters, written in 1847, a much longer period has probably passed. Because Gilbert does not need to mark the passage of 1847 time for Halford, the indications that this time is passing are more likely provided by the author for the readers of the novel.

The implication of an author speaking to the readers complicates an already complex narrative situation. The Gilbert of 1847, writing the letters, often separates himself from the Gilbert of 1827, so that the “I” who is acting in the narrative is not identical with the “I” who is narrating the events. But events at times lead us to question the Gilbert of 1847 even as he frequently belittles the Gilbert of 1827. The details that allow us to question the older Gilbert, though provided by his narration, suggest an implied author overlooking the narrator and separate from him.

Sentences two to ten of chapter 2 form a coherent narrative leading Gilbert from his fields to Wildfell Hall and his first encounter with the new tenant. He is depicted out hunting alone but he is nonetheless involved in a complicated social interaction. Though he is deliberately moving toward Wildfell Hall, he is careful to avoid stating his intention to do so. First, the narrator wishes to meet the new tenant of Wildfell Hall but he does not wish to disclose the nature of his interest. He saw Mrs. Graham at a distance in church two days before; he finds her attractive and may wish to establish some sort of acquaintanceship with her. However, he does not wish to admit this interest even to himself because he is informally but obviously courting someone else. He told himself, Halford, and the reader that he was put off by her appearance in church on the previous Sunday. Because he has already gratuitously insisted to himself that he was not attracted to her, he must find a way to get to Wildfell Hall without allowing himself to perceive in himself any deliberate intention to go there.

Also, much of the first chapter focused upon the discovery that Mrs. Graham was living at Wildfell and upon the efforts of members of the small community to learn

information about her to fuel gossip. Though the new tenant is, at the moment, the central topic of gossip in the community, Gilbert wishes to dissimulate his interest in this gossip. He adopts, at least in his comments to Halford, a tone of amused distance from the preoccupation with the news of his mother and sister. On the other hand, he wants to see the house and its occupant himself and pick up some new information that he can share with others. Because he has already indicated that he keeps himself somewhat apart from the collection and dissemination of gossip, he cannot make a deliberate visit to Wildfell as the others have done.

Both of these goals conflict with Gilbert's presentation of himself and require that he somehow arrive at Wildfell without deliberately forming any intention to go there. The solution that he provides is to embark upon a hunt that may lead him along a devious path toward Wildfell without his conscious awareness of his direction. Other problems arise from Gilbert's description of his actions. His reason for neglecting the farm work on a Tuesday morning to go with his shotgun looking for game is unconvincing. And, should he find hunting necessary, he might not necessarily look for game in the direction of Wildfell unless he has other unstated motives for wandering off in that direction. He explains that he could find only meager game on his property and so he decided to pursue predators that may have depleted the game animals on his farm. The fact that he needed to wander so far afield suggests that there may not have been so many predators about that it was necessary to dedicate his time to them rather than to farm labors. The whole hunting pretext gives only a feeble justification for leaving his work and going to Wildfell Hall.

The author has additional purposes in this text that go beyond those of the narrator. She is introducing the reader to *Wildfell Hall* and its vicinity. She wants to create a Romantic impression of wild nature. She has said in the Preface that a purpose of her novel is to tell the truth. It has been argued that one of her motivations in *Wildfell Hall* was to respond to the Romantic fantasizing of her sister Emily's novel, *Wuthering Heights*. In this scene she is creating a highly romanticized natural landscape that parallels that of *Wuthering Heights*. (The name *Wildfell Hall* echoes *Wuthering Heights*.) Gilbert's description of the landscape he passes through introduces a conventionally Romantic backdrop for what will be a realistic narrative with overtones of naturalism and classical satire. Gilbert's attitude toward the landscape, however, tends to deflate the romanticism of the scene.

On the surface, the language in this excerpt is focused upon describing the landscape that the narrator passes through on his way to *Wildfell Hall*. Though Gilbert presents the walk as a hunting excursion, we know from the previous chapter that the narrative will focus on the Gilbert's acquaintance with Mrs. Graham and that getting to *Wildfell Hall* is the central concern. That the text is a novel, probably a domestic romance, already clear in the previous chapter, guides our understanding of the events in the early chapters, including this excerpt. The text is written to be read. It is a novel and within the novel it is a series of letters. It is, in fact, a fairly extreme example of the conventions of written in contrast to spoken language, with about fifty-eight percent of the words content-bearing. An exchange of letters might tend to be informal and interactive but, as we only have Gilbert's letters here, the interaction is minimized. The

sense of a polished final draft is reinforced by Gilbert, who informs Halford that he is selecting and editing material from old notes and journals. The tenor of the text is ambiguous. The ostensible relationship between Markham and Halford is one of equal power. They are supposedly close friends as well as brothers-in-law. There is no indication within the text of any difference between them in rank, wealth, power, ability or reputation. Contact between them, however, is clearly infrequent. Markham is a farmer and Halford lives in the city. They communicate principally through letters but we do not know how often they exchange correspondence. Their affective involvement is ambiguous. Almost every time he addresses Halford, Markham stresses the closeness of their relationship, but this almost obsequious attitude may itself be an indicator of distance.

The Address to Halford

Before considering the narrative of Gilbert's walk to Wildfell Hall found in sentences 2-10, we will briefly look at sentence 1, the first clause cluster, containing five clauses and providing structural information regarding the format of the novel.

I perceive, with joy, my most valued friend, that the cloud of your displeasure has passed away; the light of your countenance blesses me once more, and you desire the continuation of my story: therefore, without more ado, you shall have it. (Bronte 1966: 25)

This sentence, linking the text that follows to the framework of a personal story owed to Halford, provides the pretext for the rest of the novel. One of the goals of the text, on the part of the narrator is to construct the image that he wants to project to his brother-in-law.

As part of this goal he adapts his description of his activity to what he assumes his brother-in-law will expect. In this first sentence, we can see that Gilbert wishes to assure Halford of the importance he gives to the opinions of the latter. He calls him “my most valued friend”, claims to feel joy at Halford’s positive response, calls his displeasure a cloud, and, with the passing of the cloud, perceives that “the light of your countenance blesses me”. Each of these affirmations serves partly to emphasize the consequence that Halford’s reactions have for Gilbert. For the reader, the moments when Gilbert directly addresses Halford by name are key opportunities to observe the social role relationships enacted by the two men, but, because we have only one side of the exchange, our understanding of the relationship can only be partial.

Gilbert’s effusiveness in flattering Halford seems somewhat false as a tone of speech between two close friends, as does the lexical density of the selection. Eggins (2004, pp. 100-101) identifies three scales (power, contact and affective involvement) along which language use in a communication event can be placed. Informal situations tend to be characterized by equal power relationships, frequent contact and high affective involvement among the participants. The tenor of the text may derive from the temporary emotional distance between the two caused by Halford’s irritation at Gilbert’s failure to share intimate details of his life. This might prompt Gilbert to insist upon his closeness to Halford. It may be the physical distance that produces the formal effect. Gilbert and Halford are not in frequent contact because one lives in the city and other in the country. Gilbert may, therefore feel more need to express his feelings explicitly. Gilbert’s tone may derive from his family connection to Halford, a relationship that may lead him to

overstate his feelings because he believes it is necessary that he maintain the friendship. If Gilbert felt comfortable with Halford, he might have been more inclined to argue and less to flatter. On the other hand, the formality of the address may simply be ironic exaggeration, in line with the half-serious, ironic tone that Gilbert remains through much of the narrative.

In this key sentence, though Gilbert establishes the pretext for continuing with the rest of the novel, he seems anxious to shift responsibility for what follows. In the first clause, 'I' functions as the senser of a mental process. What he senses are the mental states of Halford: 'the cloud of your displeasure' and 'the light of your countenance'. Though these two clauses seem to involve actors and material processes, displeasure is itself a mental concept, and both phrases may be used metaphorically, expressing mental processes as if they were material processes. The fourth clause, also a mental process, assigns to Halford the only overtly expressed purpose in the sentence, the desire to read the story. With the final clause, Gilbert makes Halford the carrier of a possessive process but does not directly associate himself with the story. Halford and we both understand that Gilbert is committing himself to narrating the history to Halford but Gilbert nonetheless seems unwilling to state his involvement directly.

Identity Chain 2 'you': Though this text is ostensibly part of a letter from Markham to Halford, there is no reference to Halford after the first clause cluster. One further use of 'you' in 3.11 substitutes for 'one' and has no relation to Halford

Gilbert Markham's Attitudes and Intentions

The walk to Wildfell Hall is narrated in nine sentences, including fifty-seven main clauses and fifteen embedded clauses. Gilbert begins, “I think the day I last mentioned was a certain Sunday, the latest in the October of 1827” (Bronte, 1966, p. 25). Although this cluster contains two main clauses and an embedded clause, the first clause can be considered a mood adjunct to the following clause. (Eggins, 2004). The second clause is projected by the first and contains the phenomenon of the mental process of the first clause.

He continues with a clause cluster containing five main clauses and one embedded clause:

“On the following Tuesday I was out with my dog and gun, in pursuit of such game as I could find within the territory of Linden-Car; but finding none at all, I turned my arms against the hawks and carrion crows, whose depredations, as I suspected, had deprived me of better prey. (Bronte 1966: 25)

To go hunting would seem to be a concrete material action. But, in clause 2.3, rather than making himself an actor in this process, he turns himself into a carrier, as if to deny volition in the circumstances he is describing. In 2.5 he, once again, had an opportunity to express his actions in a more direct manner. Although either form makes him the actor, to turn his arms against the hawks is much less direct than to shoot at the hawks. He takes credit for moving the gun but does not express the concrete act of firing it at an object.

With the third clause cluster, Gilbert reports that he changed the direction of his walk and thereafter he focuses upon describing the landscape he is passing through. In

saying “I left the more frequented regions,” he describes himself as the actor in a material process, but he clarifies that his purpose was an extension of the hunt, to search for predators. He does not focus attention on himself again until the seventh clause cluster when he recalls his childhood impressions of Wildfell Hall. In the eighth clause cluster he returns to the theme of hunting and to describing his own actions on the excursion.

I had succeeded in killing a hawk and two crows when I came within sight of the mansion; and then, relinquishing further depredations, I sauntered on, to have a look at the old place, and see what changes had been wrought in it by its new inhabitant. (Bronte 1966: 26)

The eighth clause cluster contains six main clauses and one embedded clause. In contrast to the earlier clusters, he places himself as an actor in a material process in the first four clauses. Nonetheless, he continues to avoid direct actions. In the clause 8.44 “succeeded in killing” is what Orwell would call a verbal false limb substituting a softening phrase for an exact verb. “I killed” would have been a stronger statement. In clause 8.45, “came within sight of” sounds less like a reaching a destination than “arrived at” would have. The material process “sauntered” in clause 8.46 is describes one of the less purposeful ways of walking. Finally “relinquishing” in 8.47 suggests an act that is essentially passive.

The final clause cluster, consisting of seven non-embedded clauses, involves Gilbert in five processes:

I did not like to go quite to the front and stare in at the gate; but I paused beside the garden wall, and looked, and saw no change - except in one wing, where the broken

windows and dilapidated roof had evidently been repaired, and where a thin wreath of smoke was curling up from the stack of chimneys. (Bronte 1966: 26)

He tells us in clause 9.50 that he doesn't want to go to the front, in 9.51 that he doesn't want to stare, in 9.52 that he paused, in 9.53 that he looked and in 9.54 that he saw few changes. The only material process is pausing.

Gilbert's grammatical choices in describing his walk to Wildfell Hall combine to create an impression of accidental movement as will become clear when we consider the implications of his statements. He began his first clause cluster (Sentence 2) with "I think". This clause serves the key function of calibrating the relation of the narrator to the narration. The story and Halford's reaction to the story are both important to him but he does not wish to show his eagerness to his correspondent. The "I think" allows him to adopt a casual tone toward the information he is recording. He knows exactly what he has already described and he has been eagerly awaiting Halford's reply. By introducing an element of uncertainty into the following statement he is essentially denying both that Halford's response to his offer of the story is so important to him and that the retelling of the story (no matter to whom) means so much to him. The author uses the discrepancy between what he is feeling and the words he chooses to express himself to illustrate his tendency to posture or to hide his real motivations and reactions.

This tendency is apparent throughout the excerpt. The narrator remains actively involved in the narrative through much of the text, referring to himself and to objects in some relation to him. In the third and fourth clause clusters, focused on description of the

landscape, he shifts attention from himself momentarily but then begins with references to him and four concludes by relating the description back to him. In the fifth, sixth and seventh clause clusters, he describes Wildfell Hall and its grounds. Though he indicates his presence through mood, he does not refer explicitly to himself until the last two clauses in the seventh cluster. Clause 7.43 contains only plural references to himself and his siblings. Of the six clauses in the eighth cluster, 'I' is the subject of three. Though the other three clauses do not explicitly refer to 'I', he is the unstated actor of the fourth, behavior of the fifth and sener of the sixth. In the ninth clause cluster, 'I' is the explicit subject of only two clauses, but it is the elliptic subject of the main verb of three other clauses: 'stare', 'looked' and 'saw'. Specific references to 'I' exist, then, in eight of the ten clause clusters with only five and six lacking any direct reference to the narrator. 'I' occurs thirteen times in ten clause clusters. In four other cases ({I} proceeded, 3.9; {I DID NOT LIKE TO} stare, 9.51; {I} looked, 9.53; {I} saw, 9.54), 'I' is the necessary subject of the verb though it is not stated. In addition to these instances where 'I' functions as a subject, the narrator uses the possessive 'my' in six clauses and the objective 'me' in two.

Clause 1.1 distances the narrator emotionally from the narration by feigning uncertain memory as to the content of the previous letter he had sent Halford. Although it is significant in establishing the tone that the narrator wishes to take at this moment toward his material, it does not directly involve 'I' in the narrative. Beginning with clause complex 2, the 'I' becomes a character moving through the events of the story. Although more than half the explicit occurrences of 'I' are found in material processes, the narrator

seems to want to diminish the element of volition in several of his constructions. We see this clearly in 2.3, a clause that describes an act as though it were a relation. Rather than saying that he was hunting, the narrator merely says he “was out with my dog and gun”. “Was out” suggests passivity; the narrator is not actually *doing* anything in this process. Among the material processes, 2.5 also seems to downplay the subject as actor. Rather than saying he shot at the birds of prey, he says he “turned my arms against” them. Although we might understand that he fired the guns, the clause only says that he moved the gun (or the dog) not that he fired it. In 8.44 when he specifies that he did kill some birds he employs a verbal false limb to cushion the action. (“I had succeeded in killing” rather than “I had killed”.) The one relational and two material processes using ‘I’ plus one embedded material process (2.3.1) and one interrupting mental process (2.7) realize the entire hunting element in the text. This hunting excursion, limited to the second and eighth clause complexes, provides the pretext for getting the narrator to Wildfell Hall.

References to hunting are of three types: to prey, predators and the process and tools of depredation. ‘Such game’, ‘none’ and ‘better prey’ are an identity chain. The hawks and crows relate to the game as predators but to Markham as prey. The repeated word ‘depredations’ refers in clause 2.6 to the depredations of the hawks and crows but in clause 8.45 to Gilbert’s depredations. The terms that Gilbert uses to describe the hunting process are revealing in that they are indirect or general. Rather than hunting he is ‘out with my dog and gun’. Rather than firing at the hawks and crows, he ‘turned my gun against’ them. Even the direct action of killing is softened with a more general verb, ‘succeeded in killing’. Although hunting is the activity that Markham offers as the pretext

for walking to Wildfell Hall, he seems to wish to reinforce the passive nature of his participation even in the hunting.

TABLE 2: References to Hunting

	Prey	Predators	Process and tools
2.3	such game		Out with my dog and gun, In pursuit
2.4	None		finding
2.5	The hawks and carrion crows		Turned my arms against
2.6	Better prey		depredations
8.45	A hawk and two crows		Succeeded in killing
8.47			Further depredations

A more significant group of nine clauses beginning in the third clause complex focuses directly on moving the narrator toward the hall. Clause 3.8 tells us that he left the more frequented regions. This action is described negatively telling us what he turned away from not what he turned toward. The following clause (3.9), which specifies that he “proceeded to mount the steep acclivity of Wildfell” has no stated subject. So, though the narrator indicated what he was leaving behind, he avoided, through ellipsis, an explicit statement that ‘I’ was advancing toward Wildfell Hall. The third and fourth clause complexes then turn to description of the vegetation along the way and the fifth, sixth and seventh to an introduction to Wildfell Hall and its grounds. The narrator does not return to his own actions until the eighth clause complex.

In 8.45, ‘I’ reaches Wildfell Hall. But he says “I came within sight of the mansion.” We might deduce from this statement that he happened accidentally upon the mansion as he was out hunting and this seems to be the impression that he wishes to create. There is no suggestion of volition in the formula ‘I came within sight’. The

following statement that he relinquished ‘further depredations’ might indicate that he decided when he saw the hall to go look at it. The more probable sequence, however, is that he had intended to visit the hall since before leaving his own farm. 8.46 (I sauntered on) makes the narrator unequivocally an actor moving deliberately toward Wildfell Hall. And yet, ‘sauntered’ has a haphazard, unhurried, perhaps undirected tone to it that subtracts from the purposefulness of the walk. In the ninth clause complex, the processes associated with ‘I’ tend to focus upon absence. Having arrived at Wildfell Hall, the narrator first says, “I did not like to go quite to the front”. This mental process has a negative polarity, one of only two explicit negatives in the text. He continues, “and stare in at the gate”. This clause is truncated by ellipsis. The complete idea is “and I did not like to stare in at the gate”. The following clause (9.52) reads, “but I paused beside the garden wall.” The action in this material process is to temporarily desist from the ongoing action of sauntering. Pause indicates a brief cessation of movement between actions. It does not indicate a final stop at a destination. The effect of this term, then, is to deny that Wildfell Hall is the intended destination of his walk. As he paused, he engaged in one behavioral process (looked) and one mental process (saw) but he eliminated himself from a direct relation to these processes by omitting the subject (I) of the clauses.

Of the nine clauses that show ‘I’ moving toward and arriving at Wildfell Hall, there is none that indicates an intention to do so, Only “I sauntered on” combines ‘I’ with movement toward the hall, but the verb itself undercuts the directness of the action. The more volitional verbs ‘proceeded’ and ‘looked’ occur in elliptical constructions where the ‘I’ is omitted. The overall effect of this sequence of clauses is to create the impression

that Markham arrived accidentally at Wildfell Hall and merely paused to glance at it before going on.

TABLE 3: Transitivity: Process Types

clause	Subject	Process	Function
P.1	I (perceive)	Mental	Senser
1,1	I (think)	Mental	Senser
1.2.1	I (last mentioned)	Verbal	Sayer
2.3	I (was)	Intensive	Carrier
2.3.1	I (could find)	Material	Actor
2.5	I (turned)	Material	Actor
2.7	I (suspected)	Mental	Senser
3.8	I (left)	Material	Actor
3.9	{I} (proceeded)	Material	Actor
8.44	I (had succeeded)	Material	Actor
8.45	I (came)	Material	Actor
8,46	I (sauntered)	Material	Actor
9.50	I (did not like to go)	Mental	Senser
9.51	{I (DID NOT LIKE TO) stare}	Mental	Senser
9.52	I (paused)	Material	Actor
9,53	{I} (looked)	Behavioral	Behavior
9.54	{1} (saw)	Mental	Senser

Altogether, Gilbert refers to himself as I seventeen times, explicitly in seven material, four mental, one verbal and one relational process and elliptically in one material, two mental, and one behavioral process. He also refers to himself with others in the plural as part of the community (3.9) or as part of a group of siblings (7.44).

Description of the Landscape

Beginning with the third clause cluster, Gilbert leaves his fields and begins climbing the slopes of Wildfell. Immediately, he posits a contrast between fertile valleys and the desolate hill.

To this end, I left the more frequented regions, the wooded valleys, the cornfields, and the meadow lands, and proceeded to mount the steep acclivity of Wildfell, the wildest and the loftiest eminence in our neighbourhood, where, as you ascend, the hedges, as well as the trees, become scanty and stunted, the former, at length, giving place to rough stone fences, partly greened over with ivy and moss, the latter to larches and Scotch fir-trees, or isolated blackthorns. (Bronte 1966: 25)

Clause complex 3 establishes an opposition between ‘more frequented regions’ and ‘the steep acclivity’. Clause 3.8 lists the subcategories within the superordinate ‘more frequented regions’ while 3.9 describes ‘the steep acclivity of Wildfell’. ‘The wooded valleys, the cornfields and the meadow lands’ are co-hyponymous terms, all subordinate to ‘more frequented regions; ‘the steep acclivity of Wildfell is mirrored in the ‘the wildest and loftiest eminence’. 3.9 stresses wildness and steepness or loftiness as the elements that provide the contrast to the ‘more frequented regions’ but 3.10 adds ‘scanty and stunted’. These two adjectives imply that the vegetation on the slopes of Wildfell is deficient both because it is infrequent and because those plants that grow are small or weak.

This clause cluster already suggests some significant aspects of the contrasting ecologies. On one hand, nature becomes depleted (stunted, scanty) as Gilbert moves up the hillside, while on the other it seems to move aggressively against the abundant environment of the valley, which can be seen ‘giving place’. ‘Giving place,’ however, is

not a material process, though it may seem to be. Rather we might see it as a statement of relation. The hedges cannot be carriers or tokens; they are not presented as either similar to or different from the rough stone fences, which merely substitute for the hedges. In the present tense If substitution can be taken as a relation, then this process is relational. The problem presented by the ‘partly greened over’ fences is somewhat different. Here the moss and ivy might be taken as actors but the preposition ‘with’ seems to make them means, leaving no explicit actor or relational participant. In clause 3.14, the second use of ‘giving place’ involves a change in the kinds of trees rather than an elimination of trees similar to the earlier elimination of hedges.

The description that follows in the fourth clause complex refers back to these verbs several times as it continues providing details of the physical characteristics and the flora of the hillside. The description of the fields ‘devoted’ to sheep-pasturing seems to be a disguised causative (e.g: The fields were made to pasture sheep.) but might also be another relational process. There is a strong feeling that everything is out of place, rocks poking up from the plant cover, plants growing out of the stone walls, and weeds the only plants able to thrive. The hedges that were becoming scanty in 3.10 ‘give place’ to stone walls in 3.12 and in general the stoniness of the fields and poorness of the soil are stressed in 4. Wild vegetation only partly greens over the stone. Even the wildness that is recalled in 4.19 is merely a relic of something more savage.

Gilbert’s description of the fields seems to focus on three attributes: the small number and reduced variety of plants, the smallness and deformity of the plants that do grow, and the barren, infertile condition of the land.

TABLE 4: Attributes of the Fields

3.10	Scanty	Stunted	
3.12	Giving place		Rough stone fences
3.13		Partly greened over	
3.14	Isolated		
4.16			Rough and stoney, Wholly unfit for the plough
4.17			Thin, poor soil
4.18			Bits of grey rock
4.19	Relics, Scanty herbiage		

This general panorama of barrenness is not complete. The suggestion of wildness is always present beside it. But, in these two clause complexes, wildness is implied in the type of vegetation that is mentioned (ivy and moss, larches and Scotch fir-trees, blackthorns, bilberry plants and heather, ragweeds and rushes). That these forms of vegetation are associated either with wildness or scantiness can be derived from the tone of the author as well as what we know about the plants.

In addition, the descriptions that Gilbert provides of the fields come close to suggesting volition on the part of nature. Clauses 3.18 and 3.19, for example, might be analyzed as material processes (or, in the case of 3.18, a behavioral process)

TABLE 5: Volition in Nature

Bits of grey rock	Peeped out	From the grassy hillocks
Bilberry plants and heather	grew	Under the walls
Actor	Pr: material	Circ: location

Such an analysis would require personification because, literally, bits of grey rock may not be granted sufficient mental capacity to engage in behavioral processes. Bits of rocks

can perhaps peep out metaphorically, however. Clause 3.18 might be better analyzed as a metaphorical expression of a relational process, while clause 3.19 could be an attributive process. In each case, however, Gilbert's language introduces ambiguity that suggests greater purpose on the part of rocks and plants.

At the close of this clause cluster, Gilbert refers back to himself, telling Halford that, "these were not *my* property" (Bronte, 1966, p. 25), an odd denial as no one suspected they were. Gilbert's intention in this denial seems to have been to state clearly, if any doubt may have existed, that he did not approve of the condition of the fields he was passing through.

The fifth clause cluster brings us to the third paragraph of the chapter. Gilbert notes that Wildfell Hall stands near the top of the hillside he is climbing and provides a description of it. The cluster contains five main clauses and two embedded clauses. Clause 5.22, the longest of the excerpt, introduces to a building and yard that share many characteristics with the fields he has been passing through. Clause 5.25 is a repetition of 3.13, demonstrating that the processes that have been causing the fields to deteriorate parallel and perhaps foreshadow processes that have caused the house to decay. The suggestion of will or aggression that we noted in some of the processes referring to the fields is made more visible here, especially in clauses 5.24 and 5.25, which use material or pseudo-material processes and images of struggle (only shielded from the war of wind and weather by a group of Scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms,) to describe what are essentially spatial relations.

TABLA 6: Attributes of Wildfell Hall

	old	Dark	Dilapidated	isolated
5.22	Superannuated Elizabethan era Venerable, picturesque	Cold and gloomy Thick stone mullions Little latticed panes	Time-eaten air- holes	Too lonely Too unsheltered
5.23		Dark grey stone		
5.24				Only shielded
5.26		Stern and gloomy		
5.27				Desolate fields
7.44		ghostly, haunted hall legends, Dark traditions		
8.46				
8.49	The old place			
9.56			Broken windows Dilapidated roof	

The terms employed to describe the house center on its age, gloom, dilapidation, and isolation

Complex clauses 5-7 bringing us first to Wildfell Hall and then to the fields and garden around the Hall continue the motifs of both excess (wild) and lack (scanty, stunted) The Scotch-firs in 5.24 have already been identified by the narrator in 3.14 as among the wild vegetation that replaced the trees as he ascended Wildfell. But they are also ‘half-blighted with storms’, thereby reminding us of the stunted condition of the vegetation on the hill. The source of some of the deficiency in the vegetation can be traced to the extreme weather conditions, referred to at least once in each of the three clause complexes. ‘Stern and gloomy’ can be considered an attribute of wildness because it identifies the Scotch firs with a strong emotional content. ‘Brown’ can be taken as an

attribute of scanty because we assume the vegetation on the summit would be green if it were luxuriant. ‘Once stocked with hardy plants’ tells us that it is no longer so stocked and therefore must be fairly barren if even hardy plants are no longer there. Finally the ‘goblinish appearance’ of 7.43, like the ‘fantastic shapes’ of the previous clause, implies wild imagining provoked by the undisciplined natural landscape.

The motifs present on Gilbert’s climb up the hillside are concentrated in the spaces around *Wildfell Hall*.

TABLE 7: Attributes of the surrounding Garden and Fields

	Wild	Scanty	stunted
5.24	Scotch-firs, War of wind and weather		
5.25	With storms		Half-blighted
5.26	Stern and gloomy		
5.27		Desolate fields	
5.28	heath-clad	Brown	
6.33		Once stocked with hardy plants	
6.35	Now, untilled, untrimmed,		
6.36	abandoned to weeds and grass Frost, wind, rain,	drought	
7.37			Two thirds withered away
7.39	Grown beyond all reasonable bounds		
7.42	Sprouted into fantastic shapes		
7.43	Goblinish appearance		

The garden attached to the mansion is a central element in his description, apparently warranting more detail than the hall itself. It may be that the deterioration of the property is more readily visible in the garden or it may be only that, as Gilbert has not yet entered the mansion, he sees the garden in more detail.

Conclusions

This text takes Gilbert from his farm Linden-Car to Wildfell Hall and his first meeting with its occupants. But more than that, it introduces us to Gilbert's characteristic pattern of conduct. Reaching Wildfell Hall, he says, "I sauntered on, to have a look at the old place, and see what changes had been wrought in it by its new inhabitant". This is not a true statement of his purpose in stopping at Wildfell. Throughout the novel, he dissembles his intentions, sometimes to himself and sometimes to others. His arrival at Wildfell Hall in this excerpt foreshadows his reactions at two critical moments later in the story. In Chapter 10 (Bronte, 1966, p. 79), Markham has not seen Mrs. Graham for about a week, since a party at Linden-Car at which Jane Wilson and others spread rumors about her. He has unsuccessfully tried to encounter her accidentally on his daily walks, but he finally decides he must talk to her immediately. He walks to Wildfell Hall. When he arrives, she asks him if he would like to come in. He answers, "Yes, I should like to see your improvements in the garden." The improvements have nothing to do with his reasons for visiting Wildfell Hall at that moment, just as they are not his reason for the walk to Wildfell Hall that we have just considered.

In the final chapter of the novel (Bronte, 1966, p. 268), Markham has traveled across England, first to Grassdale then to the Manor and finally to Staningley, searching for Mrs. Graham. She passes in a carriage as he stands outside the gates of Staningley. She sees him, stops the carriage to greet him, and asks, "Were you coming to see us or were you only passing by?" Markham makes his characteristic evasion. "I-I came to see the place, I faltered" This response clearly disappoints Mrs. Graham and

nearly closes the interview. In this excerpt, before Markham's first encounter with Mrs. Graham, he is already demonstrating the evasion that will nearly defeat him. In each of the critical moments, just as in this first visit to Wildfell Hall, Gilbert claims an interest in 'seeing the place' as a cover for his true motives.

The second insight to be gained from this passage concerns the Gilbert's or Bronte's attitude toward nature. Although there are only two sentences with a negative polarity (These were not my property, I did not like to go) many of the statements contain implicit negatives. Much of the setting is described in terms of what it lacks. The lack is basically of discipline or of order, submission to the norms of civilization, form. Much of the problem with the landscape derives from uncontrolled growth or uncontrolled forces of nature. Outside human control the forces of nature seem to produce warped results.

Each of the two negative sentences provides significant commentary upon the text as a whole. When the narrator says 'but these were not *my* property, he is stressing his negative impression of the natural landscape he is passing through. The implication is that he would not have let the land deteriorate to this level if it had been his responsibility. This comment serves to conclude the description of the setting that he is passing through and to orient the attitude of the reader in case he has not grasped the drift of the description. It is the strongest editorial comment in the text selection even without the italics on '*my*'.

'I did not like to go quite to the front and stare in at the gate', though on the surface a less compromising statement, also serves as the summary of a major motif of the novel. In this excerpt, Gilbert has moved from Linden-Car to Wildfell Hall indirectly,

using the pretext of hunting and carefully obscuring the volition behind his actions. When he finally arrives, he misstates his purpose, claiming that he was only interested in observing the changes that had been made to the Hall. When he tells us that he doesn't like to go quite to the front and stare, he summarizes his mode of operation throughout this excerpt and through the rest of the novel. Rather than going directly to the front, he moves indirectly and dissembles his intentions to himself and to others. This indirection, his inability to face or to state his true intentions, will emerge as the central flaw in Gilbert's character, one that, as we saw earlier, nearly destroys his chances with Mrs. Graham.

CHAPTER 8. SOMETHING IN THAT SMILE: FACEWORK AT WILDFELL HALL

Chapter II: Sentences 20-32

'Give me the child!' she said, in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, but with a tone of startling vehemence, and, seizing the boy, she snatched him from me, as if some dire contamination were in my touch, and then stood with one hand firmly clasping his, the other on his shoulder, fixing upon me her large, luminous, dark eyes - pale, breathless, quivering with agitation.

'I was not harming the child, madam,' said I, scarce knowing whether to be most astonished or displeased; 'he was tumbling off the wall there; and I was so fortunate as to catch him, while he hung suspended headlong from that tree, and prevent I know not what catastrophe.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' stammered she; - suddenly calming down, - the light of reason seeming to break upon her beclouded spirit and a faint blush mantling on her cheek - 'I did not know you; - and I thought --'

She stooped to kiss the child, and fondly clasped her arm round his neck.

'You thought I was going to kidnap your son, I suppose?'

'I did not know he had attempted to climb the wall. I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Markham, I believe?' she added, somewhat abruptly.

I bowed, but ventured to ask how she knew me.

'Your sister called here, a few days ago, with Mrs. Markham.'

'Is the resemblance so strong then?' I asked, in some surprise, and not so greatly flattered at the idea as I ought to have been.

'There is a likeness about the eyes and complexion, I think,' replied she, somewhat dubiously surveying my face; - 'and I think I saw you at church on Sunday.'

I smiled. There was something either in that smile or the recollections it awakened that was particularly displeasing to her, for she suddenly assumed again that proud, chilly look that had so unspeakably roused my corruption at church - a look of repellent scorn, so easily assumed, and so entirely without the least distortion of a single feature that, while there, it seemed like the natural expression of the face, and was the more provoking to me, because I could not think it affected.

'Good morning, Mr. Markham,' said she; and without another word or glance, she withdrew with her child into the garden; and I returned home, angry and dissatisfied - I could scarcely tell you why - and therefore will not attempt it.

The series of encounters between Gilbert Markham and his mother and siblings on the evening of October 25, 1827 demonstrated some of the complications of facework within a transitional context where one participant might see his role as changing while others fail to note or are unwilling to acknowledge the change. His interaction with Mrs. Graham outside *Wildfell Hall* on October 30, introduces a distinct group of problems. In

this case the participants do not know each other. They have never spoken and, except for glimpsing each other from opposite sides of the room during a church service on Sunday, October 28, neither has previously seen the other. Neither should have clearly developed expectations based on past interactions with the other though each may have preliminary opinions of the other based on hearsay. The Sunday interchange of looks also left Gilbert dissatisfied with Mrs. Graham's reactions and she may have been equally displeased with him.

Goffman (1967, p. 15) advises that "The surest way for a person to prevent threats to his face is to avoid contacts in which these threats are likely to occur". Mrs. Graham seems to be adopting this strategy to the extent that she can by avoiding contact with her neighbors, keeping visitors distant, and developing excuses for not going out to return calls. Gilbert, on the other hand, has exposed himself with this excursion to Wildfell Hall. He knows two relevant things about Mrs. Graham: a) She has seemed unfriendly to those who have visited her so far and b) she seemed to look scornfully at him in church two days before. He might assume, therefore, that visitors in general, and he in particular, risked receiving a cold welcome. If he had wanted to avoid an unpleasant scene or to reduce the likelihood of a threat to his face, he might simply have avoided Wildfell Hall. As it is, he has employed some avoidance strategies. He makes his visit accidental and inadvertent and he stops outside Wildfell Hall as though he were a passerby rather than a visitor. From one perspective, a chance encounter might be less presumptuous than a deliberate visit and therefore less likely to provoke threats. On the other hand, he risks

being viewed as a prying neighbor, attempting to spy on Mrs. Graham without even showing the courtesy of pretending to call on her.

As Gilbert stands outside Wildfell Hall, he gets a lucky break. Mrs. Graham's young son, Arthur, attempts to climb over a fence, catches his coat on a tree branch, and falls. Suspended from the branch, he seeks to disentangle himself from the tree and then falls again, screaming. Gilbert catches him. The fall could not have been very far and the entanglement with the branch made it even shorter. Nonetheless Gilbert's intervention ought to have won a little gratitude from the mother. Mrs. Graham rushes out, drawn by her son's scream and, unaware of the situation, demands the child from Gilbert and snatches him away as if he were in great danger. This confrontation between Gilbert and Mrs. Graham leads to a three-phase encounter. The first phase involves correction of the disequilibrium brought about by Mrs. Graham's opening demand. This is followed by an attempt at normal conversation. Finally, the interaction breaks down in the midst of ambiguous misunderstanding.

'Give me the child!' she said, in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, but with a tone of startling vehemence, and, seizing the boy, she snatched him from me, as if some dire contamination were in my touch, and then stood with one hand firmly clasping his, the other on his shoulder, fixing upon me her large, luminous, dark eyes - pale, breathless, quivering with agitation.

'I was not harming the child, madam,' said I, scarce knowing whether to be most astonished or displeased; 'he was tumbling off the wall there; and I was so fortunate as to catch him, while he hung suspended headlong from that tree, and prevent I know not what catastrophe.'

Mrs. Graham is obviously agitated and her response may have been seen as extreme in 1827 when there was less cultural preoccupation with predators on children.

Not only does she grab the child and hold him tightly, but she then turns and stares defiantly at Gilbert. Her actions are quite understandable. She has heard her son scream and rushed out to find a strange man holding his hand and apparently threatening him with a large dog. Gilbert, however, is ‘astonished’ and angered. As a neighbor, he should have been welcomed as a visitor and she should not have reacted as if he harbored criminal intentions against her son. He tells her what has happened and insists he was not harming the child. His description of the sequence of events is substantially correct but his suggestion of catastrophe if he had not intervened seems wildly overstated. It is unclear why he would feel the need to conclude with an absurdly exaggerated statement of the danger from which he had rescued Arthur. It may be that he sensed a threat to his face arising out of the situation. Goffman (1967, p. 5) defines face as “the positive social value the person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken for himself during a particular contact” Helen, with the ‘startling vehemence’ of her initial order and her agitated stare, treats Gilbert almost as a criminal. His immediate reaction, augmented by his customary theatricality, is to transform himself into a savior. Because the threat to his face was so extreme, it provoked an excessive defense.

Helen’s action was threatening because it was outside the normal range of reactions that he might have expected. Goffman (1967, p. 2) argues that norms of order exist “within and between” all units of interaction. By stepping outside these norms of order, Mrs. Graham created an incident requiring corrective facework. Gilbert is offended by her response and his description of the events is in part a challenge to her, calling attention to her misconduct.

Unknown to Gilbert or the readers, Mrs. Graham has good reasons for her forceful response. She is hiding illegally from her husband and has taken her son with her despite his father's absolute custody rights. She is aware that he is trying to obtain the return of his son and she could reasonably fear kidnapping. On the other hand, her neighbors can not know of her situation because she is trying to remain hidden. Neither Gilbert nor the readers can understand her surprising reaction at this point in the narrative. Mrs. Graham's underlying secrets are, nonetheless, part of this interaction as they are part of all her early interactions, governing the behaviors that she exhibits and at times leading her to act in ways that are unexpected to the neighbors.

Mrs. Graham is not, even at her best, a skilled communicator. We have already seen that Gilbert, too, has trouble with interactions, even within his own family. Given the social ineptness of the participants, the serious misunderstanding that begins the interchange, and the complexity of the underlying issues, this interaction may not be a skilled or successful one.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' stammered she; - suddenly calming down, - the light of reason seeming to break upon her beclouded spirit and a faint blush mantling on her cheek - 'I did not know you; - and I thought --'
 She stooped to kiss the child, and fondly clasped her arm round his neck.
 'You thought I was going to kidnap your son, I suppose?'
 'I did not know he had attempted to climb the wall.'

With Gilbert's explanation, Mrs. Graham takes in the situation and realizes that she has misjudged it. When she grasps the situation, she also realizes that she has transgressed norms of polite behavior and she accepts Gilbert's explanation of the events as a challenge to her response. She makes a two-part offering to Gilbert, first apologizing

and then, when there is no response, she begins to explain the reason for her reaction. Gilbert seems unwilling to let her off as easily as she should expect. He makes no response to her apology and then cuts her off and replies sarcastically to her explanation. He suggests that she thought he was going to kidnap the child. She does not try to deny the accusation but merely explains her error again, making a third offering. Her response, "I did not know he had attempted to climb the wall" is, on the surface, fairly irrelevant to the conversation, which is now about kidnapping. What she may be saying is that she did not connect the scream to a fall because she was not aware that Arthur was on the wall. For Gilbert the suggestion that Helen thought he was a kidnapper was ridiculous and offensive; for her it was an everyday concern because of her background situation.

Once the participants recognize that an incident has occurred, they need to find a way to correct it. Goffman (1967, p. 19) argues that an incident creates a state of 'ritual disequilibrium' requiring a correction to equilibrium. In this case Helen has no reason to alienate a near neighbor and her harsh command was the result of mistaken perceptions and mistaken identity. She naturally wishes to get beyond this incident and reestablish equilibrium. The interchange so far has included several steps. Mrs. Graham's vehement command overstepped the norms of interaction, thereby threatening Gilbert's face. He justified himself, simultaneously challenging her. She apologized as a first offering. He did not respond, thereby failing to accept the offering. She stammered and blushed, indicating her awareness that she has conducted herself erroneously. She explained as a second offering. He cut off the explanation, thereby refusing the second offering. She responded indirectly to his remark with a third offering. Goffman (1967, p. 19) suggests

that the re-establishment of equilibrium requires that the 'length and intensity' of the correction relate to that of the incident. Because Mrs. Graham's initial misconduct was so vehement, Gilbert appears to feel that it requires her to make a substantial offering in compensation.

I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Markham, I believe?' she added, somewhat abruptly.

At this point, Mrs. Graham shifts the conversation by indicating to Gilbert that she knows who he is, though they have never met before. Her comment is another offering. She has told him she did not know her son had climbed the fence because that is a way of excusing herself, but she tries to shift the tone of the interchange before he can refuse another offering. In addressing him by name she does several things. She clearly situates the interaction as one between neighbors, thereby increasing the stake that each has in the encounter and encouraging Gilbert to take a more conciliatory line. She clearly acknowledges him by name thereby giving him value and supporting his perception of himself. She calls addressing him a pleasure. This formulation is a social convention and perhaps meaningless but it nonetheless shows her disposition to treat Gilbert with the respect that he believes he deserves. Gilbert notices that her shift of tone is abrupt but this can be explained by her notorious lack of social skills. Mrs. Graham later confesses and the neighbors have already confirmed that she is awkward and inaccessible at small talk. Another explanation for the abruptness may be that in making this comment, Mrs. Graham is opening herself up to threats to her face.

I bowed, but ventured to ask how she knew me.

Gilbert's bow is an indirect acceptance of Mrs. Graham's fourth offering, continued by his question, which is aimed at placing the conversation on a friendlier level. He has not yet accepted any of her explanations for her initial harsh words, but he does indicate his willingness to let the conversation take a different turn by his polite bow. The question, picking up on Mrs. Graham's use of his name, also indicates that Gilbert enjoys talking about himself. He might have politely finished the previous theme by assuring Mrs. Graham that he understood her confusion and had not been offended by her words, but he chooses to let the topic slip from the conversation with no resolution.

'Your sister called here, a few days ago, with Mrs. Markham.'

Mrs. Graham takes up the friendlier tone and responds to Gilbert's question. This is a superficial comment intended to smooth social relations. Equilibrium has now been established in the interaction. There are no longer any awkward challenges to resolve although the encounter is taking place in the shadow of the awkwardness that preceded it and was never definitively corrected. Both participants seem to have decided to deal with the original misconduct, which each has now referred to more than once, by pretending either that it never happened or that it has been successfully resolved.

'Is the resemblance so strong then?' I asked, in some surprise, and not so greatly flattered at the idea as I ought to have been.

The interaction continues in equilibrium. Gilbert is happy to be talking about himself and he adds a further question to keep the attention there. Gilbert may have hoped for some more interesting reason that she should know his name. The sibling rivalry that was apparent in chapter 1 may play a part in his desire not to be so closely linked to his sister. The aside about not being as flattered as he should have been is for Halford, intended as a compliment to his wife. Gilbert may be laughing at himself here for his adolescent rivalry with Rose and Fergus. Being flattered would assume that Rose is more attractive than he is, whereas Gilbert is convinced that he is very attractive and charming. But realizing who he is writing to, Gilbert admits he should have been more flattered. Otherwise he would be insulting Rose to her husband.

Gilbert's surprise at Mrs. Graham's answer indicates that perhaps the resemblance between Rose and Gilbert was not so noteworthy that either would have expected to be instantly recognized by a stranger as a sibling of the other. Gilbert may be making a serious error when asks for an additional comment about his resemblance to his sister because he is opening an opportunity for Helen to comment upon him. He knows she looked at him scornfully in church and he should probably avoid her opinions of him in this early encounter. This would have been a good moment for him to shift the topic onto something more neutral. Goffman (1967, p. 16), in fact, suggests that when interacting with strangers, an individual will often avoid speaking about himself. "As defensive measures, he keeps off topics and away from activities that would lead to the expression of information that is inconsistent with the line that he is maintaining. At opportune moments he will change the topic of conversation or the direction of activity."

'There is a likeness about the eyes and complexion, I think,' replied she, somewhat dubiously surveying my face; - 'and I think I saw you at church on Sunday.'

The question is awkward for Mrs. Graham too. She is an artist and she first takes the question from an artist's perspective, searching his face for details that she can mention. This response may take Gilbert's question more seriously than he had intended it. She comes up with some details around the eyes that might be used to develop a likeness. The qualification, 'I think', may indicate she has not thought about it much before or that she wishes him to believe that she has not thought about it much before. Or she may simply have made up the part about the sister because she needed a quick excuse for knowing who he is. She is observing his face somewhat dubiously. That may indicate that she can't really find a resemblance now that she has mentioned one. Perhaps she hadn't really noticed a resemblance before and now she is looking for one after the fact. If Mrs. Graham has trouble finding the resemblance, she may be confirming Gilbert's suspicion that there isn't much.

Since searching his face isn't producing much information, Mrs. Graham finally admits that she may have seen Gilbert in church the previous Sunday. She qualifies the statement with 'I think,' but it is obvious that she knows. Not only did she see him in church but she noticed him to such an extent that she somehow appears to have heard and remembered his name. The absence of a strong physical resemblance between Rose and Gilbert Markham combined with the fact that Mrs. Graham noticed Gilbert in church and seems to have learned his name there, might indicate a greater than normal interest in him

on her part. If any interest does exist, Mrs. Graham is extremely anxious not to disclose it to Gilbert. 286 pages later at the close of Helen's Grassdale diary, in an entry marked October 30 (the date of this encounter), Helen speaks of the families that have been bothering her with visits. The final brief entry begins to describe Gilbert though it is cut off before she mentions his name. Other than her brother, he is the only individual from Lindenhope mentioned in the diary.

As this interchange progresses we can see that Gilbert has gained several advantages. He has helped her child and she is aware of it. She has misjudged him as a danger and reacted too strongly. Realizing her error, she feels that she must make it up to him. But there is another ambiguous sign as the encounter begins. She blushes when she recognizes him. This tells us something about Mrs. Graham that is made clear to us but not definitely stated at any moment during their early acquaintance: she is attracted to him. The blush may be only an acknowledgement of her over-reaction but there are several parallel clues in the early chapters that she finds Gilbert pleasing. In this encounter, she has already disclosed herself by her abrupt address to Gilbert by his name. The abruptness, which Gilbert noticed, was partly the result of her uncertainty over whether she should acknowledge him by name before he introduced himself. To do so might indicate too much knowledge of him on her part.

So, Gilbert helped Mrs. Graham's son when he fell; she's in an awkward position because of her initial rudeness; and she's attracted to him. He should have an opportunity for a successful interaction, reinforcing his opinion of his worth. Face to face encounters, however, are extremely complex, and interactions with strangers involve greater

unpredictability than do interchanges in which the participants have established relationships with known faces and familiar lines. Goffman speaks of some of the intricacy of encounters.

The human tendency to use signs and symbols means that evidence of social worth and of mutual evaluations will be conveyed by very minor things, and these things will be witnessed, as will the fact that they have been witnessed. An unguarded glance, a momentary change in tone of voice, an ecological position taken or not taken, can drench a talk with judgmental significance. (Goffman 1967, 33)

It is at this point that Gilbert experiences the impact of slight actions such as those mentioned by Goffman. In response to Mrs. Graham's acknowledgement that she saw him in church, he smiles. This smile is a key act both for what he might have meant and for what Helen might have taken it to mean.

We might first ask whether Gilbert smiled spontaneously or politely. He might have smiled deliberately as a friendly acknowledgement of having seen her in church. But this might have been inappropriate because Mrs. Graham could easily have taken the smile as sarcastic or defiant, recalling the insolence of his stare in church. On the other hand, the smile may have been from embarrassment in reaction to her comment about church, brought on by his awareness of his rudeness there. We might expect that the difference between a polite smile and an embarrassed smile would be clear, but Gilbert and Mrs. Graham have never spoken before and it is possible that she would not interpret his facial expressions accurately. Gilbert's smile almost certainly had some meaning although it is possible that neither of the participants knew what the meaning was. He might have smiled because he discovered Mrs. Graham to be friendlier than he had

expected, perhaps thinking he had misinterpreted her expression in church. Gilbert tends to be vain and he is confident of his attractiveness to the opposite sex. Perhaps he smiles inadvertently because he interprets her comment as proof that she noticed him in church. Goffman (1967, p. 16) notes that among strangers, “Any claims regarding self may be made with belittling modesty, with strong qualifications, or with a note of unseriousness.” In other words, in interactions with people we do not know, it is customary to downplay our sense of our own worth. Gilbert may simply have been involuntarily disclosing his vanity. He might have smiled because he saw that she was acknowledging something she wouldn’t have wanted him to know. Whatever led to the smile, Gilbert does not seem to be conscious of what it meant or why it produced so marked a reaction.

Mrs. Graham may have had many reasons for reacting to the smile. It might simply have reminded her of the insolent stare in church and renewed the offense she had taken on that day. Her reaction, however, seems a little too strong for so slight a provocation. If she was impressed by his appearance in church and if it was that attraction that caused her to note and remember his name, she may have felt that his smile indicated his awareness of the implications of her knowing who he is and she may have felt that her secret had been discovered and that she should therefore be more discreet. Goffman (1967, p. 16) notes that talking with people we do not know we are careful to “show respect and politeness, making sure to extend to others any ceremonial treatment that might be their due”. If Mrs. Graham interprets Gilbert’s smile as gloating because she noticed him in church, she most likely feels that he lacks respect for her line. On the other

hand, she might have taken the smile, together with the reference to his appearance, as approaching flirtatious talk, which she could not permit as a married woman. Although no one in Lindenhope knows that Mrs. Graham is married, she knows and, despite unconscious attractions she might feel, she is scrupulously moral in her thoughts and actions. More probably, she may have noted the similarity in Gilbert's smile to Huntingdon's. Both Gilbert and Huntingdon are confident of their attractiveness to women. Helen is not skilled at dissembling her feelings. When Huntingdon confirmed her interest in him, he smiled insolently at her, and Helen may have distinguished the same characteristics in Gilbert's smile. She may have seen probable similarities between Gilbert and Huntingdon as sufficient reason to avoid friendship with Gilbert. Or she could have taken the smile as threatening, an indication that, like Huntingdon, Gilbert understood things about her that he might use to damage her.

It may be that Gilbert senses that Mrs. Graham has admitted greater familiarity with him than she would have wished to and he may feel good because he has thereby been assigned greater value than he had expected. His reaction is to smile. And Mrs. Graham, who cannot be sure what the smile means, may have interpreted it as disrespectful. Gilbert who knows nothing of Mrs. Graham's past or her present is left with no idea of why his smile affected her as it did.

There was something either in that smile or the recollections it awakened that was particularly displeasing to her, for she suddenly assumed again that proud, chilly look that had so unspeakably roused my corruption at church - a look of repellent scorn, so easily assumed, and so entirely without the least distortion of a single feature that, while there, it seemed like the natural expression of the face, and was the more provoking to me, because I could not think it affected.

Gilbert's ambiguous smile, causing a breakdown in the interaction, involved some misconduct, though he is not certain what the misconduct was. His misconduct is answered by a challenge from Mrs. Graham in the form of a shifted facial expression. There is a considerable problem with the look that Mrs. Graham assumes here because she seems to change facial expressions without moving her facial muscles at all. We cannot be certain to what degree the change is simply Gilbert's interpretation. Words may be ambiguous but facial expressions can be even more so. Saville-Troike (1985) points out that silent communication is far more open to ambiguity and in a case like this one where we have two people who have never before spoken, who in fact have only seen each other once before from a distance, it may be even more difficult to interpret facial expressions. Yet the scorn must actually be there because her words and actions seem congruent with the expression. Or it may be that the expression is partially his imagination, provoked by her words and actions. Goffman (1967, p. 1) would argue that even slight alterations in facial expression can be significant. He refers to 'the fleeting facial move an individual can make in the game of expressing his alignment to what is happening' as the smallest unit of interaction.

Gilbert's smile may very well have meant nothing consciously and if it did mean anything, that meaning may have been harmless, an expression of friendliness for example. But once he has smiled that smile is taken as willful and he becomes responsible for the implications of it. In this case Gilbert is placed at a disadvantage because Helen may be reacting not to his smile but to associations that she derives from her past experience of Huntingdon's smile. When two people meet for the first time they

must base much of their understanding of the interaction on the experiences they have previously had with other people in other situations. Goffman (1967, p. 5) writes:

Regardless of whether a person intends to take a line, he will find that he has done so in effect. The other participants will assume that he has more or less willfully taken a stand so that if he is to deal with their response to him he must take into consideration the impression they have formed of him.

From this Goffman derives that there is no occasion so trivial that it does not require constant attention by the participants to the way they handle themselves and others present.

The interaction between Gilbert and Helen brings out clearly the difficulty of first encounters. Neither side knows what to expect of the other, both sides tend to interpret what they see in the light of past experiences with other people, since there are no past experiences with this particular person to guide them in interpretation. Goffman (1974, p. 2) has said that sometimes we need to wait until nearly the end of the encounter before we can understand what has been happening. He has also compared interaction ritual to drama. The participants in an interaction are actors playing specific roles in a drama. The problem with first encounters is that the actors are sometimes unaware of the nature of the drama they are participating in.

'Good morning, Mr. Markham,' said she; and without another word or glance, she withdrew with her child into the garden;

With her final leave taking Mrs. Graham takes the whole interaction out of the category of facework because by closing off further communication she is denying the possibility of facework. Mrs. Graham here seems to have made a decision, excluding Gilbert from her circle of acquaintance and closing off the possibility of negotiation. This abrupt change shows a bit of the mercurial moods, possibly deriving from the tension of her relationship with Huntingdon, which may interfere with her ability to sustain social interactions. But she hasn't said anything negative and her leave taking is polite enough. It is only her tone and expression that have changed. Gilbert could have resorted, at this point, to another face-saving device. He may have been able to pretend that nothing had happened, if he had felt that her departure was too damaging to his face. Goffman (1967, p. 17) observes that "when a person fails to prevent an incident he can still attempt to maintain the fiction that no threat to face has occurred". Because her expression barely altered and her words were conventional, Gilbert might have convinced himself that she had not questioned his line. He also had the option of recognizing Helen's expression and tone but assuming that they were caused by an outside factor, that no threat to his face had actually occurred. To some extent such a response would have been partially accurate if Helen's response to his smile derived from some observed similarity to Huntingdon's smile. Nonetheless, he clearly recognizes her action as a challenge to his line.

If Gilbert had been aware that his smile might cause a problem, he could have tried to obscure it by turning his face away. Goffman (1967, p. 18) mentions turning away as a common reaction to losing control of one's facial expression. Or Helen, in the interest of preserving the face of her partner in the interchange, might have turned away if

she had realized that Gilbert's expression was out of control. She in fact did turn away but in such a way as to challenge Gilbert's conduct rather than to pretend not to see it. Once Mrs. Graham turns away, Gilbert is back where he started at the beginning of the interaction, except that he has been perhaps more clearly challenged.

and I returned home, angry and dissatisfied - I could scarcely tell you why - and therefore will not attempt it.

Gilbert is dissatisfied because his face has been challenged again and his line has not been respected. He is not sure what he did wrong which may add to his displeasure but he is very much aware that something in his presentation of himself has been sternly rejected by Mrs. Graham. He has been led to believe by his family and his neighbors that he is charming and attractive and he cannot understand why he should be despised by Mrs. Graham. Even if he had known why his line was not accepted, he would still be unhappy with the interview because when someone is valued lower than he expects to be valued it is a personal affront. Goffman (1967, p. 6) observes that "A person tends to experience an immediate personal response to the face which a personal contact with others allows him." Our reaction may be minimal if we are accorded the response we expect. If we are valued to a greater or lesser extent than we expect, however, our feeling will be respectively positive or negative. Gilbert was hurt because he did not receive the reaction he expected. The abrupt change in the direction of the interchange was also disconcerting for Gilbert.

Once the person initially presents a line, he and others tend to build their later responses upon it, and in a sense become stuck with it. Should the person radically alter his line, or should it become discredited, then confusion results, for the participants will have prepared and committed themselves for actions that are now unsuitable. Goffman 1967, 12

Gilbert's displeasure derives partly from the apparent development of the interaction in one direction, suddenly cut off and replaced by strong statement in another direction. He was developing a line that he could no longer pursue and was unsure what had happened and how the incident could be remedied. Both participants in the interchange are confused over what is going on; they may not agree upon what the conversation is about and thus the interchange fails to meet the expectations of either. Goffman (1974) observes that we must sometimes wait till the end of an interaction before we can identify what we have been doing.

The encounter at *Wildfell Hall* essentially repeats the silent encounter in church two days before. Although this interaction is more complex it follows a similar sequence and reaches the same conclusion. Once again, he senses that his line has not been accepted and that he has been challenged and again he concludes the interview angry and frustrated. Mrs. Graham once again reacts to Gilbert by arbitrarily cutting off the interchange. In church she looked down at her prayer book; here, she walked away.

For Gilbert this interchange is not only similar to the brief interaction in church but also parallel to many of the other encounters in Chapter 1, in which Gilbert was frequently challenged. He recalled his quarrels with his father, his confrontations with his siblings and his mother and his silent encounters at church with Mrs. Graham and with Fergus. He was challenged in each of those encounters. Nobody in his immediate

surroundings seems to share his opinion of himself. The first encounter with Mrs. Graham in church piqued his interest in the new tenant. But, when he visits her on the following Tuesday, he goes through another deflating sequence of interactions. In one way, this interview has been useful for Gilbert. He befriended Arthur. He seems to have been aware of what he was doing because he keeps cultivating the son as he moves the courtship forward through the rest of the book. This may be another example of Gilbert's tendency toward indirection in pursuing his aims.

Gilbert interprets Mrs. Graham's expression as 'proud' and 'chilly' and filled with 'repellant scorn,' but assumed without the alteration of a single feature of her face. This easily assumed expression on the part of Helen may go far in explaining her previous difficulties with Huntingdon. She may be a master at expressing disapprobation without using words. That the expression is so natural may be a result of the situation in which she has lived for seven years. She is used to standing back, to repelling with her expressions, because that has been a weapon that she has needed to defend herself. We might ask also whether, because she assumes the mask of scorn so easily and does not seem to be affecting it at all, she may be unaware of the expression she is making. Perhaps some of the problems that Helen experiences, both in the events that she records at Grassdale and the ones Gilbert records at Lindenhope, have been magnified by her unconscious facial expressions. The interchange also calls attention to Helen's tendency to cut off communication when she is displeased.

The interaction between Gilbert and Helen helps to bring out characteristic behaviors of both. It also provides the first extended interaction between the two. At the

end of the interchange each seems to express distaste for the other. In the early chapters of Wildfell Hall, Gilbert insists frequently upon his dislike of Helen and her expressions seem to indicate the dislike is mutual. Nonetheless, two days later Helen will visit the Markham's home, engage in an animated discussion with Gilbert, and pressure him into making another visit to Wildfell Hall. We can only assume that there were other elements in this interaction that went unreported and that attenuated the unpleasantness that seemed to predominate at the conclusion.

CHAPTER 9. VERY GOOD AND AMUSING: SOCIAL CO-CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

Goffman's model of human actors assumes that it is senseless to ask what a man or a woman really is since we are always acting. We are forever on stage, even when we may believe that we are most spontaneous and sincere in our responses to others. Ego's conduct is always molded through dramaturgical encounters with various alters. We may play the role of deferential students in encounters with professors, ardent suitors with our beloved, dutiful sons and daughters with our parents, or ambitious young executives impressing our superiors in bureaucratic structures. What we can never be, so Goffman argues, is men and women tout court. We are what we pretend to be. (Cosser 1977: 376)

Chapter I: Sentences 33-55 (October 30, 1827)

I only stayed to put away my gun and powder-horn, and give some requisite directions to one of the farming-men, and then repaired to the vicarage, to solace my spirit and soothe my ruffled temper with the company and conversation of Eliza Millward.

I found her, as usual, busy with some piece of soft embroidery (the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced), while her sister was seated at the chimney-corner, with the cat on her knee, mending a heap of stockings.

'Mary - Mary! put them away!' Eliza was hastily saying just as I entered the room.

'Not I, indeed!' was the phlegmatic reply; and my appearance prevented further discussion.

'You're so unfortunate, Mr. Markham!' observed the younger sister, with one of her arch, sidelong glances. 'Papa's just gone out into the parish, and not likely to be back for an hour!'

'Never mind; I can manage to spend a few minutes with his daughters, if they'll allow me,' said I, bringing a chair to the fire, and seating myself therein, without waiting to be asked.

'Well, if you'll be very good and amusing, we shan't object.'

'Let your permission be unconditional, pray; for I came not to give pleasure but to seek it, I answered.

However, I thought it but reasonable to make some slight exertion to render my company agreeable; and what little effort I made was apparently pretty successful, for Miss Eliza was never in a better humour. We seemed, indeed, to be mutually pleased with each other, and managed to maintain between us a cheerful and animated, though not very profound conversation. It was little better than a tête-à-tête, for Miss Millward never opened her lips, except occasionally to correct some random assertion or exaggerated expression of her sister's, and once to ask her to pick up the ball of cotton that had rolled under the table. I did this myself, however, as in duty bound.

'Thank you, Mr. Markham,' said she, as I presented it to her. 'I would have picked it up myself; only I did not want to disturb the cat.'

'Mary, dear, that won't excuse you in Mr. Markham's eyes,' said Eliza; 'he hates cats, I dare say, as cordially as he does old maids - like all other gentlemen - don't you, Mr. Markham?'

'I believe it is natural for our unamiable sex to dislike the creatures,' replied I; 'for you ladies lavish so many caresses upon them'.

'Bless them - little darlings!' cried she, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, turning round and overwhelming her sister's pet with a shower of kisses.

'Don't, Eliza!' said Miss Millward, somewhat gruffly as she impatiently pushed her away.

But it was time for me to be going: make what haste I would, I should still be too late for tea; and my mother was the soul of order and punctuality.

My fair friend was evidently unwilling to bid me adieu. I tenderly squeezed her little hand at parting; and she repaid me with one of her softest smiles and most bewitching glances. I went home very happy, with a heart brimful of complacency for myself, and overflowing with love for Eliza.

In church on October 28, Gilbert turned away from an unpleasant interaction with Mrs. Graham to participate in a more reassuring one with Eliza Millward. Now, after another rejection by Mrs. Graham, he once again turns to Eliza for solace. The interaction described in sentences 33—55 of Chapter 2 is unlike the earlier encounters portrayed by Gilbert in that it is for the most part successful, at least for Gilbert, involving no direct challenges to his line and no need for corrective facework. The interaction is however complicated by sibling rivalry, this time between Eliza Millward and her older sister Mary. Between his dismissal by Mrs. Graham and his arrival at the parsonage he inserts one sentence directly disclosing his intention to visit Eliza to 'solace my spirit and soothe my ruffled temper'. Gilbert's purpose for this visit, then, is to seek reaffirmation of his line in an environment where he expects acceptance.

Gee (1999, p. 1) would view Gilbert's purpose as an example of the central function of language, which he considers to be "to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups and institutions." The scene that Gilbert stumbles upon at the vicarage helps us to evaluate the two sisters. Mary is engaged in useful work mending worn stockings while

Eliza's task is less necessary but more showy and dictated more by fashion than by need. Gilbert's aside that Eliza is doing embroidery because this scene occurred before the fashion for knitting with Berlin wools became strong demonstrates that he is also aware of shifts in fashion. The difference in employment defines variation between the two sisters. Although Gilbert doesn't notice the difference at this time, the novel will gradually demonstrate the superiority of Mary's character of which this is an early indication. We also see that the cat prefers Mary.

As he arrives Eliza is urging Mary to hide the socks she is mending, which Mary refuses to do. Eliza is worried about the public image of the family that her sister is presenting. Her comment may indicate several concerns. Perhaps she sees darning socks as an activity too homely to permit strangers to see. It is tedious work in contrast to the display of feminine skills that her embroidery represents. It may reveal too much about the economic realities of the family. In a family with greater resources, mending socks might be a task more suited to a servant than to young ladies. Eliza is attempting to construct an acceptable arrangement of reality for public consumption; she acts toward Mary like an adolescent warning her parents not to embarrass her.

Mary seems repulsed by Eliza's attitude and she responds to Eliza's urgency through inaction combined with emphatic refusal. With 'indeed', she seems to be voicing shock or irritation that Eliza would make such a request. Mary, the older sister, not interested in posturing, does not approve of her sister's attitudes and, will not humor her. Gilbert's use of the word 'phlegmatic' to describe Mary's response demonstrates his own distorted view of the situation and his failure to note Mary's praiseworthy qualities. The

short interaction between the two sisters sets up the characters of both. With Mary, what you see is what you get. She has no interest in the frivolous concerns that motivate Eliza.

Eliza greets Gilbert's entrance with "You're *so* unfortunate, Mr. Markham!" informing him that her father is out and likely to be gone an hour. Her comment is teasing and flirtatious, emphasized by the 'arch, sidelong glance' that accompanies it. She is teasing Gilbert who frequently visits the parsonage ostensibly to consult with the vicar, Mr. Millward, though really to visit the daughter. Eliza knows his real purpose and shows that she is aware of it, especially with the exaggeration of 'so' and the non-verbal signs. She's telling him that he's fortunate and letting him know that he has an hour to spend with her before her father returns. By speaking in code she is linking the two of them together as possessors of information not shared by others, though, in this case, the unacknowledged courtship is widely known in the community. Eliza's tone seems exuberant, perhaps excited, indicating she may be happy to see him and comfortable acting freely when he's around. She knows he comes to see her and there seems to be trust between them

Gilbert follows Eliza's lead, acting as if he were there to see her father but letting them know that he is not at all disappointed to find the father out. With 'never mind', he tells the daughters not to worry about their father being out, implying he may be disappointed but consolable. His reply builds on Eliza's coded greeting and uses the same teasing tone. 'I can manage' implies that, though he's busy, he can give up a small amount of time for them. Though he offers them the opportunity to decide whether they want his company, he doesn't wait for them to reply. He demonstrates perhaps excessive

familiarity and confidence by grabbing a chair and sitting down without waiting for his request to be answered and assuming that Eliza, at least, is happy to see him. Eliza confirms his assumptions, but offers a teasing challenge to his confidence that he is welcome, requiring him to be entertaining. Though she sets conditions, she lets him know she finds him amusing and that she can be amused. Gilbert may be much less amusing than Eliza wishes him to believe but she reinforces his view of himself and implies that she's glad he's there. Gilbert rejects Eliza's condition, but confirms her line in saying that he has come to be entertained. He thus politely deflects Eliza's compliment and tells her that she pleases him. He also indirectly admits that he has come to see her rather than her father.

Gilbert's claim that he made only a slight effort to please is intended for his reader, Halford. He is, rather, making great effort to entertain Eliza. He may be bragging to Halford about his charm when he notes Eliza's good humor. Eliza on the other hand, is obviously flattering Gilbert by appearing to pay great attention to his frivolous remarks. She has responded to his wish to be entertained with assiduous efforts to entertain. Both Gilbert and Eliza dedicate their time to foolish conversation that is basically phatic. Their mutual absorption basically excludes Mary, though Gilbert seems to imply that it is Mary's unsociability that keeps her silent. Mary seems to find their conversation distasteful. She maintains a disapproving silence except when Eliza goes so far beyond the limits of propriety that she feels she must caution her. Because Mary's relation with Gilbert is more distant she chooses not to correct him. When her yarn rolls under the table, she asks Eliza to pick it up because she doesn't feel comfortable asking Gilbert, but

she and Eliza would both have expected Gilbert to be the one to pick it up as he acknowledges.

When Gilbert hands her the yarn, Mary explains that she only asked for help because she didn't want to disturb the cat. Eliza uses this opportunity to attack her sister, implying that she is an old maid. She is also giving Gilbert a cue for the direction of the conversation. Gilbert responds as he has been directed. He discovers a reason for disliking cats although we have no indication that this comment has any relation to his real feelings. Eliza takes Gilbert's response as a cue to demonstrate his remarks are accurate and gives exaggerated attention to the cat. We can assume that Eliza's normal relation with the cat is not particularly amiable and Mary is impatient with her artificial posturing for attention.

The brief sequence including sentences 46 through 51 is a key moment of Gilbert's visit to the vicarage, the only interchange, apart from the initial greetings, that he chooses to record. Using Gee's (1999) seven world-building tasks of language in use (significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge) we can identify ways in which the speakers construct the situation.

Throughout this sequence certain details are given importance through language. Eliza first interrupts the interchange between Mary and Gilbert before Gilbert is able to respond to Mary's thanks and her explanation for her request. " 'Mary, dear, *that* won't excuse you in Mr. Markham's eyes,' said Eliza; 'he hates cats, I dare say, as cordially as he does old maids - like all other gentlemen - don't you, Mr. Markham' " (Bronte, 1966, p. 29). Eliza stresses the word 'that' referring back to 'that' explanation, thereby

characterizing Mary's justification as inadequate. At the same time she is criticizing the concern that Mary shows for the comfort of the cat. Then she tells Mary the explanation won't 'excuse' her, thereby implying that she has said or done something that needs to be excused, though she has not. Next, she ties the inexcusability of Mary's action to "Mr. Markham's eyes", thereby inserting Gilbert into the dispute as her ally. Eliza's comment here creates an incident that never happened because Gilbert's act of picking up the yarn was socially required and to be expected, whatever may have been Mary's reason for not wishing to retrieve it herself. Mary's actions in relation to the fallen yarn do not seem sufficient to provoke Eliza's criticism, which more probably responds to Mary's earlier correction of Eliza.

Eliza goes on first to affirm that Gilbert 'hates cats,' and then to modify the affirmation with 'I dare say'. She next uses 'as cordially as' to link cats to 'old maids' as something she supposes he 'hates' equally. There was no particular reason for mentioning old maids in this context except, presumably, the tendency of unmarried women living alone to keep cats. Eliza then generalizes Gilbert's hatred of cats and old maids by adding that all 'gentlemen' share his opinion. Finally, with 'don't you' she forces Gilbert to state a position on the subject, and also signals to him the position she expects him to take. With this sequence of moves, Eliza has amplified the significance of Mary's cat, originally only an impediment to Mary's movement but now a symbol of her social inadequacy. Eliza seems to feel that Mary is not successful at the kind of social interaction that she (Eliza) specializes in. She may be implying that Mary is only good for communicating with cats. Eliza's original attack on the cat probably derived from

antagonism toward it because it was Mary's cat or at least seemed to prefer Mary. The link to old maids is not clear. She may be saying that Gilbert hates cats, so he won't accept your explanation, and he also hates old maids, which is what you are, so he will be even less satisfied with your explanation. But 'as cordially as' also links cats and old maids in general and thereby provides additional evidence for calling Mary an old maid.

Eliza's challenge to Mary puts Gilbert in a difficult position and her question, 'don't you' forces him to intervene in the discussion. He replies, "I believe it is natural for our unamiable sex to dislike the creatures . . . for you ladies lavish so many caresses upon them". With 'natural' Gilbert follows Eliza's lead, saying men naturally dislike cats, but with the adjective 'unamiable' he places the blame on men not cats, thereby reducing the hostility of the attack. He then offers jealousy provoked by the 'caresses' that 'you ladies' lavish on cats as a cause for men's attitudes, which flatters both Eliza and Mary. 'You ladies' also signals to Eliza the position she is expected to take and validates Mary's concern for her cat, which is now linked to 'ladies' rather than 'old maids'.

Gilbert's intervention changes the significance of the cat and forces Eliza to shift her definition of the situation. She exclaims "Bless them - little darlings!" begins bothering the cat with kisses. Her exclamation and the 'shower of kisses' that she gives the cat both serve to enact Gilbert's statement of what ladies do to cats. She also uses the cat to provoke Gilbert's interest by demonstrating the caresses that the cat receives and he doesn't. The original significance that she had assigned to cats is completely lost in her new attitude.

Mary who initiated this interchange by thanking Gilbert for returning her yarn concludes it defending her cat from the predation of Eliza. With one gruff word, 'Don't' and an impatient shove, she tries to rescue the cat but also shows that she is offended by the Eliza's exaggerated posturing and artificiality, the hypocrisy of her enthusiasm

Much of the import of this interchange was only indirectly stated but each of the three participants by subtle variations in word choice was able to make the cat significant, though the significance was different for each of them. Gee's (1999) second building task of language is to enact a specific type of activity. On the surface this interaction has been idle talk. But beneath the surface, several subtle shifts have occurred. Eliza, who has previously been corrected by Mary, wishes to discount the implications of Mary's corrections by dismissing her as an old maid and thereby reinforcing her own position before Gilbert. She is also enacting her rivalry with Mary by reframing Mary's explanation to Gilbert as evidence of incorrect behavior. Partly, then, Eliza and Mary are quarrelling and Eliza is attempting to bring Gilbert into the dispute as an ally. Gilbert uses Eliza's question to flatter Eliza while seeking to obtain the goodwill of Mary. He also indicates solidarity with Eliza by accepting and expanding (but also reinterpreting) her claim that men don't like cats. Eliza responds to Gilbert's remarks by enacting and exaggerating the conduct that he attributed to ladies. Mary reframes the conversation by dismissing Eliza's supposed enthusiasm for the cat and again correcting her behavior. Both Eliza and Gilbert enact a courtship situation. Mary is equally aware of the purposes of Eliza and Gilbert and she assumes within this context the role of a guardian of

propriety. Throughout the interchange we can see Eliza and Mary presenting different interpretations of correct behavior, each characterizing the other as acting improperly.

The third use of language described by Gee (1999) is to take on a certain role or to build an identity. In this situation, Eliza and Gilbert have both indicated that they wish to be amused. Both are attempting to assume identities of interesting, amusing, and witty people. At another level, both seek to enact identities of desirable prospective mates. Eliza seeks to reinforce her identity by contrasting herself to Mary who she assigns the boring identity of an old maid. Mary positions herself as a truthful responsible person, assigning Eliza the identity of a frivolous child. Gilbert attempts to construct an identity as a sophisticated and charming person capable of maintaining the sympathy of all parties to a dispute.

Language also helps us to define the sort of relation we have or desire to have with others. In this interaction, Eliza and Gilbert are each attempting to construct an unspoken courtship relationship with the other. Eliza meanwhile seeks to distinguish herself from Mary as a more interesting and attractive person. Gilbert seeks to maintain a friendly relationship with Mary while reinforcing his solidarity with Eliza. Mary wishes to maintain a courteous relationship with Gilbert while attempting to govern Eliza's conduct. Each of the participants assumes an agreed upon relationship with the other two within the context of courtship.

Gee (1999) refers to the distribution of social goods, his fifth language task, as politics. Several political debates are occurring in this interchange. Mary's treatment of the cat, for example, can be taken as an indication that she is kind to other creatures or as

an indication that she lacks adequate social skills for successful interaction among humans. Eliza seeks to use the cat as proof of Mary's marginalization and Gilbert, though he might not have any opinion about cats, clearly shares Eliza's low opinion of her sister. The reader, however, even in this early encounter, is not necessarily expected to agree with Gilbert's attitude toward Mary. Gilbert's gradual recognition of Mary's positive traits will be one of the signs of his increasing maturity. At this point, the task that she is engaged in, mending socks, and her unwillingness to disturb the cat, are indications of positive qualities. She behaves responsibly in undertaking necessary but not glamorous chores such as mending socks and she behaves kindly in procuring not to disturb the cat. Her continued mending despite Gilbert's visit also discloses her lack of pretence; unlike Eliza, she is not concerned about appearances. Eliza and Gilbert, on the other hand, privilege charm and image over straightforward seriousness. They seek to establish their reputations as amusing attractive people and to confirm the superiority of this social good to Mary's alternative line of responsible maturity. Eliza uses the term 'old maid' to encompass Mary's qualities of responsibility and seriousness while Gilbert describes her as 'phlegmatic' and notes that she 'never opened her lips,' except for serious purposes.

Language also serves to connect things and ideas to each other. Eliza clearly connects cats and old maids, thereby setting up a frame for describing Mary's conduct throughout the visit. This surface connection serves as a basis for linking Mary's corrections of her behavior to Mary's lack social relevance. Eliza connects their interaction in this conversation with previous quarrels with her sister within the context of Mary's marginality as an old maid. Both Eliza and Gilbert connect this conversation to

their ongoing courtship relationship by relying on each other's support for their opinions. Gilbert finds ways to flatter Eliza and she seeks his viewpoints. Each exaggerates their attention to the other's words. Gilbert validates Eliza's comments about the cat even as he seeks to avoid offending Mary while Eliza's exaggerated attention to the cat demonstrates the degree to which she allows Gilbert to guide her reactions. Gilbert's background description of the scene connects fashionable embroidery with frivolous minds and darning socks with sober responsibility.

Finally, in this interchange Eliza and Gilbert are privileging essentially frivolous phatic communication over serious interchange of ideas. Mary attempts to limit the excesses of Eliza's language but Eliza responds by categorizing Mary's corrections as evidence of her marginalization. In considering this interchange, Gee's seven language tasks have overlapped considerably with the same word often performing several tasks.

From the viewpoint of Goffman's (1967) interaction ritual, Gilbert alters his conduct to fit the suggestions derived from Eliza's line and she alters her conduct to sustain his expectations. In the process, each creates a face that is to some degree misleading. They become a pair of masks facing each other as each of them creates the person that the other seems to expect. This is in line with Goffman's metaphor of participants in an interaction as actors in a play. Despite the element of make-believe, Gilbert is very satisfied with his visit and concludes both feeling good about himself and believing he is in love with Eliza.

As a face encounter, this interaction is incomplete but it does illustrate the role of cooperation in face work. As Gilbert and Eliza validate each other's lines, Eliza makes a

serious challenge to Mary. The challenge is superficially a rejection of Mary's explanation for not getting up, but she simultaneously criticizes Mary for worrying about her cat and suggests that Mary is an old maid. Neither Eliza, the offender, nor Mary, the person whose face is threatened takes any overt action to repair the situation. To some extent, all three participants choose to overlook Eliza's challenge and to act as if nothing has happened. However Gilbert, as the witness, must respond to the challenge because Eliza specifically calls upon him to do so. He cannot question Eliza's line because she expects him to support her. But he cannot simply support Eliza without further threatening Mary's line. He, therefore, does five things. He ignores the more threatening implications of Eliza's comment and addresses only the question of gentlemen and cats. He supports Eliza's statement that gentlemen dislike cats. To help Mary save face, he blames gentlemen rather than cats for the dislike. To flatter Eliza, he says gentlemen are jealous of the caresses ladies give to cats. In mentioning the caresses, he gives Eliza an opening to soften her comment about cats. Through this series of strategies, Gilbert has rescued Mary's line without threatening that of Eliza. In the process he has perhaps maintained his own line (at least in his mind). It is doubtful whether Mary would see his remarks as helpful.

Eliza responds to Gilbert's suggestion with exaggerated attention to the cat, thus moving beyond her threatening comment to Mary and accepting the shift that Gilbert has engineered in the significance of the cat. Although Eliza's act might be taken as an offering in that she radically alters her position on cats, Mary does not see it in this way and it is more accurately an adaptation of Eliza's line to maintain face with Gilbert. Mary

explicitly rejects Eliza's act as an offering when she says "Don't" and pushes her away. Eliza and Mary have not repaired the threat to face by the end of this interaction but Gilbert has demonstrated some of the techniques that can be used to protect the face of others.

As Mary pushes Eliza away from her cat, Gilbert notes that it is time to return home for tea and again reminds us, as he did arriving home in chapter one, that his mother is rigid about punctuality. Gilbert is very satisfied with his visit when he leaves the vicarage. Eliza does not seem to want him to leave and flatters him with smiles and glances. He leaves 'brimful of complacency' and 'overflowing with love.' It is significant that he experiences the two feelings together. The love derives from the complacency and the complacency is a result of the high valuation he has received from Eliza. This encounter, though completely artificial, is more successful than Gilbert's earlier interactions in the book. He has been frustrated and angry after previous encounters but leaves this one very satisfied with the line he has developed and the reception it has received. The reader, on the other hand, sees that both he and Eliza are performing, each assuming the roles that the other prompts. The difficulty is that each is receiving validation from a mask that the other has constructed to reflect the messages being received. Scollon and Scollon (1981, p. 14) argue that one of the main purposes of talk is "to present a view of ourselves to the listener". In the case of Eliza and Gilbert, however, neither is presenting an accurate view because both are overly concerned with the impressions they are making on the other. That this encounter directly follows Gilbert's visit to Mrs. Graham, to whom he will soon transfer his attention, signals the falsity of

the relationship developed by this interaction. Weber and Carter (2003, p. 70) stress the idea of ‘a known and moral self’ as the basis for developing trust. Though several encounters early in the novel will indicate that Eliza trusts Gilbert, this interchange clearly demonstrates that the trust between them is based upon false characters that each has presented to the other rather than any fundamental disclosures about themselves that they have made.

As Gilbert leaves, he and Eliza engage in smiles, glances, and hand-holding. These activities are partly intended to set up conditions for their next meeting (Goffman, 1974; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Conversation permits each participant to present his view of the world (Scollon & Scollon, 1981, p. 14) and as these views intermingle and develop within an interaction, the participants negotiate ‘intersubjective reality’. Scollon and Scollon (1981, p. 27) describe departure as “the final check on where you have gotten to in the negotiation that has taken place”. At the close of the visit to the vicarage, both Gilbert and Eliza sense that they have reached a new level of understanding and through the various non-verbal signs that they exchange as Gilbert prepares to depart are intended as messages to confirm the new reality.

The interaction at the vicarage is an example of social co-construction of reality. The participants interact in the game as they also send messages to the other participants directing their participation. But we might ask ourselves to what extent it is fair to say that Gilbert and Eliza are assuming masks for their performances. An assumption of masks presumes an authentic personality somewhere behind the mask and different from it. But the narrative so far seems to indicate that if Gilbert uses a mask, he hides his true

face even from himself. Both Gilbert and Eliza are performing, as Goffman (Cosser, 1977: p. 376) says we all do in interactions, but can we say that their performances are meant to mislead. Cosser (1977, pp. 334-335), interpreting Mead, argues that communication involves “constant self-conscious adjustment of actors to the conduct of others, a repeated fitting together of lines of action through definitions and redefinitions, interpretations and reinterpretations.” This definition describes the process that Eliza and Gilbert have engaged in during interaction described above. They have adjusted so carefully to the clues that each has provided to the other that we might doubt whether either has presented any true beliefs or feelings. On the other hand, Schubert (1998) writes that the self is created through interaction with others. Burr (2003) argues that, if personality can be said to exist, it exists outside the individual as part of interaction. Cooley (1998, pp. 132-142) insists that the individual and society are aspects of the same phenomenon. In other words, individual personality can be taken to be an attribute of participation in interaction. In a different encounter, any of the three participants in this interaction might be expected to respond differently.

**CHAPTER 10. THE SAME ARGUMENTS WITH REGARD TO A GIRL:
EDUCATION, POWER AND IDEOLOGY**

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. Luke 11: 4

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness.

Areopagitica, John Milton

Thelwall thought it very unfair to influence a child's mind by inculcating any opinions before it should have come to years of discretion, and be able to choose for itself. I showed him my garden, and told him it was my botanical garden. "How so?" said he, "it is covered with weeds." -- "Oh," I replied, that is only because it has not yet come to its age of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair in me to prejudice the soil toward roses and strawberries."

Table Talk, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire
The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg, Mark Twain

Chapter 3 relates a few highlights of a visit by Mrs. Graham to Linden Car, returning an earlier visit of Mrs. Markham to Wildfell Hall. The encounter passes through four stages: a) interrogation of Mrs. Graham by Rose and Mrs. Markham focused on her social intentions and parenting practices; b) competition over Arthur against the background of the earlier discussion; c) discussion of education, temptation and related issues among Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Markham and Gilbert; and d) display of the outcomes and emotions produced by the visit.

Bad Mother and Bad Neighbor

When Mrs. Graham arrives on her visit to the Markhams, she is forced to submit to a barrage of questions and comments, provoked originally by her previous eccentric behavior as a new neighbor and then augmented by her surprising replies. These questions can best be understood by considering them in relation to power and ideology. Mills (1997) discusses power as form of interpersonal action or relation that is renegotiated with each action. Basing her analysis of power on the work of Foucault, she argues that attention should focus on how people negotiate power within an action rather than assuming that power is monolithic. Fairclough (1995, p. 17), on the other hand, criticizes Foucault's view of power as negotiated between participants. He believes that power is always the attribute of the governing institutions and the elites. Fairclough tends to view action as occurring within the context of institutions and defines participants in these interactions as members and clients. His definition of institution, however, is broad enough to include such entities as families and peer groups. He compares an institution to a speech community, which he also calls a 'community of ideology (Fairclough, 1995, p. 40):

Each institution has its own set of speech events, its own differentiated settings and scenes, its cast of participants, and its own norms for their combination—for which members of the cast may participate in which speech events, playing which parts in which setting, in the pursuit of which topics or goals, for which institutionally recognized purposes (Fairclough 1995: 38)

However, unlike Hymes who seeks to understand speech events from the view point of the participants Fairclough seems to argue that the participants may not be aware of what is really happening in an interaction.

The initial phase of the visit to Linden Car lends itself to analysis involving power and ideology. Mrs. Markham begins the questioning by expressing surprise that Mrs. Graham has brought her son with her. Mrs. Graham answers:

'It is a long walk for him; but I must have either taken him with me, or relinquished the visit altogether: for I never leave him alone; and I think, Mrs. Markham, I must beg you to make my excuses to the Millwards and Mrs. Wilson, when you see them, as I fear I cannot do myself the pleasure of calling upon them till my little Arthur is able to accompany me.' Bronte 1966: 30

Mrs. Markham would not have expected Mrs. Graham to bring the child with her. This indicates that Mrs. Graham would not have been blamed for leaving the child at home while she went visiting the neighbors. Mrs. Markham's surprise may be a polite form of criticism: she should not have taken the child on so long a walk. Bringing the child may also show too much attachment. Victorian novels often discourage overly close relationships between mothers and children. This act is an early sign of the overindulgence that Mrs. Markham will warn her about. Mrs. Graham admits the long walk, but states that she would not have come without Arthur. Her response reinforces the idea that she may be too close to the child.

The tone of Mrs. Graham's response is somewhat abrasive especially in the context of a first visit to people she barely knows. She sets up an either/or situation; "I wouldn't come if he couldn't." She says she 'never' leaves him at home. Mrs. Graham, in fact, uses 'never' four out of the five times it appears in this chapter. Gilbert later uses the word once in a metaphorical construction. Perhaps Mrs. Graham speaks so sharply because she reacts to the implied censure in Mrs. Markham's surprise. She goes on to use

Arthur as an excuse for her failure to visit other neighbors and asks Mrs. Markham to explain to them. The construction 'I think I must' is ambiguous. It might imply, politely, that she's unsure whether she should ask Mrs. Markham to make excuses but it seems more likely to be a strong statement of decision. The statement, that she would not have come if Arthur had not been able to walk so far, is the foundation for her new pronouncement that she will not visit the other neighbors. Her request is a little presumptuous as if she could entrust to some one else the duty of explaining her questionable conduct. In seeking to dispose of the obligation so casually she may even be treating the other neighbors and Mrs. Markham insultingly. Once again, although she may be quite decided she does not say she cannot visit them but only expresses a fear that she will not be able to. With a formulaic phrase, she politely implies that she is denying herself the pleasure of visiting them. On the other hand, she seems to imply that Arthur will need to grow a little bigger before she can visit. This excuse might therefore provide her with a rationale for waiting a year or more. She is a capable walker as we see when she takes the excursion to the sea and as is clear from the frequency that we find her wandering around the Markham's fields, so the excuse seems suspect and as time passes will become more suspect. Altogether, this early statement of defiance delivered so abruptly seems to confirm Gilbert's belief that her personality is 'difficult'.

Gilbert mentioned before this reply that the Wilsons had 'testified' that Mrs. Graham has so far visited no one. To testify suggests a trial, and in a sense Mrs. Graham has been on trial since she arrived at Wildfell Hall, and the testimony has been negative as the court of public opinion aligns against her, though accusing her only of eccentricity

so far. That she provides an excuse for her behavior demonstrates that she is aware of the social obligation to return visits and argues that she would fulfill the obligation if she could. That her failure to visit is characterized as an omission, suggests that it was not an optional act. She has failed to do something that she was obligated to do by common social practice within the community.

Mrs. Graham's explanation is not necessarily acceptable to the community. Rose, for one, is unsatisfied. Because Rose and Mrs. Markham are usually presented as less antagonistic than other neighbors, Rose's dissatisfaction is a significant sign that the explanation may be insufficient. She asks Mrs. Graham why she doesn't leave Arthur with the servant. Mrs. Graham tells her that the servant is too busy, which is fairly weak pretext. But Mrs. Graham realizes that the pretext is inadequate and immediately adds a second about the age of the servant. And then, as a third pretext, she claims Arthur is hyperactive. He has so far given little indication of hyperactivity, but the second excuse was weak and this one, when combined with the age of the servant, seems to strengthen the pretext. The need for three reasons highlights the inadequacy of each and calls into question the sincerity and the accuracy of the excuse as a whole. The weakness of her pretexts suggests either that she does not feel that this social obligation is of much importance or that, despite its importance, she is unwilling to comply.

Rose then notes that she had left the child with the servant a few days before to go to church, thereby rejecting the whole group of pretexts. Rose's comment may seem almost rude. The implication is that she cannot understand why the child would be such a problem. She doesn't believe Mrs. Graham's pretexts. Mrs. Graham admits the objection

about church but separates church from visits as the only occasion important enough to justify leaving Arthur at home. She then adds that perhaps she won't do it again, thus also creating a pretext for not going to church if she should later decide not to go. Her insistence that she wouldn't leave him for 'any other purpose' may be an attempt to show her commitment to going to church in light of the vicar's visit after she missed the first Sunday. But she's giving herself some space should she later change her mind. She seems to add the final caveat as though she's reacting to Rose's intrusive questioning. Not only would I not go anywhere else without my son, she may be saying, but I believe I won't go there anymore either.

Mrs. Markham, now shocked asks about Arthur. He must be a very difficult child, since he needs such constant supervision. Mrs. Markham intervenes because, like Rose, she cannot see how all these pretexts really constitute a valid reason for failing to visit the neighbors. Mrs. Graham seems to be too casually explaining her way out of her responsibilities to the community. Also Mrs. Graham has here threatened further eccentricity by claiming that she cannot go to church either unless her son is able to walk there. Mrs. Markham's shock is only partly due to Arthur's supposed wildness. The principal surprise is due to the ease with which Mrs. Graham discards church attendance.

But Mrs. Graham, despite a very questionable argument based on the hyperactivity of her son, now admits he's not difficult and instead describes him as her 'only treasure' and herself as his 'only friend'. This comment once more exposes the possibly unhealthy relation of Mrs. Graham to her son, suggesting issues of co-dependency that may later cause difficulties for Arthur. The effect is augmented by her

sad smile, which may derive from thinking of their perilous situation, still unknown to either the neighbors or the readers. At any rate for Rose and Mrs. Markham she must seem to be an incompetent mother, unable to combine the requirements of childrearing with other important tasks that she must accomplish. She comes across here in her physical attitude, in her tone of voice and in the comments she makes, as a doting mother, defeated by the complexities of raising children. Her explanations haven't explained and both Rose and Mrs. Markham are aware that there is something wrong with her position. Though it is fairly early in the first visit, Mrs. Markham can tolerate her comments no more and she makes a direct criticism of Mrs. Graham as a mother. Her previous criticisms were framed as questions or stated as surprise.

She frankly tells Mrs. Graham that she is being foolish and is likely to harm her son. Mrs. Graham is not at this point in a position to argue on a basis of equality with Mrs. Markham because, judging from the evidence she presents to the Markhams, she is clearly not an effective mother. Mrs. Markham sees her as a ridiculous figure and is not too optimistic that she is capable of being wiser or more aware of her responsibilities. She therefore warns her that it is not only to save herself from ridicule that she should reconsider her attitudes and actions but also because she is likely to destroy her son. Mrs. Markham may believe that a doting mother like Mrs. Graham would be more likely to react to a threat to her son that to fear of ridicule to herself.

Mrs. Graham reacts emotionally to Mrs. Markham's suggestion of ruin, as Mrs. Markham probably expected she would. She appears to be unwilling to accept that she is harming her child and she therefore confirms Mrs. Markham's opinion of her. Mrs.

Graham of course sees the comment in the context of the danger her son was exposed to at home before she left Huntingdon. She believes that she is hiding out at Wildfell Hall precisely to save her son from ruin. Although Mrs. Markham does not yet understand the whole background of the situation she might not alter her opinion even if she knew everything. Mrs. Graham's action in leaving her husband would not have been universally applauded in 1827 as the later responses of Rev. Millward and some of the early reviewers demonstrate. Although at this point neither the readers nor the Markhams are aware of the larger ideological discourses behind this discussion, some of them are being discussed in the interchange. Mrs. Markham directly states her analysis based upon her observation of Mrs. Graham combined with her interpretation of Mrs. Graham's comments and her earlier opinion of Mrs. Graham as a clever but foolish woman. All the evidence so far seems to support her conclusions.

She gives Mrs. Graham direct advice, assuming the role of a wiser older woman who should be listened to, telling her that she needs to avoid spoiling her son so much. From the point of view of power, Mrs. Markham, a figure of authority in her home and respect in the community, obviously has a fairly low opinion of Mrs. Graham and she feels justified in giving her directives and sure that she needs the advice. Mrs. Graham reacts by drastically shifting the intent of Mrs. Markham's statement.

Mrs. Graham's energetic response, as well as her misinterpretation of Mrs. Markham's words, discloses her strong emotional involvement with this question. She is very concerned about how she is affecting her son and how her son will react to her actions. Much of this probably derives from Huntingdon's attempts to alienate her from

her son but also, as Mrs. Markham's surmises, she had entered into marriage unprepared in many ways and she is barely learning what to do. But Mrs. Graham responds by asking Mrs. Markham not to say such things in front of her son. Though framed as a request, her tone is imperative. Mrs. Markham sees that Mrs. Graham is overly emotional and that she reacts inappropriately at times. She cannot be too direct with her because she cannot predict her responses. Therefore, to keep her from becoming upset, she attempts to explain again. But Mrs. Graham, in a clearly inappropriate reaction, simply changes the topic. Mrs. Markham is the older and more established neighbor. It is to Mrs. Graham's advantage to gain Mrs. Markham's approval and support. If the conversation is going to move on to a new topic, Mrs. Markham is the one who should indicate the change. This is a question of power. Fairclough (1992b, p. 155) argues that "topics are introduced and changed only by the dominant participant." Mrs. Graham has here broken the conventions of interaction and failed to observe the operative power hierarchies. For Mrs. Graham the relative power of the participants may not have been clearly established yet as she knows that her social standing, at least in the past, is somewhat higher than that of Mrs. Markham. Within the context of the moment however it is obvious that Mrs. Markham is and expects to be recognized as the more powerful participant. Mrs. Graham's act of cutting off Mrs. Markham and introducing a new topic is seriously confrontational and would be taken by Mrs. Markham as disrespectful and uneducated. The effect of Mrs. Graham's act is clear to all. Gilbert judges her as argumentative because of her failure to observe power relationships.

In this initial phase of the visit to Linden Car we can observe several communication problems. Fairclough (Mills, 1997, p. 136) sees social relations as a clash of different discourse types within interactions. What happened between Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Graham, then, may be fairly common in social encounters. To begin, it is fairly obvious that they are enacting different ideologies. Mrs. Markham (and Rose) performs as a representative of the community. She understands clearly what is expected of participants in this community and she is aware that Mrs. Graham has so far failed to fulfill several obligations that admittance into the community would require. Her questions and expressions of surprise are indirect clues meant to guide Mrs. Graham toward an understanding of the responses that are required of her. Mrs. Markham represents conformity to community values and conventions whereas Mrs. Graham at times seems unaware of these values and represents conformity to moral absolutes that are not immediately dependent upon the community. She does not appear to be aware that her actions fall outside community norms or that she is responding inadequately to Rose and Mrs. Markham's suggestions about expectations. On the other hand, it is not clear that she places much importance on social conventions and she may not have conformed to community expectations even if she were aware of them.

The encounter is frustrating for both Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Graham because they see the world in two different ways, with differing goals for their actions. This is not necessarily because Mrs. Graham is less governed by social constraints but because she is an outsider in this particular community and may not have recognized the specific constraints that operate in it. Berger and Luckman (1967, pp. 38-39) note that interaction

requires that the participants conform to convention. They write, “I must take into account prevailing standards of proper speech for various occasions, even if I would prefer my private improper ones.” The conversation between Mrs. Graham and the Markhams, however, reveals clashing ideologies. They obviously have differing concepts of what it means to be a good mother or a good neighbor. Earlier interactions have indicated that they also have different expectations of conversation. In this context, it may be difficult for them to understand each other’s remarks.

A second zone of confusion in this encounter relates to power, or what Fairclough (1995, p. 41) calls status, the relationship between participants in an interaction. As was mentioned before, Mrs. Markham clearly sees herself as the dominant person in this encounter. She is older and more established in the community than Mrs. Graham. She believes she is also wiser and more knowledgeable. Pennycook (2001, p. 81) suggests that variations in power among participants in an interaction will determine who may speak, what they may speak about and how long they may speak. Saville-Troike (2003, p. 18), within the context of ethnography of communication, argues that awareness of these and related aspects of a communicative situation are the basis of communicative competence. In practice these constraints do not appear to be operating in this interaction. Mrs. Graham changes the topic at will, cuts off Mrs. Markham and eventually dominates the entire conversation. We might ask what Mrs. Graham’s willingness to cut off Mrs. Markham says about how she perceives the context. Her general touchiness about being lectured by Mrs. Markham might also tell us something about who she perceives as having rights in the encounter. As we will later learn, she has grown up an only child

having little contact with others outside her immediate household. Her family is wealthy and she is part of the rural aristocracy, though separated from other members of the gentry by dissenting religious practices. She married, believing that she was assuming power in taking on the role of wife, but found herself powerless in the situation. Perhaps her inability to negotiate power or rather the inefficiency of her techniques for negotiating power has enhanced her overbearing style. Perhaps her peremptoriness contributed to her experience of powerlessness. She has not been successful at exercising influence and she has become unbending. Perhaps she has not experienced situations where negotiation aided her. She believes her residence at Wildfell Hall will be temporary and her main concern is not to be accepted into the community but rather to be left alone by it. Mrs. Graham may believe that she is the dominant person in the interaction but, even if she intends to meet the Markhams on equal terms, she may lack the social skills to accomplish her intention

We can see several elements in her communicative style that indicate command and also suggest limited communicative competence. As Mrs. Markham was advising her she told her not to say those things in front of her son and then, when Mrs. Markham began to explain, she cut her off and changed the subject. Although these actions can be taken as expressions of power they might also be seen as lacking in politeness. Mrs. Graham's use of modals is also notable. She uses 'must' nine of the eleven times it occurs during the visit and 'should' six of the ten times it is used. She also sees herself as an authority. She seems to use "I think" as a statement of decision or endpoint of a topic,

as though what she thinks decides the issue and of the ninety-five times the pronoun 'I' occurs in the encounter she uses it fifty-eight times or 61% of all the occurrences.

Mrs. Markham, in contrast, is more likely to state opposition through questions, although she does directly tell Mrs. Graham that she is wrong on several occasions. She never says 'must' or 'never' and only twice uses 'should'. She also uses 'ought' three times. Mrs. Markham despite being shocked several times is more likely than the other participants to try to calm down the interchanges when the civility threatens to break down. Though she is cut off on several occasions she does not usually express anger. Her more conciliatory tone does not necessarily suggest that she is ceding power to Mrs. Graham. Rather, Mills (1997, p. 37) has indicated that those in positions of power sometimes need to use more deferential language forms to obtain the results they want from people having less power. In studies of interactions between bosses and secretaries, Mills demonstrates that the language of the boss may enact powerlessness while the secretary enacts power. But these are clearly defined situations where power, already determined by an institutional hierarchy, need not announce itself. In the case of Mrs. Markham, though relative power is ambiguous, the constraints of civility and the duties of hostess combine to lead her to adopt a less commanding tone.

'No, Mamma,'

The second phase of the visit to Linden Car focuses upon Gilbert's interaction with Arthur, Mrs. Graham's difficulty as a mother, and Mrs. Markham's attempt to ease a

socially awkward moment. The key moment occurs when Mrs. Graham calls her son who is sitting on Gilbert's knee looking at pictures.

'Arthur,' said she, at length, 'come here. You are troublesome to Mr. Markham: he wishes to read.'

'By no means, Mrs. Graham; pray let him stay. I am as much amused as he is,' pleaded I. But still, with hand and eye, she silently called him to her side.

'No, mamma,' said the child; 'let me look at these pictures first; and then I'll come, and tell you all about them.' Bronte 1966: 31

Though this interchange calls Gilbert's behavior into question, it is especially awkward for Mrs. Graham. She did not respond to Gilbert's request, as she should have, but by her gestures she made clear she wished Arthur to come. Gilbert should have taken the hint and sent Arthur back to his mother. He didn't do so. Arthur then tells his mother he won't come. Neither Gilbert nor Mrs. Graham responds. Mrs. Markham ends the awkward silence by inviting Mrs. Graham to a party. Her intervention leads the conversation to other topics and Arthur's defiance is ostensibly forgotten. In the context of the previous discussion of spoiling children and the following discussion of how children should be raised, Mrs. Graham's failure to respond is significant; In Goffman's (1967, p. 19) terms, she has failed to prevent an event incompatible with the line that she is maintaining. If Mrs. Graham wishes to present herself as an authority on raising children, she needs to be able to govern Arthur. Mrs. Markham's introduction of a new topic covers the incident and allows the participants in the encounter to pretend that nothing has happened. Nonetheless, the adults in the room are aware that Mrs. Graham has lost face.

Given the reduced value of her line after this incident, and the debt she owes to Mrs. Markham for helping her through the threat to her face, we might expect Mrs. Graham's response to the invitation to be gracious. She chooses, however, to make one of her abrupt refusals, "Thank you, I never go to parties." Surprised at the rebuff, Mrs. Markham offers several encouraging details about the planned party, none of which sways Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Markham then signals Rose to bring wine and cake to the table. Both Mrs. Graham and her son again fail to react adequately, refusing the wine though both eat the cake. We can see what actions would be expected in this situation from the commentary of Gilbert who refers to the repeated offering of the wine as 'hospitable, but the refusals as 'obstinate'. This finally leads Mrs. Graham to explain that she has trained Arthur to dislike wine.

But Would You Use the Same Argument

When she describes how she has trained her son to be disgusted by wine, everyone else laughs and Mrs. Markham comments:

'Well, Mrs. Graham,' said my mother, wiping the tears of merriment from her bright, blue eyes - 'well, you surprise me! I really gave you credit for having more sense - The poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him, if you persist in --' (Bronte 1966: 82)

Mrs. Markham has already heard Mrs. Graham's weak excuses for not visiting the neighbors. She has already noticed her difficulty with social etiquette. She has already seen her poor child raising practices and heard her questionable theories. It is doubtful

that she expected much of her. So to say that she surprised her is to indicate that this last statement was more eccentric than all the previous ones. By this time there is little that should have surprised Mrs. Markham. She has given her credit for very little sense since the first time they met so the following comment seems to indicate that Mrs. Graham has exceeded the foolishness that Mrs. Markham already attributed to her.

Mrs. Graham cuts her hostess off with 'I think it a very excellent plan,' (Bronte 1966, p. 82). The ensuing discussion develops four interrelated themes: alcohol, childrearing, education and gender. On each of these topics, Mrs. Graham's radical ideas challenge the accepted wisdom of the time. Mrs. Graham seems to function in this interchange, at least to some extent, as the mouthpiece for the beliefs of the author. If early twentieth century critics were correct in condemning the novel as didactic, then this is its most didactic segment. Mrs. Graham's comments, however, are not simply a didactic pause in the development of the novel. This scene is also the first and one of the few opportunities we have to observe her interacting with members of the community of Lindenhope other than Gilbert, and it includes her most strident statement of her opinions. As such, it is central to the development of the plot because it illustrates her difficulty in fitting in with the community and foreshadows her eventual alienation from it. The early incidents of the visit, preceding the comment quoted above, focus principally upon the inappropriacy of her comments and responses and the final moments of the encounter remind us again of her lack of perception in social situations.

The common theme of the four topics of the interchange is temptation. Mrs. Markham, who Gilbert has already presented to us as a guardian of conventional

proprieties and a spokesperson for gender inequality, takes the position of Milton in *Areopagitica* that true virtue can come only through exposure to vice. Mrs Graham argues that children should be armed against temptations that are likely to corrupt the unprepared and that, if possible, temptations should be kept from them until they are strong enough to withstand them. She then exposes the weakness of Gilbert's positions on education by asking Gilbert whether he say the same about the education of a girl.

Within the context of critical discourse analysis, much of the ideological content of this interchange is open and explicit. The participants in the discussion argue plainly for their positions in relation to the value of temptation. Their positions, however, are based upon more basic unstated ideological beliefs. This becomes clear when Mrs. Markham tells Mrs. Graham, "Only think what a man you will make of him." Mrs. Markham's and Mrs. Graham's differing conceptions of education and opposing attitudes toward temptation are based partially upon different conceptions of what the attributes of a good man are. Mrs. Graham answers that she hopes to save her son from "one degrading vice", thereby perhaps indicating she wants to make him virtuous. Mrs. Markham seems more concerned to make him spirited. These two adjectives can be taken as coded references to distinct ideological systems.

Although Gilbert presents Mrs. Markham as a nurturing mother, he has several times let us know that she is an autocratic figure strictly controlling her family. In this interchange, she establishes her authority through several strategies. First, she laughs at Mrs. Graham, calls her foolish and questions the effect she will have on her son. Next she directly dismisses Mrs. Graham's childrearing practice and expounds her own concept of

virtue. When Mrs. Graham does not defer sufficiently to Mrs. Markham's opinion, Mrs. Markham warns her against the "fatal error" of seeking to educate her own child, implying that she cannot, as a woman, understand the education of boys. She also implies that Mrs. Graham may be misled by cleverness to imagine she is also wise. She supposes that Mrs. Graham's parenting practice will be indulgent and, even if not indulgent, will make him a sissy. Treating Mrs. Graham as a slow learner, Mrs. Markham announces that she plans to send the vicar to her to explain parenting so that she can understand.

Underlying Mrs. Markham's advice are several unstated givens. She states implicitly or explicitly that parents should not protect their children from possible error. Mother's should not be overly involved in the education of their sons. Mothers tend to spoil their sons. Boys and girls should be educated differently. Boys should be encouraged to be 'spirited' and girls should not. Many of these beliefs are clearly geared to support the power structure in a time when married woman had no rights over either their property or their children. Mrs. Markham may not be aware of the extent to which the actions that she advocates function to create the structures of her society. Fairclough (1995) argues that verbal interaction is a form of social action and that social structures are both the necessary conditions for and the products of this action. In other words, Mrs. Markham assumptions cause her to speak and act in certain ways that in turn create the structures that she assumes.

Mrs. Graham first challenges Mrs. Markham's warnings and counsel and then shifts her attention to Gilbert who attempts to present his mother's views more convincingly. He attempts to define virtue and constructs a metaphorical caricature of

Mrs. Graham's position to contrast to his. Mrs. Graham reframes his metaphor and then almost refers to her alcoholic husband. At the last moment, she adjusts her comment to include "the rest of mankind". Gilbert chooses to be offended and remarks, "You are very complimentary to us all". This somewhat ironic, somewhat joking, statement serves to mock Mrs. Graham's arguments by undercutting the seriousness of the discussion. He also seems to be trying to give the discussion a friendlier, less intellectual tone. Mrs. Graham dismisses his objection and his move toward friendliness and claims to speak for "those I do know". She goes on to construct her own variation on the metaphor that both are using but undercuts her position by revealing that she considers herself an exception to the general rule she is developing.

After another short exchange with Mrs. Markham, Mrs. Graham begins to question Gilbert but he interrupts her. After he finishes, she asks whether his opinions about the education of a boy would also apply to girls. The question effectively silences Gilbert, who only makes three brief denials during the rest of Mrs. Graham's speech.

During the course of the conversation Mrs. Graham has rejected three versions of the dominant discourse. First she directly contradicts Mrs. Markham's first ridicule of her parenting practice, gravely stating, "I think it a very excellent plan." Then she dismisses Mrs. Markham's offer to send the vicar, implying that his counsel could not much interest her. Finally, when Gilbert complains that she is leaving before he can answer her because she wants to have the last word, she generously responds, "You may have as many words as you please; -only I can't stay to hear them". Each of her replies makes clear that she is neither impressed by the arguments she is hearing nor much interested in hearing them.

In what seems to be her most striking argument, Mrs. Graham becomes an analyst of discourse and asks her companions to think about the ideologies that underlie their remarks. Specifically, in asking Gilbert whether his comments would be the same if he were talking about a girl, she is asking him to consider gender assumptions that he has not previously analyzed but which clearly determine his thoughts about parenting. Fairclough, (1995: 44) argues that when a specific ideological-discursive formation has attained undisputed dominance within a system its norms come to be seen as reality to such an extent that individuals are unable to discern the ideology that limits their thoughts. He calls this process ‘naturalization, (Fairclough, 1995, p. 42). One of the purposes of Critical Discourse Analysis is to denaturalize these ideologies so that the participants in a debate can identify the ideological premises behind their statements. When Mrs. Graham asks, “would you use the same argument with regard to a girl?” she denaturalizes the ideas behind his comments and forces him to confront the ideological bases upon which he is constructing his arguments. As Mrs. Graham describes the possible premises that would have to underlie his conclusions he can only interject, “Assuredly not.” And “Heaven forbid that I should think so!” He rejects the conclusions she reaches about his theories three times, but he makes no attempt to reframe her statements or to explain what he really means. Her question has effectively silenced him because it has exposed implications of his arguments that he had not suspected were there.

In the discussion of temptation, vice and virtue that Gilbert and Mrs. Graham pursue, they are really talking about something else. Gilbert introduces the metaphor of physical labor in his first reply but rapidly shifts to the journey metaphor. Mrs. Graham

continues with the journey in her response but includes a hint of physical exertion as well. After Gilbert's ironic interruption she returns again to the journey. Gilbert seems to shift to a siege metaphor, calling for fortification, which Mrs. Graham pursues, subtly shifting it to a battle and then making the battle internal. After the second exchange with Mrs. Markham, Mrs. Graham turns back to Gilbert and to the battle metaphor but then modifies it to a hunting metaphor with the individual soul as prey. Gilbert responds with a variation on the hunting metaphor which he extends first with a metaphor about physical exercise and then a return to battle. Continuing, he moves the discussion into gardening and contrasts plants raised in greenhouses with those grown in the wild. Mrs. Graham transforms the argument by changing the sex of the child but continues the garden metaphor. She drops it momentarily to discuss the relative tendencies to vice of boys and girls but then returns to nature with the experience of an oak tree in a storm. Then after some talk of experience she is able to fit battle, hunting and journey all into one line. Although they believe they are, neither Gilbert nor Mrs. Graham is actually talking about the education of children. Their conversation is a series of analogies by which each of them tries to frame the educational process by identifying it with other things. One problem that arises in this interchange is that none of the metaphors is really very accurate. As the participants work to refine the metaphors and develop the logic of their arguments, they seem to move ever farther from the themes they are supposedly discussing. Rather than adapting the metaphors to their ideas, they seem to be adapting their points to the metaphor. Also though they often use the same metaphors, each alters the details to fit a different image. So, though both may make temptation a stone on a

pathway, the paths are really very different and the stones alter in shape and weight according to the convenience of the speakers. All they can really reach agreement about in this discussion is paths and stones but since the paths are so dissimilar they probably cannot really even agree on that. Education and parenting, alcohol and temptation have really dropped out of the discussion before it has advanced much. Hodge and Kress (1993 /1979, p. 15) may have identified a part of the Problem facing Gilbert and Mrs. Graham.

Ideology involves a systematically organized presentation of reality. How can ideology be defined without a prior description of the truth? All such descriptions involve language, and presenting anything in or through language involves selection.

In turning to metaphor, Gilbert and Mrs. Graham seem to be attempting to convert their thoughts on the topics they are discussing into clear complete presentations of truth. But in leaving the topics for more familiar images they are actually turning away from the concrete details of truth and attaching their ideas to abstract images whose details shift according to necessity. They select the details they need for each response but the image moves further each time from concrete details. This is not to say that they would be speaking of truth if they dropped the metaphors because, as Hodge and Kress argue, truth cannot be presented through language, which always involves selection.

This conversation is about power on different levels. Each of the three participants believes he or she possesses truth and tries to frame the discussion to make the truth clear. They do not, however, subscribe to the same institutional structures. Mrs. Graham tends to be rigid and moralistic and she finds it difficult to listen to the ideas of others or to accept social conventions she does not approve of. We see these tendencies in this

conversation when she clearly indicates that she is uninterested in the advice that others offer her. She also rejects opportunities to continue the interaction in a friendlier tone. Mrs. Markham believes that her advice is valuable. Mrs. Graham's failure to agree with her, or show gratitude for her counsel, leads Mrs. Markham to question the common sense and the propriety of the younger woman. We see this in her dismissal of Mrs. Graham's arguments. Gilbert is a vain young man who restates familiar ideas but may be unaccustomed to thinking through his ideas or hearing new perspectives. He begins by explaining his viewpoint pedantically but eventually is unable to respond to Mrs. Graham's arguments. Mrs. Graham shows herself to be an incomplete conformist to social convention and demonstrates characteristics that will eventually seriously undermine her relations with her neighbors.

At a deeper level, the discussion contrasts ideologies loosely identified with dissenting religious movements of mid-nineteenth century England to other ideologies conforming approximately to establishment of the time. Mrs. Graham, using the weapon of critical discourse analysis, is able to bring some of the unstated assumptions of conventional thought to the surface and force Gilbert, at least, to contemplate them but she has been no more successful than the others in presenting the truth.

All the Words You Want

As Mrs Graham concludes her monologue, Gilbert notices that she is preparing to leave and he complains.

'Well! you ladies must always have the last word, I suppose, said I, observing her rise and begin to take leave of my mother.

'You may have as many words as you please, - only I can't stay to hear them.'

Mrs. Graham has dominated the conversation for the past few minutes. She has taken over the theme and not allowed anyone to respond to her in her final comments. So her abrupt departure may seem to be a little rude to all of them not merely Gilbert. But this may be an attempt at humor made to lighten the atmosphere after her monologue that became emotionally charged at the end.

Mrs. Graham answers with one of the few clear jokes that she makes during the course of the novel. Although *Wildfell Hall* is a very funny book, Helen often lacks a sense of humor. She seems to view the world a little too seriously most of the time. This quick response is perhaps the only brilliant repartee that she is able to pull off. On the other hand, though the remark was obviously intended to be funny, it is also revealing. Mrs. Graham always does this. She has her say and doesn't listen to what others want to say. She repeats the mistake here although it is good-natured this time, in contrast to her dismissal of Gilbert at Wildfell Hall. Gilbert has said almost nothing during the latter part of the monologue except to interject three denials that she is expressing his thoughts. Mrs. Markham became silent much earlier and Rose has said nothing since the two comments she made when Mrs. Graham arrived. There was no reason to expect that they would be given an opportunity to respond because she had already told them that she wouldn't be swayed in her views by the opinions of anyone.

Now, as the visit comes to an end, a curious thing happens to Mrs. Graham. She seems to have been persuasive in her discussion of education and related themes. No one other than Gilbert has responded to her for quite a while and even he could only object,

without making any arguments. But Gilbert is angry rather than impressed and his silent mother and sister may have stopped talking because they find Mrs. Graham hopeless.

It is difficult to analyze Gilbert's further responses. Perhaps he is embarrassed by the clever reply that he is unable to answer. Perhaps he is trying to answer in the same vein but doesn't quite achieve the effect he attempts. His replies seem a little peevish but it is possible he didn't intend them that way. He may have been too surprised by her response to be able to respond adequately. That is what happened to him in the argument when he was silenced by her question about doing the same with a girl. The general atmosphere seems a little tense, perhaps even hostile, with the whole family anxious for Mrs. Graham to leave.

But Mrs. Graham suddenly seems to be in pretty high spirits. She follows her joke with a daring invitation. She asks him to visit her right in front of his mother after she has been particularly rude to Mrs. Markham several times during the visit. She covers the invitation by telling him to bring his sister, but she hasn't actually talked to the sister since the first remarks on entering. She also promises to listen to him if he comes to visit, something she has shown no interest in doing so far. She seems almost to be begging him to come and giving him reasons to do so. She has shown no interest so far in receiving visitors so this change of attitude is puzzling. She cannot have been impressed with Gilbert's comments because they were not very articulate and she easily tore them apart. She may have been more impressed by his willingness to listen to her ideas. She warns him beforehand that though she might listen patiently she has no intention of considering

his arguments. When she calls him a logician she is perhaps laughing once again at his reasoning ability.

Gilbert wants to be provoking but his replies are stilted and he seems unable to really respond to her comments. She says good bye exactly as she did at Wildfell. And she leaves his final barb unanswered, once again winning an argument by simply refusing to continue it. But this time she smiles rather than looking scornfully. Her smile, however, is pitying, and may be provoked by her amusement at his inability to respond to her and apparently even to understand what is happening in this conversation. Gilbert refers to her as his 'fair antagonist', noting, as he has several times during the visit, that she is attractive even at this moment when he is receiving another humiliation at her hands. She may be aware that she has this effect on him accounting in part for both her high spirits and for her pitying smile. Mrs. Graham finishes the visit in a manic mood. When Arthur 'impertinently' tells her to shake Gilbert's hand, she seems to be pleased and more than willing to shake hands with Gilbert. She's teases and ridicules and she's enjoying herself. He is irritable while she is teasing him. Maybe he really doesn't understand what is happening in this part of the encounter.

The happiness of Mrs. Graham at this point shows something of her blindness to social norms. She has not done well at this visit. She has been extremely rude to the hostess who is a woman of influence in the small community and someone Mrs. Graham should maintain good relations with. She has shown herself to be careless of propriety in the casual way that she discards her obligation to visit the Wilsons and the Millwards. She has cut off Mrs. Markham and turned the conversation in directions that she chooses

to. And finally she has taken over the conversation and let no one else talk until she is ready to go. As a mother she has shown herself to be eccentric in her ideas, inept in her performance, and unwilling to listen to advice from someone more experienced. Overall the visit has not gone well for her. Yet she now becomes very animated, jokes around with Gilbert and invites Rose and him to visit her.

Goffman (1967) observes that when we receive threats to our face or challenges to our line, we tend to experience feelings of anger and frustration. Yet Mrs. Graham seems quite happy. One explanation may be that she is simply not good at noticing social nuances. She is not aware of how critical the questions that she was asked at the beginning of the visit were. She doesn't realize how rude she was being with some of her interventions. She may have no idea of the impression she was making on the people around her. She even seems contented with Gilbert who obviously is upset with her. So we might postulate that she hasn't viewed the encounter as Gilbert and the reader do and that she isn't aware of how seriously she erred in many of her actions. Her sheltered upbringing and higher social status may have led her to automatically assume certain prerogatives that in her new circumstances she cannot so casually assume.

Gilbert is frustrated by this encounter with Mrs. Graham even though she seems much friendlier. She is laughing as she leaves and she holds out her hand to Gilbert but he feels he has been belittled and that she hasn't accepted his line at the value he would assign to it and he is angry. He is still battling with the low opinion he receives from her. He calls her attitude an injustice and argues she knows nothing about him and has no reason to judge him as she does. But altogether he has no reason to be displeased unless

he has really failed to understand what was happening as she left. For some reason she seems to be having fun on the visit and the reason seems to be tied to Gilbert. Of course, one problem that Gilbert has here is that Mrs. Graham doesn't flirt the way that Eliza Millward does. She competes with Gilbert rather than humoring him. And she expects him to show some intellectual capability and to talk about what she considers meaningful issues rather than just frivolities. He may not yet be accustomed to the dynamics of conversation with her.

Mrs. Graham's visit to Linden Car has provoked a complex series of interactions of which this discussion considers only a few. The interchanges that occur as the Markhams converse with her might be taken as further examples of the kinds of interaction rituals already observed in previous speech events from earlier chapters. But they are even more useful in identifying the dynamics of negotiation over power among participants in interactions. The extended metaphorical discussion of education, gender and temptation provides an example of the opacity of ideology and Mrs. Graham's central comment demonstrates how an ideological foundation might be denaturalized. The denaturalization of ideology, however, does not necessarily change perceptions. At the close of the visit, we can see that Mrs. Graham's intellectual insights have not altered the impression that the Markham's have of her character and abilities. The clash of discourses that has occurred because of Mrs. Graham's unfamiliarity with the conventions of the community and her lack of perception in social situations, has probably led to deterioration in her reputation within the community. Finally her high

spirits and Gilbert's frustration at the close of the encounter demonstrate how easily participants in an encounter may fail to recognize what is happening.

CHAPTER 11. “DID YOU EVER SEE SUCH ART”: THE PERFORMANCE OF GOSSIP

Whereas Habermas argues that communicative action—action oriented toward reaching an understanding—is achieved by means of a consensus of individual selves who must account for intersubjectively recognized validity claims (1984, 1987) the Xavante organize discourse to be a the product of multiple selves in the form of multiple voices.¹ Graham (1993)

“the talk/in small towns is one of the ways/we get the word out/when there’s trouble.”
Bodeen (1993)

The extent to which the individual may be the locus of political activity has been suggested as a difference that can be observed between traditional Western political theory and the public discourse of some non-Western societies. Graham (1993), for example, discusses how political discourse among the Xavante of Brazil “lies not within the individual but in the relationships between individuals”. Graham develops her characterization of Xavante discourse in contrast to the model of public debate developed by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989, 1962). In the Xavante community that she observes, public pronouncements are not understood as statements by individuals and considerable effort seems to be made in the men’s councils to obscure the connection of discourse to identifiable individuals.

It may not be necessary, however, to go as far as Brazil for examples of ways in which public discourse may be severed from individual intention. The practice of gossip has been an area in Western culture that encourages polyvocality parallel to that described by Graham. Elements in the process of gossip recorded in *Wildfell Hall* suggest that the negativity principle is very strong in gossip, that gossip requires the participation of multiple voices and the co-construction of reality, and that the referential content of

gossip is of only secondary importance to the process. *Wildfell Hall* is a work of fiction and the characters are fictional creations. Critics might, therefore, argue that this text should not be used for the purpose of observing how people interact in the real world. However, the use of written texts rather than observation of social interaction does not necessarily remove a study from the realm of ethnography of communication. Warner (1990) builds an argument for the depersonalized nature of print in the late colonial-early republican epoch of the United States using newspapers, letters and other documents. Bauman (1970, 1971) uses public documents, journals and letters to observe the ways that seventeenth century Quakers used language to perform public roles. Court records permit Norton (1987) to observe the operation of gossip in seventeenth century Maryland. Freeman (1995, p. 27) speaks of Jeffersons's awareness that, "history unfolded in the spaces between the public transactions", and constructs an ethnography of gossip in the early republic from Jefferson's text. The letters passing among members of the family and social circle of John Adams enable Gelles (1989) to reconstruct the complex consultations and interactions that resulted from and determined the course of a courtship.

Several characteristics of *Wildfell Hall* argue that it may be a rich source of insights into social interaction. Its detail and realism may be unmatched among early Victorian novels. Social interaction, as portrayed in the book, convincingly illustrates twentieth century frameworks of co-construction of meaning, interaction ritual, and the complex functions of the speech event. The precision and complexity of Bronte's descriptions of interaction at a time when communication was understood in much

simpler terms argue that her observations are ethnographically valid and can be used as a source material to further our understanding of the way humans interact. Warner's (1990) study of the printed word from an ethnographic perspective includes analysis of literary texts, especially the novel, and, as previously mentioned, other novels have been used to illustrate anthropological theory.

Personalized discourse

Graham defines personalized discourse as, "understood to represent an individual speaker's intentions as well as experiences" (Graham, 1993, p. 718). This characterization is grounded in Habermas's model of public discourse and Searle's (1969) formulation of the speech act (although Searle's speech act theory does not seem to relate directly to Graham's dichotomy). In contrast to this personalized view of speech she posits a view of discourse as "socially situated interaction". Discourse grows out of the interaction between participants in an interaction rather than the intentions of any individual participant. She grounds the second perspective in the insights of conversation analysis and Bakhtin's polyvocalic view of discourse.

The dichotomy that Graham suggests depends upon acceptance of a view of intentionality as a psychological rather than a social process. Duranti (1993) questions the possibility that individual intentionality can exist outside the social and linguistic context of the community.

A key concept in personalized speech, the speaker's accountability for her words, would be undercut in socially situated interaction. Brenneis (1987), for example,

describes techniques including overlap and ritual language used among the Hindus of Fiji that help to separate the speaker from the message, which becomes the product of multiple voices.

Print, perhaps surprisingly for readers like us raised in the modern atmosphere of intellectual property rights, can constitute distancing technique adequate to separate the author from responsibility for the content of the text. Warner (1990) sees the printing press as a crucial element in the construction of the abstract called the public.

In the early republic, Warner argues that print was taken as impersonal discourse and writers of pamphlets and newspaper reports were expected to speak for the general public. He quotes an early pamphlet responding to a newspaper letter, “As I am of Opinion with the Author of the Letter, that aiming at the Good of ones Country is sufficient Apology for publishing a Man’s Thoughts; so I am clearly of Opinion that it is the indispensable Duty of every Man to do it . . . and that he ought not to suffer any private Views or Ends . . . to bypass or influence him” (Warner, 1990, p. 38). In a time dominated by anonymous and pseudonymous publication, writers argued that “persons are irrelevant in the discourse of the public field” (Warner, 1990, p. 42). Newspapers and pamphlets also created the concept of the public, a fictitious impersonal entity whose views they claimed to be transmitting. The public became conceptualized as the agency that supervised the organs of government (1990, p. 61). Warner sees the ultimate expression of this negative construction in public career of Benjamin Franklin and in the introduction to the Constitution, acquiring full authority by speaking in the voice of the hypothetical “We, the people” (1990, p. 96)

In spoken discourse, too, accountability can be shifted to an abstract entity. Xavante discourse does this by deliberately disguising the role of the speaker through a number of devices such as simultaneous multiple speakers, averted glances, and feigned sleep. Both gossip and Xavante discourse involve repetition of whatever is being said around one as part of one's own performance. But neither the gossipier nor the Xavante elder can avoid injecting a degree of subjective manipulation of the repeated material because both must select from the simultaneous voices that surround them what to say and both frame the discourse in the act of repeating. Among the Xavante elders, the ability to select is limited by the requirement that whatever words are spoken must be seen to be representative of a group position rather than individual opinion. In the hostile interchange among Gilbert, Eliza, and Jane, we can see that participants can be criticized for going beyond the conclusions of anonymous community opinion as interpreted by the participating group. In both cases, it is clear that successful interaction requires collaborative construction of knowledge through a process that leaves no participant individually responsible for introducing ideas to the group.

Discourse and negativity

Graham (1993) defines the principle of negativity as a required negation of self in public discourse as a basis for obtaining legitimacy. In discussing Quaker meetings White (2006) observes that participants hesitate before speaking “to be as sure as they can that that it is indeed the Spirit that is moving them to speak—not their own need for attention or their desire to be heard, or the pleasure of telling others how things are” (2006, p. 207)

For the Quakers, Bauman observes, the intellect and the emotions pertained to earthly man “and were therefore inadequate to the attainment of spiritual truth. The Quaker belief instead was based on the belief that the Light of God was present in everyone” (Bauman, 1970, p. 74). In other words, speech is of value for the Quakers only when it derives from God uncorrupted by human intellect and emotions. Graham (1984) describes parallel practices among the Xavante. Performance of either ritual wailing or collective singing is possible only for adult men or women who have learned the wail or song through dreams. Brenneis (1987a) presents examples of arbitration of disputes (*pancayat*) and specialized hymn-singing (*bhajan kavvali*) (see also, Brenneis, 1985) in a Hindi community in Fiji. In these situations, witnesses or performers enact emotions existing in situations rather than individuals. In each case, expressions by individuals are acceptable only to the extent that they can be perceived as originating beyond the individual.

Other examples of the principle of negativity can be found in situations where communication seems to be constructed through the interaction of several voices rather than as a message from one speaker to an audience. Brenneis (1987a) describes two social situations in Fiji, group singing (*cautal*) and gossip (*talanoa*), which dispense with turn-taking, utilizing extensive overlap as two or more voices speak at the same time co-constructing meaning. Graham’s description of the discourse structure of the male meeting (*warã*) among the Xavante of Brazil offers another example of multi-voiced discourse. Individual accountability in these situations is obscured by overlap and through the incorporation of others’ comments into each participant’s words. Because the

participants are seen as spokesmen for groups, their own accountability is further reduced.

Brenneis (1984b) describes the unsteady situation of the Big Men in the egalitarian village of Bhatgaon in Fiji whose prestige depends upon their ability to successfully but unobtrusively resolve community conflicts within a culture where they must always demonstrate their unwillingness to become involved for fear of seeming to exercise influence. Influence or authority in Bhatgaon is weakened by a perception that one might have influence or be willing to use it. Public intervention in the early years of American independence followed the same format (Warner, 1990). Politicians stressed their reluctance to accept positions but finally allowed themselves to be persuaded for the public good. Washington, for example stressed his desire and intention to leave the presidency after one term but finally relented, bowing as he said to “the universal desire that he continue” (Freeman, 1995, p. 42) The ambiguity of exercising authority becomes even clearer in Brison’s (1989) description of a series of meetings in a community in Papua New Guinea that followed the deaths of two brothers. Judges and influential members of the community were first pressured to take action against the accused and then themselves implicated in the crimes on the basis of having acted.

The community

Wildfell Hall is an epistolary novel dealing with events occurring in a small Yorkshire farming community in 1827. The narrator, Gilbert Markham, is a forty-four year old farmer who reconstructs, in letters to his brother-in-law based on twenty-year-

old personal journals, the narrative of his courtship of his wife. Markham's supposed journals function as ethnographic field notes, recording the norms of social interaction of his community.

Gilbert, his neighbors, and their servants live in farm houses scattered through the neighborhood. Although there is a church in the area, it is probably a rural church as there is no other indication that there may be a town nearby. Church attendance on Sunday, occasional evening gatherings at one or another farmhouse and frequent afternoon visits between farms are the principal occasions for social interaction. Church attendance is obligatory and other social interactions are nearly so for individuals hoping to be accepted into the community (Liddell, 1990, p. 95). The tenant, Helen Graham, is a young widow who has recently rented an abandoned mansion on a rugged hillside. Because she fails either to understand or to observe some of the social customs of the community, she gradually becomes an object of condemnation for the others. Although this will not become apparent until the close of the first section of the novel, Mrs Graham is not precisely as she presents herself to be. She is actually a married woman from a somewhat higher social status hiding from an abusive alcoholic husband. Because her rural upbringing may have been within the context of Methodism, she has difficulty fitting in both with the decadent representatives of the leisure class that her husband moves among and with the Anglican farm families that she encounters in the vicinity of Wildfell Hall.

Social interaction, as described in the novel, almost always takes place in the homes, gardens or fields of the participants. Only one instance of interaction in the

church is recorded. Occasional encounters occur on paths or roadways and on one occasion several young adults and children made an excursion to a cliff overlooking the ocean. In larger gatherings, young adults and adolescents tend to group together separating themselves from mature adults. The figure of the vicar is central to the gatherings. When he is present, he tends to dictate the conversation. When he speaks other conversations are expected to cease. While guests are sitting around the table, conversation is expected to be general and inclusive of everyone at the table though small pockets of private interaction continue to exist. All participants in interactions are very formal in their address to others, generally using courtesy titles and surnames for all except the immediate family.

Because Gilbert's father died before the novel began, Gilbert supervises the family farm. His brother and sister and other young men and women in this society, however, have considerable free time. Possibly because the narration begins at the end of October, even the farmers seem to have adequate time to engage in regular visiting with each other.

Engagement in gossip

Gossip can be defined variously as a method of social control, a system for getting the news out, a process of social interaction, a means of achieving solidarity or of defining group boundaries or as an individual weapon of social action. Arno (1980, p. 343) summarizes, "Gossip is a system for the circulation of information about, and the evaluation of, behavior among members of a group." Gilmore (1978) divides students of gossip into two groups, those who see it as the operation of public opinion enforcing

conformity to group norms and those who consider it informal communication of information. He goes on to argue that researchers do not always seem to be observing parallel phenomena. He then identifies eleven distinct forms of gossip in a small Spanish community and classifies them according to four elements: gossiper, gossipee, instrumentality and legitimacy. The gossiper, for example, may function as the community, expressing what everyone believes, as a participant in a small network within the community, or as part of a dyadic pair. In the first case, gossip promotes social conformity; in the second, it communicates news; and in the third, it is generally discounted by the community. The process of gossip varies according to the nature of the gossiper.

Brenneis (1984) discusses the importance of displaying familiarity with shared knowledge, the ability to repeat what everyone knows, as a marker of inclusion within a community. In Bhatgaon, members of the community avoid direct attacks on others but may use sacred orations delivered in weekly religious gatherings to comment on current events through metaphor, irony, and double meanings. Ability to interpret these disguised communications solidifies an individual's position in the community. Freeman notes that eighteenth century American politicians from different parties could not share gossip because they didn't know each other's codes of interpretation. Jefferson was delighted when Hamilton made a comment before Washington and himself that confirmed (for Jefferson) that Hamilton was a monarchist conspirator. When Jefferson later discussed the proof with Washington, thinking the monarchist plot was now apparent, he was surprised to find that Washington, unaware of symbolic framework constructed by

Jefferson and his group, couldn't see it (Freeman, 1995, pp. 38-39). Pilkington (1998) argues that to be fully a member of a group, one must be able to understand and participate in the gossip of that group.

Brison (1989) discusses an egalitarian community in Papua, New Guinea characterized by long inconclusive meetings where decisions are seldom made and never implemented. She identifies the gossip-based purpose of public meeting as the construction of acceptable narratives of events rather than the resolution of problems. Similarly, Eder and Enke (1991) discuss the role of gossip among teenagers in negotiating norms. The role of gossip in creating an acceptable narrative of community events is documented in Freeman's (1995) analysis of Jefferson's *Annas*. Jefferson, concerned that his cousin John Marshall's *Life of Washington* would consolidate a federalist view of the founding of the United States set out to write a background notes to accompany his official papers. These notes, intended to document a republican construction of the period, confirm the central role that gossip played in the politics of the early republic.

Spacks (1985, p. 4) gives a minimal definition of gossip as "talk about one or more absent figures" in a small group. The word derives from "God related" (1985, p. 25) and originally denoted god-parents, then close friends and eventually simply companions. Tracing attitudes toward gossip through several centuries she finds a variety of characterizations. Gossip is sometimes seen as distilled malice and condemned as detraction or scandal. It is seen as idle talk and "insists on its own frivolity. Idle talk offers the possibility of understanding everything without previously achieving

understanding (Spacks, 1985, p. 16). It is generated by trivia and can create something from nothing. Though people are reluctant to admit it, they enjoy the game of discussing other people's affairs (Spacks, 1985; Pilkington, 1998 & Jones, 1980). Though often taken as play, gossip affects the larger world. Norton (1987, p. 7) observes that, in small rural communities like seventeenth century Maryland, gossip might be one of the few forms of social entertainment available. It is often, however, a closed system of entertainment, outsiders can't enjoy it and are unable to participate in it (Pilkington, 1998). It can also be seen as the voice of the world (Spacks, 1985, p. 7).

Spacks' discussion of gossip stresses several points. First it is a form of intimacy; she speaks of, "close and emotionally fruitful human association (1985, p. 34, see also Jones, 1980) and the "seductiveness of its appeal to closeness" (1985, p. 80). Secondly, she sees gossip as discovery. It derives from and generates a need to know the facts. It provides the pleasures of speculation based upon little evidence and of investigation. She argues that the stages of gossip (narrative, interpretation, and judgment) generate the characteristic rhythm of investigation (1985, p. 13). Freeman (1995, p. 34) writes "Wise politicians evaluated a rumor before passing it on, appraising its source and substantiating evidence, and sometimes even researching its authenticity (and in the process spreading the gossip)". She describes Jefferson, preparing his *Annals* twenty years after the events he records, still evaluating and revising the old gossip and assuring his readers that he has eliminated all "incorrect" information (1995, p. 35). Freeman makes clear, though, that the processes of authentication used by Jefferson and his contemporaries were unlikely to provide much security as to the reliability of the information. Reliability may not even be

a plausible requirement for gossip. Spacks (1985, p. 90) writes that the urge to gossip may derive from the impossibility of knowing.

Gossip also solidifies a group's sense of itself (Pilkington, 1998 & Spacks, 1985). People locate themselves within or outside a social context, and gossip declares their status. Another benefit of gossip is that it reveals complacencies of groups in power. Spacks states, in fact, that gossip questions established powers (1985, p. 46). She calls it a weapon of the oppressed and argues that, in Western culture, it was traditionally associated with women because many other sources of power were closed to them. Norton (1987, p. 6) suggests that, in colonial Maryland, gossip was one of men's weapons but that it was the only weapon women had. She notes that in defamation cases men were usually accused of making statements in public with several witnesses while women libeled others in private conversations with no more than one or two listeners. (1987, p. 16) Although, men and women gossip equally, confidences among women have been considered more dangerous (Pilkington, 1998; Jones, 1980 & Spacks, 1985). Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, for example, prefers her 'gossip' to her husband and confides his secrets to her (Spacks, 1985, p. 34). Parman (2005, p. 122), in a recent ethnography of a Scottish farming community encountered this same fear of women's gossip.

Women are evil, the root of wickedness, because they tell things that should be kept a secret. A man will keep a secret to his grave, but a woman will gossip. With men you can do foolish things and keep your dignity. A woman is there to remind you of shame with her shameless tongue. You can tease a woman, you can court her, marry her, have a family by her; but you can't talk to her and be friends with her.

Spacks argues that gossip privileges the female value of community over the male value of secrecy (1985, p. 45). Cameron (1998, p. 285) notes that, though both men and women gossip, “its cultural meaning (for us) is undeniably feminine. Therefore we might expect to find most men avoiding it or disguising it as something else, especially in mixed settings where they are concerned to mark their difference from women”.

On the other hand, gossip is also a means of exerting social control (Pilkington 1998). It functions as a means of self-control and emotional stability; it circulates information and evaluation; and it facilitates self-knowledge. Gossip can be used to control aggression (Spacks, 1985, p. 49). It generates shame in those who violate social standards (Spacks, 1985, p. 141). By upholding community norms, the gossiper can enhance his own reputation while detracting from that of another (Norton, 1987, p. 5) Norton’s study based upon lawsuits for defamation in seventeenth century Maryland focuses upon moments when the system of gossip breaks down. She points out that defamation cases provide evidence of what people consider valuable in their reputations. Most men for example sued over accusations of financial wrongdoing or thievery whereas women more often sued when their sexual conduct was questioned. The cases themselves, more often than not, were decided through repetition of more extensive gossip in the courtroom rather than any evidence we might call factual.

Spacks also states that we humanize the world only by speaking about it (1985, p. 43). We can only learn to observe of human nature through conversation. One way of looking at gossip suggested by Spacks is a division between peculiarities and

relationships, essentially the contrast between communication of news and community solidarity or social control suggested by Gilmore (1978)

Gossip and the principle of negativity

Talanoa (gossip), described by Brenneis (1987a), is considered worthless talk, using low level Hindi and proscribed themes, but excelling at it gives prestige. In Bhatgaon it is practiced in small intimate groups, occurring within a context of more general conversation. It is often introduced with the word “bole”, a verb without subject that means approximately “they say”. An outsider would not be able to extract the subject of the gossip from the transcript. The participants speak in overlapping phrases, co-constructing a story as they proceed.

The attribution of gossip to an undefined “they” may be equally characteristic of Western society. Gossip often deals in information that everybody knows but that has no clear source. It is something that is “in the air”. Freeman (1995, p. 31) observes, “Many described it as ‘whispers,’ a discernible murmur that remained frustratingly indistinct.” In the early years of the United States, Freeman detects a gossip etiquette comprising four rules. The gossip should never be written down, the source should never be revealed without permission, the gossiper should manifest no malice or motive and he should not repeat tales without proof. Each of these guidelines functions to separate the gossiper from responsibility for his words or to leave undefined the origins of his observations.

Freeman (1995) describes how both sides in the political conflicts of the early American republic engaged in innocent conversation while their opponents spread

poisonous slander. To be perceived as skilled at gossip or a frequent participant in gossip reduces the legitimacy of one's gossip in Western society.

And finally, gossip is interactive. Meaning emerges gradually and cooperatively, or it may remain unarticulated but understood. Dialogue is the necessary component of gossip (Spacks, 1985, p. 18). Coates (1998) discusses four techniques that women use to accomplish the collaborative production of text. First, they develop topics progressively through multiple participants. Coates finds a sequence of exposition, development, recapitulation and coda, with the individual who initiates the topic often allowed the final comment as well. The shift from topic to topic occurs gradually rather than abruptly. Secondly, participants encourage and support the speaker with minimal responses, words such as "ummh", that signal active participation in joint construction of the narrative (Jones, 1980). Speakers also use epistemic modal forms (I mean, well, sort of) to mitigate force of utterance, qualify degree of confidence, and preserve face for both speaker and hearers. Questions are often used as a variety of modal epistemic, qualifying the truth of a statement (see also Jones, 1980; Maltz & Borker, 1998). Finally, the participants engage in simultaneous speech. Coates speaks dismissively of concepts of interaction that assume one speaker speaks at a time through a process of turn taking.

Contrasting the norms of men's talk and women's talk, Pilkington (1998) also finds collaborative development of topic, simultaneous speech, epistemic modal forms, and minimal responses to be characteristic of women's speech. In addition she finds that women permit neither long nor frequent silences in their interaction. She contrasts these with abrupt topic shifts, lack of response, frequent challenges or disagreements and long

periods of silence that she finds in men's interaction among themselves (see also Jones, 1980). Cameron (1998) suggests, however, that the distinction between men's and women's talk is not as clear-cut as these distinctions might indicate. Reanalyzing earlier data she observed that, though specific themes and techniques might differ, much of men's talk is collaboratively constructed gossip aimed at building solidarity.

The practice of gossip

In one sense, the entire narrative of *Wildfell Hall*, a story related in a letter to the narrator's brother-in-law, is an exercise in gossip. Spacks points out the relation of letters to gossip, both of which preserve and give importance to others' lives by turning them into story (Spack, 1985, p. 77). Like all talented gossips, though, Markham denies interest in and even claims to disapprove of gossip. Among the scenes he records, however, are several that provide insight into the norms of gossip and the techniques by which it is accomplished. In this study, I focus upon three elements in the practice of gossip: the principle of negativity, the co-construction of meaning and the language functions that predominate.

Nobody gossips, although everyone knows people who gossip. Freeman (1995) stresses this truth in her discussion of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, each outraged by the slander that the other conspiratorially spread but each seeing his own activity as only conversation among friends. We are introduced to this truth about gossip in the first conversational exchange reported by Gilbert Markham as he, his mother, sister, and brother have tea and discuss the events of the day that is about to conclude.

Markham's sister, Rose, reveals to the amazement of the others that an abandoned hall in the area has been occupied by a new renter for over a week. In reply to their disbelief she assures them:

But you may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her. (Bronte 1848 [1966]: 19)

This description shows Mrs. Wilson to be an enthusiastic gossip. Although we never observe her actually gossiping, as the narrative continues she will be consistently contrasted to Mrs. Markham, who Gilbert mentions as an exception to the tendency of the women of the community to indulge in gossip. Mrs. Wilson's visit to Mrs. Graham, the new tenant, nonetheless proved unsatisfactory. Despite Mrs. Wilson's inability to obtain information, she did give Mrs. Graham ample opportunity to tell her story according to the evidence provided by Rose. Rose goes on to describe other measures being planned. Mrs. Wilson and Jane Wilson apparently visited Mrs. Graham to gain information and Eliza Millward intends to do the same. Rose, on the other hand, suggests that they should visit Mrs. Graham because it is the proper response to getting a new neighbor. Mrs. Markham agrees because she believes that Mrs. Graham must be lonely, despite evidence that she is receiving adequate visits.

This sequence illustrates the principle of negativity. Although the Markhams can openly discuss their neighbors' schemes to obtain information, they must attribute more noble aims to themselves. Or rather, they cannot perceive that they are engaging in the same activity as the Wilsons. Gilbert's younger brother makes a witticism about gossip,

chokes on his tea and leaves the room but Gilbert, though he claims not to be interested is careful to remain sitting at the table until the conversation ends. Gilbert's dilemma illustrates the conflict, described by Cameron (1998), Pilkington (1998), and Parman (2005) that provokes men to disguise their participation in gossip. The narrative then passes immediately to the next day.

The next day, my mother and Rose hastened to pay their compliments to the fair recluse; and came back but little wiser than they went; though my mother declared she did not regret the journey, for if she had not gained much good, she flattered herself she had imparted some, and that was better: she had given some useful advice, which, she hoped, would not be thrown away; for Mrs. Graham, though she said little to any purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated, seemed not incapable of reflection, - though she did not know where she had been all her life, poor thing, for she betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it. (Bronte 1848 [1966]: 20)

This report of the visit makes clear the purpose of the visit to Wildfell Hall, though Gilbert assigns the false purpose of 'paying their compliments'. They went to obtain information and were unable to do so. Gilbert says they returned "little wiser" and Mrs. Markham acknowledges she did not get "much good". Knowledge of the affairs of one's neighbors is thus characterized as wisdom and good. That Mrs. Graham "said little to any purpose", indicates that whatever she said did not qualify as useable gossip. Later encounters, throughout the narrative demonstrate that Mrs. Graham is a very religious woman with little skill at or patience for small talk. Mrs. Markham's belief that she has been at least able to give useful information to Mrs. Graham may be partially an attempt to console herself for not getting what she really wanted. When Mrs. Markham concludes her report, Rose and Gilbert continue to sit at the table as Rose gives Gilbert all the

details that she has noticed about Mrs. Graham and her household. Gilbert, still minimizing his interest in gossip, reports to his brother-in-law that he wasn't paying enough attention to be able to repeat the information.

In a later speech event recorded several months later, we can observe some complexities of a gossip session that develops unsuccessfully. Several neighbors have gathered at the Markham's farm for a dinner party. Over the past few weeks, Gilbert has been shifting his attentions to Mrs. Graham. Eliza is becoming unsure of her present position with Gilbert but she needs to get important information to him. Mr. Lawrence, the local squire, enters the parlor nods slightly to Mrs. Graham, greets the other guests and sits between Mrs. Markham and Rose.

'Did you ever see such art!' whispered Eliza, who was my nearest neighbour. 'Would you not say they were perfect strangers?'

'Almost; - but what then?'

'What then! - why you can't pretend to be ignorant?'

'Ignorant of what?' demanded I, so sharply that she started and replied –

'Oh, hush! don't speak so loud.'

'Well, tell me then,' I answered, in a lower tone; 'what is it you mean? I hate enigmas.'

'Well, you know, I don't vouch for the truth of it - indeed, far from it - but haven't you heard

'I've heard nothing, except from you.'

'You must be wilfully deaf then; for anyone will tell you that - but I shall only anger you by repeating it, I see; so I had better hold my tongue.'

She closed her lips and folded her hands before her with an air of injured meekness.

'If you had wished not to anger me, you should have held your tongue from the beginning; or else spoken out plainly and honestly all you had to say.' (Bronte 1848 [1966]: 69)

Eliza's introductory question requires collaboration from Gilbert. Her question assumes that he is aware of speculation in the community that Mr. Lawrence and Mrs.

Graham may have an intimate relationship. Gilbert may not be aware of the speculation, but he has wondered about the same possibility and he, like the others, watched Mr. Lawrence closely when he entered the room. This topic of conversation is a difficult one for discussion in mixed company, so we can assume that Eliza is accustomed to gossiping with Gilbert on a wide range of topics or she would not have risked introducing it. Her question allowed them to share a joke at the attempt at deception on the part of Mr. Lawrence. It allowed her to present unsubstantiated speculation as general knowledge, to include her listener as part of the community of knowers, to spread information while appearing to only ask a question, to ask in a form that assured her of receiving the desired answer and, if Gilbert hadn't yet heard, to insure that the news got out. Although they might not be able to speak directly on the topic, Gilbert should have used Eliza's opening to make a witty remark that reinforced her suggestion and strengthened the complicity between them. Instead, he answers rudely and pretends not to understand her insinuation. She is obviously shocked by his reply and insists he can't pretend to be ignorant. His second response is even ruder and prompts her to quiet him. Gilbert has put Eliza in an untenable situation in several ways. First, because gossip is collaborative, his reinforcement is necessary to validate what she originally said. Secondly, rather than offering the expected complicity, his reply suggests Eliza may either be wrong or inappropriate in her comment. His tone also fails to be supportive. In raising his voice, he also draws attention to their conversation. Though both of them are willing gossips, they would not want others to notice that they are gossiping. But the situation is more humiliating for Eliza for two reasons. Since Gilbert pretends ignorance, she would be

taken as the initiator of scandalous gossip. And since she is a young single woman, she shouldn't indicate awareness of such a topic especially in conversation with a man. If the conversation had ended here it could be taken as a serious loss of face for Eliza and a breakdown in social interaction.

Gilbert, however, opts to continue. His allegiances are shifting and, though ambiguity is one of the elements of gossip, he frequently insists on making the implicit explicit when he senses that he is being attacked. He also insists on knowing the details when he is given generalities. Finally, he can't be sure that Eliza doesn't know more than he does. Though he reacts angrily when he hears people gossip about Mrs. Graham, he tends to believe the gossip. His question puts Eliza in a predicament. She can't directly state the substance of the gossip she has heard because it is an inappropriate topic for a young lady. Saville-Troike (2003, p. 22) observes that the competent language user knows when to appear incompetent. Eliza in this situation is demonstrating the competence of incompetence in her inability to clearly state a message the direct statement of which would detract from her public image. She is also hampered by the nature of the gossip. She is repeating what everyone has heard but she may not have heard very much of it herself and she may have few details to give. She tries to answer as well as she can but only succeeds in angering him further. Still counting on the special relationship that she believes exists between them, she gives up and sits silently looking hurt while Gilbert continues badgering her for details.

This unsuccessful sequence illustrates the collaborative nature of gossip and the risk involved in initiating gossip in ambiguous situations. It also illustrates differences in

the ways men and women gossip. Eliza introduced her topic through one of the most common techniques used in women's speech, the question (Jones, 1980; Pilkington, 1998 & Coates, 1998). Gilbert failed to protect Eliza's face with a supportive answer and he followed one of the norms of male speech in choosing to challenge Eliza (Jones, 1980 & Pilkington, 1998). As the speech event involving Gilbert and Eliza concludes, the guests are called to dinner and Jane Wilson joins Eliza and Gilbert at the table

'Will you be so good as to exchange places with me, Miss Markham?' said she, 'for I don't like to sit by Mrs. Graham. If your mamma thinks proper to invite such persons to her house, she cannot object to her daughter's keeping company with them.'

This latter clause was added in a sort of soliloquy when Rose was gone; but I was not polite enough to let it pass:

'Will you be so good as to tell me what you mean, Miss Wilson?' said I.

The question startled her a little, but not much.

'Why Mr. Markham,' replied she, coolly, having quickly recovered her self-possession, 'it surprises me rather that Mrs. Markham should invite such a person as Mrs. Graham to her house; but perhaps she is not aware that the lady's character is considered scarcely respectable.'

'She is not, nor am I; and therefore, you would oblige me by explaining your meaning a little further.'

'This is scarcely the time or the place for such explanations; but I think you can hardly be so ignorant as you pretend: you must know her as well as I do.'

'I think I do, perhaps a little better; and therefore, if you will inform me what you have heard, or imagined against her, I shall, perhaps, be able to set you right.'

'Can you tell me, then, who was her husband; or if she ever had any?'

Indignation kept me silent. At such a time and place I could not trust myself to answer.

'Have you never observed,' said Eliza, 'what a striking likeness there is between that child of hers and --'

'And whom?' demanded Miss Wilson, with an air of cold, but keen severity.

Eliza was startled: the timidly spoken suggestion had been intended for my ear alone.

'Oh, I beg your pardon!' pleaded she, 'I may be mistaken - perhaps I was mistaken.' But she accompanied the words with a sly glance of derision directed to me from the corner of her disingenuous eye.

'There's no need to ask my pardon,' replied her friend; 'but I see no one here that at all resembles that child, except his mother; and when you hear ill-natured reports, Miss Eliza, I will thank you - that is, I think you will do well to refrain from repeating them. I presume the person you allude to is Mr. Lawrence; but I think I can assure you that your suspicions, in that respect, are utterly misplaced; and if he has any particular connection

with the lady at all (which no one has a right to assert), at least he has (what cannot be said of some others) sufficient sense of propriety to withhold him from acknowledging anything more than a bowing acquaintance in the presence of respectable persons - he was evidently both surprised and annoyed to find her here.' (Bronte 1848/1966, p. 71)

The new speech event is much more direct than the previous one. Jane Wilson, who is a few years older than Eliza Millward, does not hesitate to make her insinuations clear. She refuses to sit by Mrs. Graham and deliberately announces her criticism to the son of the hostess. Her behavior is inappropriate in several ways. She is defaming a guest in the house in the presence of the host. She is quite directly including the hostess in her criticism. She is creating unpleasantness in the presence of several guests. Her actions seem intended as a public challenge to the host. Her actions can be seen as conscious verbal performance. Goffman (1967) would label her performance as a movement within interaction ritual that directly challenges the line of a co-participant in interaction. Such a challenge requires either an apology or a counter-challenge in response. Gilbert, already irritated by Eliza, decides to confront a more formidable opponent. His reaction is more socially acceptable this time because it could be taken as a defense of his mother rather than a defense of Mrs. Graham, but it is still impolite. On the other hand, Miss Wilson's remarks have directly challenged his line and Gilbert may be justified in seeking an apology. As before, he demands more details, but receives only general accusations. This first mild challenge seems to surprise Miss Wilson, perhaps indicating that she believed her position as a guest in the house or her formidable verbal skills would prevent Gilbert from responding. Bauman (1977) indicates that those who are masters of performance gain considerable social power. Hall (1993) also suggests that popularity as a participant

in gossip might tend to remove one from the focus of others as a possible target. But Gilbert continues to insist on details and insinuates he knows Mrs. Graham better than Jane Wilson does. She counters with her own question which he cannot answer. His silence is a multiple defeat, an admission both that he doesn't know Mrs. Graham as well as he has indicated and that there are serious questions about her past life. Miss Wilson's question is, in a sense, rhetorical. She can be fairly sure that Gilbert will not be able to answer it, that he will already have wondered about it and that the ambiguity surrounding the issue will function as evidence supporting her insinuations. In this sequence of challenges, no apology was extracted from any participant and the interaction can be said to have broken down. Miss Wilson, nonetheless achieved a clear triumph and Gilbert was correspondingly humiliated. As Goffman would predict, his failure to assert his line leaves him angry and frustrated.

Eliza misunderstands the silence and, supposing that Gilbert is pondering the question, attempts to help him with the information that she has (again in the form of a question). Jane Wilson attacks her, cutting her off before she can give a name and defending Mr. Lawrence. The second attack is partly Eliza's fault. Gilbert has already gossiped to us (the readers) about the apparently mutual attraction of Frederick Lawrence and Jane Wilson, a situation that Eliza must have been aware of. Once again, Eliza's humiliation demonstrates the need for collaboration in gossip. Together these two sequences show that even people who enjoy gossiping do not like to be the subjects of gossip. Gilbert is irritated with Eliza's earlier remarks because of his interest in Mrs. Graham and Jane is angered by the later remarks because of her interest in Mr. Lawrence.

That much of their anger derives from the fact that they believed the gossip only increases their harshness toward Eliza. These two failed episodes of co-construction suggest a breach of the principle of negativity because Eliza is clearly made responsible for her comments. This happens despite that fact that Eliza has not really offered any information. In the first case, her original question was general and her subsequent explanation resolutely without details. In the second, she only asked a question; it was Jane Wilson who supplied Lawrence's name. We can interpret these interventions as evidence either that Eliza is less accomplished than her companions in the verbal art of gossip or that she is not quite enough of an insider to appropriately echo the news in this situation.

The attacks on Eliza by Gilbert and Jane might also be motivated by invisible factors that Bourdieu (1989) posits as implicit structures of interaction. We know that Eliza is a marriageable young lady with limited economic capital. Her father enjoys a fund of cultural capital as the religious arbiter of the community but he is not a property owner and does not have a notable income to bestow upon her at her marriage. Jane and Gilbert are the heirs of property owning farmers. Jane combines her economic capital with cultural capital in the form of a superior finishing school education that makes her the most eligible lady in the community and, to some extent, a natural object for the attentions of the local squire, Frederick Lawrence. Mr. Millward's position provides Eliza with an entry into the society of the prosperous farmers but it does not give her the same prospects for an advantageous marriage. It is probably this disparity of economic capital rather than any perceived superficiality of character that motivates Mrs. Markham's

marked hostility to the idea of Eliza as a possible spouse for her son. Mrs. Markham does not, of course, ever comment on the economic difference between the Markhams and the Millwards. Within the wider context of social capital, Eliza's observations, first incommoding Gilbert and then Jane, may have led her antagonists to drop their strategies of condescension and more openly mark the symbolic space that separates her from them.

Although the conjectures that were made about Mrs. Graham at this gathering happened to be false, they were justifiable. Somewhat after the conversations recorded above Gilbert encounters Mrs. Graham in the garden. She explains that she left the party for a moment because "I was wearied to death with small talk, nothing wears me out like that." (Bronte, 1848/ 1966, p. 74) She describes her difficulty conversing about nothing, mentions her admiration for people who can do it when it's necessary but concludes, "I hate talking where there is no exchange of ideas or sentiments, and no good given or received." (Bronte, 1848 /1966, p. 74) In other words, Mrs. Graham lacks social skills. "Is it," she asks Gilbert, "that they think it a *duty* to be continually talking?" Pilkington (1998) might answer, "Yes". In observing women talking among themselves, she found that they allow few silences and that those silences that do occur are generally very brief. Mrs. Graham is well educated and earns an independent income as an artist but she does not know how to interact with her neighbors. Gossip is the discourse of solidarity. Her inability or refusal to take small talk seriously isolates her from the community and eventually makes plausible the range of speculations that occur about her. The distance between Mrs. Graham's vision of the world and that of her neighbors can be clarified by comparing her criticism of small talk (no good given or received) with Mrs. Markham's

reaction to her first visit to Mrs. Graham (she had not gained much good). The two women clearly differ in their definition of good. Mrs. Graham prefers conversation involving “exchange of ideas or sentiments”. When she chooses to discuss ideas her neighbors see it as coldness or secretiveness and Mrs. Markham concludes, “she said little to any purpose”.

Jakobson’s (1960/1997) theory of the speech event helps us to focus on the way Mrs. Graham’s theory of communication differs from that of Mrs. Markham. Mrs. Graham sees communication as principally referential while Mrs. Markham gives much more importance to the phatic component of speech. Both women expect information about the world to be communicated in interactions and both also seem to recognize the importance of emotive language. (Mrs. Graham claims to privilege the communication of ideas and feelings.) But the kind of information that they expect to give and receive differs. Mrs. Graham, above all, fails to recognize the significance of keeping the channels of communication open and she belittles what is essentially phatic language as “small talk”. Mrs. Markham, on the other hand, is alert to precisely the phatic elements that Mrs. Graham ignores and she senses a communicative deficiency beginning with the first interaction between the two.

The construction of Mrs. Graham’s reputation within the community follows a process described by White (2002) in study involving girls who had acquired reputations as ‘sluts or ‘fast girls’ in high school. She notes that these girls almost are always different in some way, perhaps new to the school or from a different background, with a variant accent or some variation in appearance. Mrs. Graham combines all of these

characteristics. In the church scene in the first chapter we learn that she dresses and wears her hair slightly differently from other women in the community. She is new to the neighborhood, and odd in her habits. She doesn't participate in the regular exchange of visits and gossip with the neighbors. The idea of the slut, she argues, is an archetypical concept that functions as 'a way for the adolescent mind to draw a map' (White, 2002, p. 21) through the confusing terrain of sex. Stories of sluts, she believes, flourish especially in suburban environments:

. . . often an atmosphere of monotony becomes a breeding ground for exaggerated storytelling. The slut rumor is a way of bringing a hint of scandal and recklessness to a place of uniform, serene surfaces and perfectly timed traffic lights. It is an attempt to interrupt and undermine this world, maybe glamorize it. (White 2002: 80)

The community of Lindenhope in 1827, far more restricted than any modern suburb, may have been precisely the kind of neighborhood that needed the excitement of rumor and Mrs. Graham ambiguous history, odd conduct and subtle unfamiliarity make her ideal for the role of fast girl.

Because one of the purposes of gossip or small talk in the eyes of the practitioners is instruction, one who deliberately disregards opportunities for learning can only be seen as perverse. (Mrs. Graham, for example, expressed little interest in the recipes and advice that Mrs. Markham offered on her first visit.) Carelessness in this may be seen as an indicator of other defects of character. At the conclusion of the gathering described above, Mrs. Markham makes just this observation. All the members of the family heard

the rumor during the party and all of them insist they do not believe it. But Mrs.

Markham continues to dwell on her surprise.

'Dear, dear, who would have thought it! - Well! I always thought there was something odd about her. - You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people.' And once it was - 'I misdoubted that appearance of mystery from the very first - I thought there would no good come of it; but this is a sad, sad, business to be sure!'

'Why mother, you said you didn't believe these tales,' said Fergus.

'No more I do, my dear; but then, you know, there must be some foundation.'

'The foundation is in the wickedness and falsehood of the world,' said I, 'and in the fact that Mr. Lawrence has been seen to go that way once or twice of an evening - and the village gossips say he goes to pay his addresses to the strange lady, and the scandalmongers have greedily seized the rumour, to make it the basis of their own infernal structure.'

'Well, but Gilbert, there must be something in her manner to countenance such reports.'

'Did you see anything in her manner?'

'No, certainly; but then, you know, I always said there was something strange about her.'

(Bronte 1848/1966 p.77)

We assume that others tell us the truth (Grice, 1975) and we cannot so simply decide to disbelieve. Hill (1985, p. 729), discussing the variety of relations of the speaker to the word in Bakhtin's translinguistics, calls the last sub-type the "active" word. She describes this as a voice that influences the speaker from within; "the word of the other can resist and interrupt the authorial voice, and their relationship can be a struggle for dominance, with the embedded voice having a good chance at victory." Once Mrs. Markham has heard the gossip it enables her to fit together several pieces of information that had previously perplexed her. She asks, "Who would have thought it?" but immediately answers herself that she has always thought it, or at least she has always thought that something was not quite right. When her son reminds her that she doesn't believe the rumor, she acknowledges that she doesn't but returns directly to Grice's

maxim to assert that “there must be some foundation”. In other words, people do not say things if they are not true. Mrs. Markham’s observation illustrates an accepted principle of gossip. Freeman (1995, p. 37) argues that the founding fathers repeated rumor hoping to turn “allegations into assumptions”. She quotes a newspaper remark that, “where so much was said there must be some foundation in fact”.

In an analysis of an outbreak of hysteria based on unfounded rumor in Orleans, France in May and June of 1969, Morin (1971) identifies this belief as a central basis of rumor:

The second of these assertions, ‘no smoke without fire’ forms the central backbone of all theories, every alleged piece of ‘evidence’, and each new resurgence of the myth. It forms the point of departure for the secondary proliferation in May 1969, and for its ultimate residuum. It is the alpha and omega of mythology, the final stage which precedes a regression to some new beginning. (40)

Jacobson (1948, p. 3) tracing the same expression to Plautus, treats it as the core principle of gossip. We can see the same principle operating in the attitude of Jane Wilson who angrily denies the rumor linking Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Graham, yet demonstrates in her actions toward Mrs. Graham that she believes it to be true.

Gilbert strenuously suggests that the foundation Mrs. Markham speaks of for the gossip is a defect in the world rather than a defect in Mrs. Graham. But his later actions demonstrate that he also believes at least a part of the rumor. His vehement reply may derive from his doubt. Or he may be exaggerating his response in retrospect; he is writing twenty years after the events and during the intervening years Mrs. Graham has become Mrs. Markham. In response to her son’s outburst, Mrs. Markham answers by shifting the

discussion to a different perspective. Would the rumor have come up if there had not been something in Mrs. Graham that provoked it? When Gilbert asks her whether she has seen anything, she answers that she certainly has not and then adds that she has always seen something strange. Mrs. Markham's double-voiced replies call into question the notion of intentionality. She obviously intends to disbelieve the rumor that she has heard but as Hill has suggested can happen, she can't dominate or dismiss the embedded voices and the expectations of the community.

Lopez (2001) suggests that Gilbert becomes a victim of gossip to parallel the victimization of Helen by Huntingdon and his circle, and that Gilbert responds to victimization with the same emotions that Helen did (jealousy, rage, hatred, and violence). It is difficult, however, to see Gilbert as a victim of gossip rather than an enthusiastic participant. He generally denies his interest only because to deny participation in gossip is one of the conventions of gossip and because the denial is part the line he develops for the benefit of Halford. His anger at the gossip directed against Mrs. Graham derives from the implications of the content of the gossip and is no different than Jane Wilson's anger at the gossip directed against Frederick Lawrence. It seems misleading to view the gossip in Wildfell Hall as defamation. Rather, Bronte may be seen to be exploring the impersonal processes of gossip. That Jane Wilson, who is portrayed as a masterful gossip, is angered by some of the rumors discussed at the party is an indication that these rumors arise through community consensus outside the control of any participant.

Gilbert shows himself to be a serious gossip, albeit one who may be limited by gender from participating too publicly in the activity or acknowledging it to his friend, Halford. Helen, on the other hand, seems genuinely uninterested in gossip, and inept at either recognizing the structure of the genre or performing her part in the small talk around her. Gilbert, writing in retrospect, might wish us to think that he has adopted her attitudes toward gossip and he does deliver passionate diatribes against it to Mrs. Graham and to his mother and he implies to Halford that the gossip around him causes him anguish. But his distress is really over the content of specific gossip not the structure of the genre. We might ask whether in this particular Gilbert gradually adopts Helen's ideas or merely disguises his own. The narrative, however, provides little evidence for believing that either has occurred. His letter to Halford remains as gossipy at the conclusion as it ever was.

The two broad aspects of gossip mentioned by Gilmore, getting the news out and exercising social control, or as Spacks expressed it "peculiarity and relationship" operate in the novel. Helen does not behave according to accepted social practices and the community needs to sanction her flouting of its standards. Helen's conduct does not conflict with acknowledged moral or ethical standards but her failure to participate normally in the exchange and interpretation of news creates mystery that must be satisfactorily explained. Her error might go unperceived by an outsider like herself because the standard is not openly expressed. Mary Millward, who is a member of the community, also fails to engage properly in gossip and, despite admirable qualities, she finds herself little valued within her society.

The gossip about Helen serves to alert the community to her oddness. That the details of the gossip happen to be in error is not really significant. The truth is that Mrs. Graham does behave differently from community conventions and that difference forms the substance of the communal; gossip. Her enactment of different norms must perforce threaten the community and activate the apparatus of social control. The truth about Mrs. Graham may actually be worse than the gossip. The people of the community perceive that there is something wrong with her story but they fail to imagine the extent of her flouting of the conventions of society. Gossip seems to be working as it should in this novel in getting the news out. It errs only in details but not in the perception of major problems with Mrs. Graham's presentation of her self and with her ways of interacting with the community. When the truth does come out Mr. Millward, the voice of moral orthodoxy continues to condemn her, not because of any rumor but because he does not approve of her action in leaving her husband.

Conclusions

The polyvocalic discourse of the Xavante warã might be seen to offer a clear contrast to the personalized and intentional speech of Western public discourse. But whether public discourse in Western cultures can generally be interpreted in Habermasian terms is an open question. Duranti (1993) indicates that discourse is nearly always socially constructed. In the speech events recorded by Bronte (1966/1848), we have seen the principle of negativity, the social construction of reality, and the communal influence on intentionality operating to modify the positions of the participants in interaction. The depersonalization of the discourse that results from the social construction of meaning

contributes to the functioning of the community. Individuals who fail to understand and participate in the communal process of creating meaning may find themselves sanctioned by the community.

CHAPTER 12. A NARROW-MINDED TATTLING OLD GOSSIP

Self-disclosure

The first chapter of *Wildfell*, introducing the narrator, the Markham family and the general context of the narration, concludes with a housekeeping task of sketching in several minor characters: the Millwards, the Wilsons and Frederick Lawrence. These seven paragraphs seem to involve several problems for the reader. First, we may wonder why Gilbert thought the information would interest Halford or the reader and why he felt that it should be presented at this point in this way. These paragraphs may be seen as incongruent as part of a letter, inept as part of a novel and unnecessary as background to the narrative. On the other hand, the section does provide repetition and reinforcement of key ideas, exemplification of the process of expansion of purpose, insight into the character of the narrator, and illustration of his performance.

This section may seem awkward because we cannot determine satisfactorily the relation between the text and the audience. In part, this is simply a more blatant example of a contradiction that has arisen several times in the first chapter. The text as letter appears to be directed to a specific audience, Halford, whereas the text as novel is directed toward the general audience of all the readers of this novel. Although Halford is more present in the first chapter than in the rest of the book, the author is nonetheless willing, even here, to remind us that Halford is a fiction by speaking at least implicitly to the readers of the novel. Booth (1983, p. 101) argues that all novelists sometimes encounter the need to include extra information to help the reader.

Even the finest novelists often create scenes which on analysis seem unnecessary except as they aid the reader. They are appropriate to their contexts, but the critic who tries to defend their author's economy must refer to the audience's needs rather than to any completion of necessary detail in the "natural object."

But in this section, Gilbert is merely characterizing certain of his neighbors; he is not creating a scene. And the information he provides is of use neither to Halford nor to the readers of the novel and cannot be justified on the basis of necessity or even defended as appropriate in the context in which it occurs.

If Halford were the only intended audience for the information that concludes the chapter, we might question its inclusion for two reasons. The Millwards and Wilsons are minor characters in the narrative, unknown to Halford, and irrelevant to the present lives of both Halford and Markham. In addition, the facts about them included in these paragraphs do little to further Gilbert's narrative. On the other hand, Frederick Lawrence is one of Gilbert's two brothers-in-law and, as such, would no doubt already be familiar to Halford, the other one, and not require introduction. But if we therefore consider the information as intended for the general reader of the novel and only incidentally directed to Halford, other problems arise. The artificiality of the letter framework seems to be exposed by Gilbert's use of the letter to provide the readers with information that Halford would not need or want. This discrepancy in audience needs is emphasized by Gilbert's deliberate reminder "Now Halford, before I close this letter . . ." Even without the letter framework, however, the presentation of minor characters seems awkward. The information is out of place because it doesn't grow out of narrative action but feels more like a pause in the story. The sensation is augmented by Gilbert's manner of introducing the information as a sort of interruption in his main narrative. And the author seems to be

attempting to tell us how we should feel about these characters rather than letting them determine our reactions through their words and actions.

We can also question the inclusion of this description of minor characters from the perspective mentioned above. No narrative need justifies the inclusion of this material at this point. First, we don't need any of these details for clearer understanding either of what happens in the first chapter or what will immediately follow in the next chapter. Secondly, despite the space dedicated to these characters, Gilbert actually provides very little information about them here. Much of the information that he does provide merely repeats what has already been said, and some of the new information will be repeated when it becomes germane to the story. Ordinarily, we would have no reason to question repetition of information as over-determination is characteristic of fiction. In this case, however, the narrative seems to be stopped to permit the awkward inclusion of details that are neither essential nor new. Finally some of the details that he provides soon turn out to be mistaken. If Gilbert functions here as a mouthpiece for the author, enabling her to define the minor characters, his comments can be seen as awkward in the context of the novel and insufficiently integrated into the development of the narrative. Yet if we assume other purposes for the final seven paragraphs we can identify several ways in which they contribute to the development of the novel.

In these paragraphs, Gilbert first announces that he will conclude by telling Halford who Eliza Millward is. He is right to attempt to limit his gossip here to Eliza. Only she and Lawrence figure at all prominently in the narrative that follows. Although Rev. Millward and Jane Wilson assume some substance, the others remain little more

than names. But he devotes only a paragraph to Eliza, then one to her sister Mary and three to Mr. Millward. The sixth paragraph describes Mrs. Wilson and her two sons and the final paragraph deals with Jane Wilson and Frederick Lawrence. The chapter then closes with a paragraph focused upon Halford in which Gilbert refers back to his reasons for writing the letter. The paragraph describing Eliza begins with a long sentence including much information, all of it, except her lack of income, already known to the reader. The following three sentences focusing upon her physical appearance and manners include some new details. The description of Mary, who has not yet appeared in the text, provides a few new details about the Millward family and mentions the death of Mrs. Millward. The three paragraphs dealing with Mr. Millward construct a fairly detailed portrait of the vicar. The information about Mrs. Wilson is already known to the reader though her two sons are introduced here for the first time. The appearance and character of Jane Wilson are described more fully and Mr. Lawrence is briefly introduced in the seventh paragraph. Except for the portrait of Mr. Millward, most of the significant information provided by this section is already known. Much of the new information is unimportant to the narrative.

Returning to Jakobson's (1960/1999) speech event, however, we may find a more satisfactory explanation for these paragraphs. To the extent that the section is looked upon as primarily referential, it is repetitive. But Bronte may not have included it to provide information about minor characters. Rather it serves to provide insights into the character of Gilbert, the narrator, and to reinforce elements of his voice. The overview of minor characters permits us to observe specific qualities of his writing persona. Mendoza

(1993, p. 2) observes “Literature is communication, and any discussion of literature must at some point address the voice.” Bronte provides a number of clues that the principal import of this section is emotive, referring back to the speaker, rather than referential, referring to the world.

Gilbert offers to tell Halford “who Eliza Millward was” but tells him instead how he (Gilbert) reacts to her and what he thinks of her. We already knew the details he provides about her being the vicar’s daughter and the object of his (Gilbert’s) attentions. We also knew that he didn’t find her particularly pretty, that he was studiously noncommittal, though suggestive, in his relationship with her, and that his mother was hostile to any mention of her. We learn that Mrs. Markham’s hostility derives in part from Eliza’s lack of income and we see Gilbert’s surprising reference to her as “that insignificant little thing”, a comment that says much about Gilbert’s attitude but little about Eliza. Gilbert attributes the idea that he is too good for any of the local girls to his mother but he clearly seems to share her opinion. We are left to assume that the criticism of Eliza’s financial prospects also comes from Mrs. Markham. If it does, it allows a glimpse of her narrowness that contradicts the praise he mechanically employs when he refers to her. If it reflects Gilbert’s attitude as well, it suggests a conventional materialism that contradicts his Romantic posturing earlier in the chapter. The second part of the paragraph focuses on Gilbert’s assessment of Eliza’s appearance, especially her eyes which he labels “diabolically wicked or irresistibly bewitching”. His description, comparing her to a playful kitten, subtly belittling her and laying a foundation that will later allow him break with her still focuses more on his reaction to her than on objective

description. It also implies that he sees her as something of a pet rather than as a human being of equal status to his own. In the description of Eliza, he already assumes some of the male condescension toward women that will become a significant theme in the events narrated in Helen's diary. From Eliza, Gilbert moves to her older sister Mary, with a description that contrasts her productiveness and responsibility to Eliza's frivolity. Despite calling her 'plain' and 'a drudge', he constructs a fairly positive but condescending image of her. His awareness of but lack of interest in her positive attributes discloses the superficiality of his judgments of others. The introduction of the Millwards concludes with three paragraphs ridiculing Mr. Millward but also providing information about him and indicating how we should interpret his actions and words. He first creates a portrait of an obsolete old man dressed in the fashions of the previous century and fixed in his own opinions and prejudices. He then recalls his own encounters with Rev. Millward in childhood and finally describes the vicar's numerous eccentricities and prejudices. He does not, however, call into question the Rev. Millward's performance of his duties, and we are left with a portrait of a strict and, as we will later see, diligent, but limited pastor of a rural congregation. After brief characterizations of Mrs. Wilson and her sons Robert and Richard, Gilbert finishes his overview with a description of Jane Wilson, acknowledging her elegance, education, and beauty but insisting that he was not impressed by any of it.

Gilbert's discussion of Jane is especially revealing. Though he acknowledges her accomplishments, elegance and beauty, his general attitude is hostile. He seems put off by her ambition despite his earlier defense of his own. In crediting her with 'some talent

and more ambition', he implies that her sense of her worth surpasses the worth. Yet she is clearly better educated and superior in social graces to the other young ladies of the community. What is more, Jane's initiative in insisting on the opportunity for a superior education and her success in transforming herself indicate a degree of foresight and perseverance beyond his own. Though he uses the same terms, ambition and talent, to describe her that he had used for himself, his ambition led to Romantic posturing while hers motivated her to sustained effort.

In addition to her superior education, Gilbert credits her with great beauty, presenting her features as more imposing than those of Eliza Millward, and describing with enthusiastic detail the elements of her physical attractiveness, but he insists that he was not impressed. Just as he used Eliza's eyes to counterbalance all of her defects he uses Jane's eyes, "clear, hazel, quick and penetrating", to counteract all of her virtues, describing them as 'destitute of poetry or feeling'. It is difficult to avoid feeling that Gilbert's hostility derives, at least in part, from jealousy. He suggests that she is widely considered the most desirable young woman of the community and he seems to feel that he is the most desirable young man. Jane seems to struggle with some of the same feelings that Gilbert described in the opening lines of the novel. Just as he feels that he is destined to be more than a simple farmer following in his father's footsteps, she seems to feel that she deserves a higher destiny than to be a farmer's wife. Although, from Gilbert's perspective, they are the two most eligible young people of Lindenhope, it is doubtful that Jane has ever noticed Gilbert, who she would view as an "insignificant thing" for someone like her. Thus, much of his hostility may derive from wounded

vanity. But there might also be a conservative distaste for social mobility, exacerbated in Gilbert's case by his knowledge that he is following the same path that she is (more successfully, it turns out). Gilbert's criticism of Jane to some degree may be his echo of the ideas of his father. Jane is clearly stepping outside her destined path in seeking greater education than other young women of her neighborhood and Gilbert may be applying to her the strictures that his father urged upon him.

Gilbert harshly criticizes Jane for her desire to find a husband who is a rich gentleman. This criticism coming so soon after he dismisses Eliza for having no income emphasizes the competition between the two neighbors, each of whom perhaps hopes to escape from the community through marriage. The discussion of Jane concludes with Gilbert's mention of the possible courtship of her by Frederick Lawrence. Gilbert only knows that Lawrence has seemed to show interest in Jane but he notes that "it was whispered" that Jane returned the interest. "It was whispered" is a variation upon the ubiquitous source of rumor, "they say". We might wonder how Gilbert knew what was being whispered unless he participated in the whispering sessions. We might also wonder how he still remembered twenty years later what was being whispered about a suspected courtship that came to nothing unless he was a careful collector of rumor. We might wonder, finally, whether Gilbert, writing this sentence after nearly two decades of marriage to Lawrence's sister, can see the parallels between Jane and him. In any case he is gossiping about a twenty year old supposition that proved to be untrue about a man who is at the periphery of his story, his own brother in law, to another man, also his brother-in-law, who could have no interest in the story. Gilbert sometimes manifests a

need to say something, regardless of the possible interest to his audience, about each person whose name comes up.

The organization of these seven paragraphs shows us something of Gilbert's communicative style. After announcing that he will say something about Eliza, he spends five paragraphs on Eliza, Mary and the Rev. Millward but devotes most of his attention to the father. He then tries to close a second time saying he will just touch on two more people. But by the time he finishes, these two have become five. Throughout this section Gilbert goes beyond his originally stated purpose, thereby demonstrating that new ideas are occurring to him as he writes. Everything seems to remind him of something else. He knows gossip about everyone and he can't seem to resist sharing it with his reader, even when it has little relation to the story he is trying to tell. His communicative act in introducing the neighbors to Halford recalls Hymes' discussion of performance in oral narrative.

In each of the cases to be presented below, these two latter considerations will be essential—the performance as situated in a context, the performance as emergent, as unfolding or arising within that context. The concern is with performance, not as something mechanical or inferior, as in some linguistic discussion, but with performance as something creative, realized, achieved, even transcendent of the ordinary course of events. (Hymes, 1981, p. 81)

The discrepancy between what Gilbert announces he will do and what he finally does confirms the emergent nature of his performance the final paragraphs of the letter. In a sense, these paragraphs resolve a question that Gilbert has kept before the reader throughout the chapter. While chapter 1 focuses upon the process and the content of the

gossip surrounding the new arrival in the community, Gilbert has transmitted the gossip and at the same time insisted that he is not a participant in the process of gossiping. Yet he usually procures to be present when his sister or mother has information to share and by the church scene he is providing Halford with tidbits acquired through direct observation rather than family conversation. When Gilbert pauses before closing the letter to catalogue the neighbors, he makes clear that his denials of interest in gossip are merely the conventional disclaimers expected as part of the ritual. Booth discussing the imitators of the intrusive narrative techniques of Fielding writes: "The great narrators in this mode often look so much like gossips that mere gossips have often attempted to create great narrators" (1983, p. 219). In *Wildfell Hall*, using narrative techniques unlike those of Fielding, Bronte reverses the process. Although her narrator, Gilbert, finds himself a very entertaining narrator, she undertakes to disclose that often he is a mere gossip. But he is a gossip like Jane Wilson, not like Eliza Millward. He is a performer and he attempts to make *Wildfell Hall* a virtuoso performance of gossip. Humor is a central tool in his performance of gossip and he uses it even when he is talking about himself because some of the stories are just too good to pass up. The narrow-minded tattling old gossip of the novel may be, not Mrs. Wilson, who seems harmless enough from what we see of her, but Gilbert himself as he tells the story of his courtship of his wife twenty years later. The content of the novel reminds us that though he says he has changed since the time described in the novel, we have little evidence that he has actually done so, and some fairly strong indications that he remains as opinionated as before and as obsessed with gossip as he ever was. He is in fact so obsessed with the performance of

gossip that he is willing to betray the confidences of his wife regarding unpleasant events in her past (though he has promised to reveal her secrets to no one) and use himself as a comic foil as well. The prattle and calumny of the enveloping narrative owe at least as much to Gilbert the 44 year old farmer who records the tale as they do to Gilbert the 24 year old character who enacts it.

Besides illustrating Gilbert's obsession with gossip and reinforcing the image of him that is already developing, these paragraphs strengthen the presumption that Gilbert as a narrator can not be believed. Much that he says about the people he mentions here either proves to be untrue when we find out more about them, or suggests questionable interpretations that reflect upon Gilbert rather than the neighbors he describes. Overall this section serves mostly to introduce Gilbert and not the minor characters. The seven paragraphs, looked at from this perspective, also function differently in the narrative than we might be tempted to assume. On a first reading they appear to be background information provided by the author or narrator, intended to establish our attitudes toward the characters discussed. They might be more accurately described, however, as part of Gilbert's self-presentation in his letter to Halford. Rather than simple description, these paragraphs are part of a communicative event in which Gilbert establishes his line for Halford. Hymes would insist that it is necessary to consider this context as we look at the words.

Interpretation that excludes speech falls short, as would a treatment of a painting that excluded paint. Interpretation that seeks only the individual voice, the author's or the interpreter's, falls short as well. Interpretation that attends only to what is culturally defined, excluding both the mode of existence of the work and the personal voice, as is

the case with most analyses of myth, yields only a surface image, however much it talks of underlying depth (Hymes, 1981, pp. 9-10)

Hymes is arguing for an interpretation that brings all aspects of the text, narrative, and author or narrator into play. To limit our analysis to any aspect of the text is to miss part of the meaning. To see these paragraphs only as an introduction to the reader of a group of minor characters encourages us to miss their significance in defining the narrator and displaying his voice. When we see them as a series of speech acts by Gilbert aimed at establishing his identity, the paragraphs no longer feel like a pause in the narrative; they are an integral part of Gilbert's failed attempt in the first chapter to establish for the reader the image of himself that he wants others to perceive.

Bringing the Neighbors Together

Yet, despite the centrality of these paragraphs to disclosing the voice and certain character traits of the narrator and the marginality of the information they provide about other characters, the neighbors are the professed focus of the description. Though Gilbert tells us little about them in this summary for Halford, we may find that the descriptions play a role in the structure of the book. The eight people who he mentions here, plus Gilbert, his brother, sister and mother, form the entire community of Lindenhope, as far as we know from the narrative. Although, we assume that there are more people in church and more neighbors to visit, none are ever specifically referred to by the characters who participate in the story. In bringing these characters together and describing them at once, Gilbert is warning us that they will be of some significance in the narrative. Though some of the eight appear only rarely in the story, each of them

helps us to better understand the community or Gilbert. Taking them in the order that they appear in these seven paragraphs, we will briefly consider the Millwards, the Wilson's and Lawrence.

Eliza Millward, Gilbert's jilted girlfriend, has already been considered at length in other chapters. Gilbert's treatment of her early in the book helps to define his character and to demonstrate his irresponsibility. His preference for her over her sister Mary reveals his superficiality. His ambiguous disentanglement from her displays his difficulty with direct actions and statements. His petulant dislike for her later in the book discloses his pettiness. Gilbert's perceptions of the Millward sisters early in the book are distorted by his need for approval. He begins to see his error through his interactions with Helen who recognizes Mary's qualities and through his own observation of Mary's more mature responses to frivolous talk. By the end of the narrative, Mary, now a pastor's wife and admired even by Gilbert, has become a leader in the community because of her good works. Gilbert's changing reactions toward Mary are indicators of his gradual progress in the learning process that he goes through under Helen's guidance. His changing attitudes toward Eliza, on the other hand, remind the reader that even at the close of the book Gilbert's transformation has been partial and limited.

Both Millward daughters provide additional insights into the narrative beyond their relation to Gilbert. Eliza's experiences with Gilbert in the course of the novel focus attention on the precarious situation of young middle-class women of limited fortune in search of marriage. Her interactions with Mary and the occasional comparisons of the two help to define the norms of the community. Neither Eliza nor Mary fits the

community model for young single women. Mary is responsible and capable of recognizing and performing the tasks expected of her but she seems almost too independent. She has no interest in participating in the flow of gossip that maintains the integrity of the community and she is careless of appearances as she demonstrates when she refuses to put away the socks she is darning when a visitor appears. As the narrative develops, the reader becomes more aware of the virtues of Mary's character. We first see her as a marginal participant in a frivolous conversation between Gilbert and Eliza and then as an uncomfortable guest at the Markham's first party. Her subsequent appearances in the novel, however, focus on her skill at dealing with and concern for others. In contrast to Mary, Eliza demonstrates developed social skills early in the novel, but later shows that she lacks her sister's seriousness. Her interest in the opinions of others is too great and her dominion of the domestic skills required of young women is questionable. Mrs. Markham's distaste for Eliza demonstrates her inflated opinion of her son's merits but also suggests that Eliza's frivolity is apparent to older women. Even in her area of social expertise, Eliza is unable to compete with more skilled communicators such as Jane Wilson. The gradual ascendancy of Mary over Eliza in Gilbert's mind relates, in part, to his gradual realization that Mary's conduct, despite some social roughness, is a more positive expression of the community norms.

Rev. Millward, the father of Mary and Eliza, also plays a useful role in the narrative. Although we assume that he is a ridiculous figure, we know of him only through Gilbert's letter and even Gilbert recognizes that he is dedicated to serving the people of his parish. Gilbert's laughter at him can be seen in part as adolescent

rebelliousness, the equivalent of Huntingdon's act of drawing a caricature of the minister in Helen's church at Staningley. When Millward later lectures Gilbert about his visits to Helen, he is fulfilling his social function and, in allowing his anger and frustration to become visible in Millward's presence, Gilbert is openly rebelling against the conventions of the community. He has several motivations for belittling Millward. As a boy he was taught and chastised by the older man. He implies that he was not a model child in his religious training and suggests that Mr. Millward's skills were calculated to intimidate a child but insufficient to win over an adult. Millward, in fact seems in earlier years to have admonished Mrs. Markham about her childrearing practices enough to irritate her. There is a suggestion that Gilbert may have been a discipline problem when he was younger and Mr. Millward's comments to Mrs. Markham create a context for her later comments about raising children to Mrs. Graham (chapter 3). Mr. Millward is also the father of the girl that Gilbert dropped in a manner that can only reflect poorly on Gilbert however he chooses to describe it. It is to Gilbert's advantage both in living with himself and in justifying himself to the community to paint the Millward family as darkly as he can.

Yet Rev. Millward is a vocal participant in several of the communicative events recorded by Gilbert and we assume that Gilbert, though he may not be a reliable interpreter, records events accurately. Millward's speech and actions in the scenes recorded by Gilbert seem to confirm Gilbert's opinion. He comes across as pompous and foolish, insisting upon moderation in all things but enthusiastic in his consumption of Mrs. Markham's ale. Like Mrs. Markham he is vastly particular about certain things,

another allusion to the rigid social norms that underlie the apparent informality of life in Lindenhope. His diet is fairly unhealthy, mostly things that should not be eaten in any quantity and even before the Victorian age, characters in novels tended to suffer consequences from excessively eating meats or drinking alcoholic beverages. Victorian readers would probably have seen his preferences as excessive even if he did not necessarily overeat. The party scene suggests that he probably drinks more beer than he should. The key point here, though, is that, although his dietary habits are questionable, he thinks everyone should eat as he does. On the other hand, despite undue focus on his health, he is disciplined in his life and generally cares for himself in healthy ways. Within the book, he seems to perform a larger role than simply helping to define Gilbert's character. He is a voice of authority within the community, the principle spokesman for the judgment of the community. It may well be that in his visits to Wildfell Hall he chooses the role of disciplinarian over comforter and that he relishes the task of condemning conduct more than is seemly in a spiritual guide but he nonetheless embodies the voice of the community insisting upon propriety. Apart from Gilbert and Helen, the members of the community of Lindenhope clearly defer to his authority. His dissatisfaction with Helen's conduct, though it coincides with the conclusions reached through community gossip, is based upon ecclesiastical authority and moral influence and lends substance to the speculation occurring among the neighbors. His final pronouncement upon Helen, long after she has left Wildfell Hall, reminds us that her actions, even shorn of the scandalous speculation that increased the appearance of immorality, were unacceptable to the society of her time.

In *Agnes Grey*, Bronte had portrayed two churchmen, Mr. Hatfield, the rector, and Mr. Weston, the curate. Mr. Hatfield is a complacent and hypocritical high churchman with little interest in his congregation and no notable calling to the ministry. Mr. Weston is a humble and conscientious low churchman intimately concerned with the needs of the members of his congregation. Hatfield seems to have no redeeming characteristics while Weston displays few flaws. In *Wildfell Hall*, Rev. Millward, the only clergyman of importance (the minister at Staningley is mentioned only briefly in one scene) is neither as admirable as Weston nor as unpleasant as Hatfield. In his care for the parish, he seems closer to Weston, yet he is clearly prejudiced in his assumptions, unbending in his opinions, and overly concerned with creature comforts. His combination of qualities seems, to some extent, intended to establish the nature of religious life at Lindenhope. Although Mr. Millward is serious about his duties, he seems to lack some of the spiritual intensity of the Methodist sects. His worldly concerns suggest that the Lindenhope congregation may be less focused upon religious preoccupations than Helen's family are, and sets off Lindenhope as representative of one of the varieties of religious experience examined in the novel.

Each of the Millwards, in different ways, offers the reader insights both into the character of the narrator and into the norms of the community. Although they occupy less space in the novel than the Millwards, the Wilsons may perform an even more important function. The Wilson family directly parallels the Markhams. Mrs. Wilson, like Mrs. Markham, is the widow of a prosperous farmer with three young adult children: an older son, a middle daughter, and a younger son. The family offers an alternate perspective

from which to view the Markhams. Robert Wilson is portrayed as a plodding unimaginative farmer. He is Gilbert Markham seen in another light. He has made the same choice as Gilbert, to continue managing the family farm. Gilbert sees himself as someone with great potential to be more than simply a farmer. Robert Wilson permits us to view Gilbert as others may see him. Robert seems to have a bit more gravitas than Gilbert and maybe more skill at his vocation, perhaps because he is more at one with his role although we do not know enough about him to make assumptions about his inner thoughts. We do know that, in the one instance where he enters a business transaction with Gilbert, Gilbert believes that Robert made the better deal.

Richard Wilson like Fergus Markham is a younger son, condemned to search for gainful employment because the farm descends to the oldest son. Whereas Fergus dedicates himself to games and idleness while he waits to go off to the army or navy, Richard devotes himself to study, expecting to enter the ministry. Between them they represent the orthodox choices for younger sons. Richard Wilson is important for other attributes, however. Unlike the other characters in the book he is able to see beyond superficial attributes to recognize the important qualities of people, at least in the case of his attraction to Mary Millward. As Mary's friend and later husband, he contrasts to Gilbert who is courting Eliza. Gilbert is attracted to Eliza who is superficial and consistently ridicules Mary who is sensible and good. The contrast between Richard and Gilbert is one of the ways we are given to evaluate Gilbert. As the story progresses and Gilbert becomes less enchanted with Eliza he comes to see the superiority of Richard's discernment in relation to the two Millward daughters. In fact, Gilbert's increasing ability

to see the superiority of Richard Wilson and Mary Millward is a measure of his maturing. Richard in making apparent the superficiality of Gilbert's romantic attachment performs a function somewhat parallel to Fergus who states directly the intent of the gossip that Gilbert, Rose, and Mrs. Markham seek to present in more innocent terms. But Richard, in choosing to dedicate himself to study and to serving others, also draws attention to the frivolity of Fergus's ambitions.

As Gilbert describes the activities of his mother and Mrs. Wilson in parallel circumstances, we see that they behave identically. In chapter 1, we have already seen that both are anxious to gather information about the new tenant and that both stare at her in church. Gilbert consistently condemns Mrs. Wilson for her gossiping, however, while praising his mother. Mrs. Wilson seems to function as a control that allows us to put Gilbert's statements into perspective. We are probably not meant to take seriously his criticisms of her when he contrasts her to his mother. Mrs. Wilson serves rather as a mirror that allows us to see what Mrs. Markham is really doing, although Gilbert cannot directly categorize his mother's behavior as he does that of Mrs. Wilson. The comments that Gilbert makes about Mrs. Wilson's gossip are comical because the reader sees immediately that, despite Gilbert's exclusions, Mrs. Markham is equally a narrow-minded tattling old gossip. And clearly, despite his disclaimers, the description fits Gilbert as well.

Thus in Gilbert's descriptions of and comments upon the members of the Wilson family we gain insights into his own family. It might even be true that the Wilson's are superior in character to the Markhams. Robert comes across as a more responsible and

serious farmer than Gilbert, and less conflicted with adolescent romantic yearnings. Jane is the most accomplished young lady of the community, far outshining Rose, and Richard is obviously more sensitive and responsible than Fergus. Each of the Wilson siblings is slightly older than his or her Markham counterpart so some of the difference may be ascribed to greater maturity, though Jane's education seems to be beyond what Rose at her age would be able to aspire to. While each of the Wilsons serves as a foil for a corresponding Markham, the three Wilson siblings each functions as direct contrast to Gilbert as well. Robert has made the same choice as Gilbert but is handling it much better. Jane is striving to better herself in a fashion parallel to Gilbert's but she seems to have worked more seriously to educate herself, and Richard in the clarity of his perceptions recalls the superficiality of those of Gilbert. The Wilsons allow Bronte to present a much more rounded portrait of the Markhams. They are clearly more complex and admirable than Gilbert depicts them. In the book they allow Bronte to portray Gilbert and his family, not simply from Gilbert's biased perspective but also as seen from outside in the parallel lives of their more accomplished neighbors.

The final neighbor to appear in the closing paragraphs of chapter 1 is Frederick Lawrence, an element in the gossip about Jane Wilson. Although, Gilbert's expresses many questionable impressions of Lawrence during the course of the book, and though Lawrence is a pivotal character in many ways, Gilbert limits himself here to designating him as the local squire, a suitor to Jane Wilson and the owner of Wildfell Hall, without otherwise characterizing him. On the whole, however, in bringing the neighbors together and expressing opinions about them, Gilbert has set out clear markers of how he hopes to

be viewed by his readers. He has also introduced us to some of his conflicts and contradictions and directed attention to aspects of his personality that the reader might want to question.

CHAPTER 13. FIDGETING ABOUT FROM ROOM TO ROOM

Wildfell Hall is a novel that grows out of the conflict between speaking and writing, with both Gilbert and Helen closely tied to the written word. Gilbert describes his motivation for writing in a prologue that has been omitted from most editions of the novel. He acknowledges that Halford spoke at length at some time in the past about significant incidents in his life. At the time Gilbert was unwilling to respond in kind to him and coolness developed between the two brothers-in-law as a consequence. Now, sitting in his library, among “musty old letters and papers”, Gilbert offers to re-cement their relationship by recounting the significant tale of his personal history in a letter. Gilbert’s inability to speak directly about his past experiences and his choice of writing as his means of communication places the contrast between speaking and writing at the center of the novel’s structure. The novel, as it is visualized, can only exist because Gilbert is uncomfortable speaking and chooses to write down his story. He concludes the prologue assuring Halford that the narrative can be believed because he bases it not solely upon memory but also on an old journal that he kept at the time.

The narrative of *Wildfell Hall* is ostensibly based on several layers of writing. First, it is supposedly the text of a letter that forms the longest epistolary novel in English. According to Gilbert, he bases his letter on his own old journal from the late 1820s. This forms the basic source for the first and third sections of the novel. The long middle section is based upon Helen’s journal which he also has in his keeping and which he admits to editing somewhat as he copies it into the letter. The information in the third section about Helen after she returns to Grassdale and the sickness and eventual death of

Huntingdon is derived from letters from Helen to Frederick Lawrence, which Lawrence shared with Gilbert. The narrative, therefore, is not only written in a letter rather than spoken but also based upon a series of older written sources.

Helen duplicates Gilbert's action at the close of the first section when she needs to explain herself to Gilbert. She also resorts to text, choosing to loan him her diary rather than speaking to him about her history. As a part of the narrative, this move is necessary; Helen could not, from the perspective of the moment, have told the same story that the diary reveals developing over time. But the action also reflects Helen's preference for written over spoken communication. The early pages of her diary show that even before she marries Huntingdon she kept her own counsel and recorded her thoughts in her diary rather than communicating openly with her aunt. Later, on the night of her first quarrel with Huntingdon, she shuts herself in her room and writes a long letter to her aunt, demonstrating that she too interacts more easily with an absent correspondent.

The events of *Wildfell Hall* focus attention on several questions raised by Basso (1974, pp. 431-432) He asks, for example, "What kinds of information are considered appropriate for transmission through written channels" (1974, p.431). Both Helen and Gilbert repeatedly explore the limits of appropriacy as they shift to writing at key moments of interaction. Basso's also suggests that the study of writing should consider issues such as the distribution of writing ability among members of a community and the influence of such factors as age, sex, and socioeconomic position on the incidence of writing. In the community of Lindenhope, it is clear that the community leaders exercise their authority through the spoken word. At Grassdale, too, the characters with higher

social status, Huntingdon especially, are less likely to employ writing. Though both Helen and Gilbert seem more comfortable writing than speaking, their reactions are not necessarily typical for people in their communities. We have already observed Helen's awkwardness in several situations that required spoken communication and seen that she recognized that she is not skilled at oral interactions. And we have seen that her clumsy handling of social calls has led to suspicion and rejection within the larger community. She expresses herself more readily in her painting and her journal. Gilbert was probably wise, therefore, to choose a book as a gift when he tried to strengthen his friendship with Helen. Early in the narrative, Helen generally tolerates Gilbert's presence only when he maintains adequate emotional distance. The negotiations over the gift of the book are a significant step in the gradually developing relationship between them. Gilbert and Helen both use books as tools on a number of occasions. Helen, for example, creates the space that allows her to offer marriage to Gilbert by sending her son to look for a book. Both Helen and Gilbert use books as shields, pretending to read when they wish to avoid conversation or observe another. Gilbert does this when Helen visits the Markham home in chapter 3 and Helen follows the same course in her first major fight with Huntingdon in chapter 24.

As Helen and Huntingdon continue their quarrel, Helen's book becomes almost a weapon. Huntingdon and Helen occupy different positions on the continuum of literacy and orality. Just as books are a means of bringing Helen and Gilbert together, they are a device for keeping Helen and Huntingdon apart. Helen reads to create a barrier between her and her husband and though he attempts to do the same as a weapon against her, he is

unable to sustain the deceit. It is noteworthy that in the quarrel in chapter 24 neither Helen nor Huntingdon is really reading at the time they are both pretending to, but Helen is the more convincing actor. She records that Huntingdon spent considerable time after breakfast with the paper, but “he spent the remainder of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in fidgeting about from room to room” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 171).

Huntingdon later tries to read again but soon pushes the book away calling it ‘cursed trash’. Helen tells him her book is ‘very interesting’ but “I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer”. Huntingdon soon turns his book into a real weapon, throwing it at his dog and also hitting Helen in the process. This act breaks through the façade of reading, forcing Helen to respond directly to what is happening at the moment rather than seeking to hide behind the book. But through his action he acknowledges his defeat in the competition to fight through books by throwing his away.

The quarrel between Helen and Huntingdon conducted through books draws attention to a larger conflict between literacy and orality that underlies much of the action of the book. Olson (1994, p. 274) tracing a gradual change over thousands of years in the way humans think and relate to the world based on their relation to written texts, concludes that people may be able to participate in many kinds of ‘literate or textual communities’ but that in ‘bureaucratic’ societies, literacy is identified with ability to participate in such privileged domains as ‘law, religion, politics, science and literature’. In the area of literature, Jajdelska (2007) speculates that the critical mass of silent readers

reached by 1700 produced a shift in the nature of the novel, altered the reader from speaker to hearer, permitted the author to address an implied reader and led to the creation of the narrator. Nonetheless, Gordon (1996) argues that more than two centuries later, the competition between literacy and orality formed a major motif in the fiction of Scott, Austen, Emily Bronte, Dickens, and Eliot. For Gordon, literacy is the institutional text, supporting official truth while orality advances subversive voices of ‘corrupting, superstitious deviation’. While institutional dominance is based on documents and literacy (genealogies and peerage documents in Scott and Austen, legal documents in Dickens), it is undercut or challenged by oral alternatives usually expressed in gossip.

Gordon posits several contrasts between literacy and orality, notably closure vs. alternatives, tales vs. truth and communal vs. individual voices. She notes that the act of writing privileges one rendering of events as real and excludes alternative versions which persist only as subversive gossip. The oral history is never fixed; it remains open to adaptations. Eighteenth century Protestantism distrusted oral accounts and saw ‘old wives tales’ as impediments to understanding. What was not written down assumed the status of folk tales. Gordon makes a contrast between ‘gossip’ and ‘gospel’. Finally she observes that orality in the form of gossip resists ‘propriety—the ownership of discourse’ (Gordon 1996, p. xii). Gossip must be presented as information that is generally known rather than the production of an individual author. Gordon suggests Echo, the nymph who could only repeat the last thing, she heard as the prototype of the gossip. Hymes (1981, p. 90), speaking of Chinook storytellers, observes “to have claimed to speak on one’s own authority alone would have deprived what was said of authority”. This restriction

underlies much that is presented in *Wildfell Hall*. There are always written texts behind Gilbert's letter. Even though the texts may have been written by Gilbert himself they still provide authority that memory would not. Spoken texts are the same. Hymes says the speaker must insist that the information is not his own but has been received from someone else. In *Wildfell Hall*, when news is announced, it is usually accompanied by the name of the source. Gossip and innuendo are modified by 'everyone knows' or 'they say'.

Although *Wildfell Hall* seems to illustrate many of Gordon's observations, the relation between literacy and orality may be somewhat different here than in the nineteenth century texts that she analyzes. In the early chapters of the *Wildfell Hall*, Helen's character is gradually constructed through gossip. This official version is contradicted by her written diary which is introduced to form the second section of the novel. Two versions of Helen, the spoken and the written contrast in the first and second sections of the novel, but, in the interplay between literacy and orality, literacy is usually private. Gossip, orality, on the other hand, is the institutional voice. Mrs. Markham, Jane Wilson, and Mrs. Wilson provide the orthodox viewpoints on the news, voicing community expectations and conventional interpretations. Gossip flows around all the events of the novel. Orality seems dominant and perhaps assumes institutional authority unlike the subversive role suggested by Gordon. When written documents contradict the orally established community consensus, they serve private ends. Although the journals kept by Gilbert and Helen resemble the institutional documents that, according to Gordon, establish official histories, they do not possess the same inscribed truth as legal

documents. Gordon, in fact, refers to the genre of the diary as ‘really a kind of counter-text’ (1996, p. 100). Gordon also defines gossip as “Talk which begs us not to talk of it” (1996, p. 92). After Helen gives her diary to Gilbert, she calls him back to say, “Bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being.” Her request would seem to align the diary with Gordon’s definition of gossip. Gilbert’s old journal, in contrast, may not have provided much of a response to the oral gossip around Helen because for the most part he believes it all, although at this point, twenty years later, he claims he hadn’t believed it. His actions in the narrative show his words to be false; he generally behaves as though the gossip were true. For Bronte, it often seems that writing functions as an individual reaction to institutionalized convention or a tool for the creation of individual space. Writing is often an admission of weakness in communication. Helen keeps her journal partly because she is unable to adapt to the oral community she participates in. Gilbert writes his letter to compensate for his failure to provide an oral history to Halford.

Gilbert and Helen both seem to need to commit everything to paper. The worlds they are creating on paper are attempts to set out individual realities in defiance of institutional authority, which is more embodied in the “they say” of gossip. But their chosen literate forms may be only marginally representative of literacy as authority. Gordon (1996, p. 64) claims that gossip and letters are complementary. Gossip makes letters speak and letters extend gossip to specific audiences. But letters with dates and signatures are a restricted kind of gossip. “Gossip,” she says, “can incorporate the currency of the letter far better than the letter can keep up with gossip, because, unlike the

letter, it is never complete, never reproductive of a ‘finished’ account” (1996, p. 72)

Warner (1996), on the other hand, lists as one of the basic rules of gossip in eighteenth century America never to write suspicions down because letters may fall into unexpected hands. Much of his material, nonetheless, comes from gossipy letters. Pennycook (2001, p.77) suggests that the divide between literacy and orality is exaggerated and suggests instead that the term ‘literacies’ may better describe variations in literacy practices. In *Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert and Helen align themselves with writing but choose forms that are generally not used to embody institutional authority. Huntingdon, who might be more generally characterized as a non-reader does glance through the paper and the daily mail, occasionally writing brief replies to his letters.

Just as literacy in *Wildfell Hall* does not exactly reflect the dichotomy described by Gordon, orality also exhibits variations. When Gilbert first visits Wildfell Hall, he mentions the stories his nurse told him when he was a child, but these quasi-supernatural tales, identified by Gordon as an eighteenth century stereotype of oral history, play no part in the rigorously realistic narrative of *Wildfell Hall*. Gossip, on the other hand, permeates it. Gordon describes the voices of oral tradition as marginalized. In Austen, for example, gossips are often financially dependent marginal figures entrusted with the care of the young. In *Wildfell Hall*, on the contrary, the principal gossips, Mrs. Markham, Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Millward and some of their children, are substantial members of the community capable of speaking for the community. Gossip is marginalized as a subversive voice in the novels that Gordon analyzes, but in *Wildfell Hall* it is the legitimate of organ of social orthodoxy. Bronte clearly discounts old wives tales but she

gives great importance to gossip as the apparatus of enculturation and social consolidation. The oral narrative may occasionally be mistaken, as, for example, in the interpretation of the relation between Frederick and Helen or in telling Gilbert about Helen's remarriage. But gossip also gets it right in important ways. Although the details may not always be exact, the members of the community sense that something is wrong in many of Helen's actions and words. They note the falsity of Helen's position without necessarily identifying the details that she is hiding.

In one sense, orality clearly functions in Wildfell Hall in accordance with Gordon's description of its role in nineteenth century fiction. Gilbert's original imperative, you must go back with me, is made possible only through the extensive written records that allow him to compose a new writing that contains a detailed reconstruction of the past. Although Gilbert is ostensibly telling the story of his own life, the letter that contains it is not even a primary source. It is a case study based on old letters and journals, a secondary compilation derived from documentary sources. Within the narrative Gilbert includes multiple oral voices that undercut his own narrative voice. Gordon (1996, p. 2) observes that 'an alternative, orally-based culture' opposes 'the exclusionary family library with its inscribed and encrypted truths'. Truth in Wildfell Hall does not belong entirely to the narrator or to any of the other participants, creating a fluid, multi-voiced context molded by overlapping speech communities, oral and literate orientations, implicit assumptions and empirical observations, and communal and individual voices. No participant, not even the narrator, can control the narrative. Each representative of the communal voice seems to distort it into a somewhat personal voice.

Jane Wilson and Mrs. Markham will never be an identical voice. We see this lack of identity as we watch Jane Wilson and Eliza Millward in chapter 9 struggle to coordinate their telling of the same story.

The conflict between orality and literacy in *Wildfell Hall* is complicated by a second conflict between verbal and non-verbal communication and sometimes between communication and non-communication. Much of the most important action in *Wildfell Hall* is enacted through silence and the major crises of the book have large silent components. The church service in chapter 1 is a tour de force of silent communication. But it is only the lack of communication between Lawrence and Markham that allows their misunderstanding to reach the level that it does. It is likewise only Lawrence's silence that allows Gilbert to assault him with impunity. No one in the community ever learns of Gilbert's responsibility for the beating. Gilbert's whole narrative is an attempt to compensate for his failure to communicate a personal history in response to Halford's confidences. Gilbert's chief character flaw may be his inability to communicate his intentions, even to himself. But his pursuit of Helen in the first section of the book is made possible by her silence about her marital status. When he believes he has seen proof of the truth of the gossip about her and Lawrence, he responds by avoiding rather than confronting her. Silence is Helen's preferred response to conflict. She attempts to discipline Huntingdon through the use of silence and part of the difficulty of their marriage derives from Huntingdon's use of silence to respond to her silence. Huntingdon, however, during the courtship, had already demonstrated his own tendency to use silence

as a way to manipulate Helen. Later, at Wildfell Hall, it is Helen's silence about her past that leads to her ostracism from the community.

CHAPTER 14. "THE USUAL COMPANY OF FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS": COMMUNITY IN WILDFELL HALL

The Physical Community

Introducing the party in Chapter 10, Gilbert describes the guests, the same group that attended the party in Chapter 4, as "the usual company of friends and neighbours". These twelve people, the four Markhams, the four Wilsons, the three Millwards and Frederick Lawrence are all that we know of the community of Lindenhope. Any description of the community must begin and, to a large degree, end with them. Besides Lindenhope, we become acquainted with two other communities in the course of Wildfell Hall: Staningley and Grassdale. Although there are variations among these three places, we can abstract several generalizations about the nature of rural communities in early nineteenth century England. Although London is mentioned vaguely a few times in Helen's diary, almost everything in the book happens in the country, and we can form an idea only of rural communities. To begin, the communities are very small, bounded by visits and invitations.

The Markhams' parties, as we have seen, include the four family members and eight guests. Interaction between members of the Lindenhope community usually takes place through visits to private homes or chance encounters in the fields. Occasionally people gather for a party as happens a few times in the Markham home or groups of young people may make an excursion as they do to the ocean in Chapter 7. Everyone is expected to attend the church services on Sundays. The common mode of transportation

is by foot, although Lawrence and Markham are each seen riding horses on occasion. For the excursion to the ocean, some of the women rode in a cart part of the way.

All the communities of the novel are composed of small groups of upper-middle or upper class families with rural-based wealth. Gilbert and Linden Car are more properly upper middle class, separated by a slight economic and social inequality from Maxwell, Huntingdon and Lawrence who are part of the squirearchy. Though Aunt Maxwell and Huntingdon seem to be representatives of the same economic group, prosperous country gentry just short of aristocratic, they can be distinguished from each other through divergent moral and religious values. Staningley and Grassdale are larger properties than Linden Car, seeming to be connected to more extended networks in a more mobile society. When groups gather, guests may come from greater distances, on horses or in carriages, and some may stay for several days rather than a couple of hours. The gatherings may be more sophisticated, sometimes with somewhat larger groups of people though probably never so many as twenty. All three communities seem to be bounded by social hierarchies. Farmhands and servants occasionally appear but they are rarely given names and interaction between them and the main characters seems to be minimal, even though the servants may be living in the same households. There must have been a larger community in which these small groups moved but we hear nothing about it, except for Helen's old housekeeper companion, Rachel, and a few references to persons outside the circle of friends and neighbors that would be invited. Those who would be invited or who would be visited seem to be a very limited group and to account for nearly a hundred percent of all social interaction. Austen's Emma (Handler & Segal

1990), situated in 1815, twelve years before *Wildfell Hall*, shows us that the boundaries of who would be invited and who might invite were porous and the occasion of considerable social confusion but Bronte does not explore the boundaries here.

In an era when travel was slower and distances accordingly greater, the physical boundaries of community may have been more limiting than they are today and cultural variation from one community to another could have been substantially greater. Some of the decisions made in the story might depend upon the bounded nature of community. For example, Helen's options for marriage were in reality very limited and, combining the vast oversupply of women with the limited opportunities for social interaction, Huntingdon might have appeared to be the only tolerable option available. The flawed candidates offered by her uncle and aunt suggest that the field of choices must have been severely restricted. Helen's later choice of Gilbert, a selection that surprised and irritated several early reviewers, may also have been determined by the same scarcity of options.

The trajectory of Helen's experience in *Wildfell Hall* is parallel to that of Agnes Grey in Bronte's first novel.

Agnes begins her history in a state of innocence, even exaggerated innocence represented by a closed and simple physical setting, in Agnes' case the parsonage. As the novel develops, Agnes will be tested in other physical locations, each place representing a kind of experience and a measure of her character. (Peer 1984, p. 60)

Agnes and Helen each leave their childhood homes, seek to adapt to two different communities, finally return home, and eventually marry, Agnes for the first time, Helen for the second. In a sense, the plots of Bronte's two novels may enact the central theme of the realistic novel. Discussing the trajectory of the nineteenth

century novel from Scott's early work to the end of the century, Shaw (1999, p. 31) notes, "But the linked recognition of the complexity of societies as they move through history, and the fragility of the individuals who face them, remains constant". This summary of the realistic novel offers a framework that provides a clear vision of *Wildfell Hall* as a record of Helen's faltering attempts to interact with the complex communities around her.

The separation of different communities from each other is noted by the Examiner (07/29/1848) in one of the earliest reviews of *Wildfell Hall*:

There are two distinct series of character in the book: the one being the inhabitants of the village in the neighborhood of Wildfell Hall; the other, less rural and far more ambitiously sketched; the friends and acquaintance who surround the heroine in her native country, and tend to illustrate her conduct in the earlier and later portions of her life. For she is 'Tenant of Wildfell Hall' during some months only, when she has been forced to fly from a drunken, vicious, and tyrannical husband; and there is in fact no connection whatever between the two sets of dramatis personae, except the very slender link which the heroine herself presents, by passing from one place to the other. (Allot 1974, p. 255)

This review is the first to point out the contraposition of two sets of characters, the isolation of the groups within which she interacts from each other, and the position of Helen as a tenant rather than a member of the community. The reviewer stresses the foreignness of Helen in Lindenhope by referring to Grassdale as 'her native country'. He fails to remark, however, that Helen, whose childhood home was at Staningley, is as much an outsider at Grassdale as she is in Lindenhope. It is only a few hours by carriage from Lindenhope to Grassdale and Staningley is less than twenty miles from Grassdale. We might find it surprising that two small rural communities in the north of England

would be so different that an individual moving from one to the other would become a foreigner. Nonetheless, it is clearly the intention of the author to suggest to suggest that there is indeed a suspicion of something foreign about Helen. This becomes apparent in chapter 7 when Fergus attempts to initiate a series of impertinent questions that he claims enumerate the themes of discussion among the neighbors. The first, the only one that he is allowed to ask, concerns her birth. "Some will have it that you are a foreigner, and some an Englishwoman" (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 56). This question reminds us of Helen's status as an outsider and also links her to the foreign woman, a common motif of Victorian literature. That the neighbors would ask whether she is an Englishwoman is a crucial fact for two reasons. First, because foreign women are exotic, and possibly dangerous or threatening to the community, the doubt about her birth draws attention to the eccentricities and secretiveness in Helen's conduct. Helen's answer, in fact, reinforces the suspicions that the neighbors might have because, though she claims to be English, she is deliberately vague about where she is from. From the opposite perspective, however, the question also discloses the insular nature of the community. Helen's origins are not so different from those of her neighbors and Staningley is not so distant from Lindenhope as to call into question her nationality. For the question to be seriously considered, Lindenhope must be a very closed, homogenous community. That Helen is an alien in both of the major environments of the narrative, and that the differences between these environments are substantial, are factors that motivate much of the conflict in the novel.

The Speech Community

In earlier chapters, we have seen that Helen Graham is not always clearly aware either of the responses expected of her or of the effect of her responses on others. We might ask whether her lack of competence in interaction can be taken as an indication that she is insufficiently familiar with the speech community in which she is interacting. Because Hymes' focus in ethnography of communication is upon speech events as they are understood by the participants, information must be gathered within the context of a specific speech community. Saville-Troike (2003, p. 15) defines a speech community as a group that shares knowledge or behaviors related to the ways they use, value or interpret language, though she cautions that such a group will not be 'linguistically homogeneous'. To speak the same language does not necessarily mean to be in the same speech community. Nonetheless, Saville-Troike argues that Spanish speakers in Texas and Argentina (2003, p. 14) can be considered members of two different speech communities while nothing prevents us from viewing Armenians in California and Syria (2003, p. 16) as part of the same speech community. Such large or extended groupings may render the concept of the speech community too abstract to be of much use in furthering understanding of speech events among specific language users. Saville-Troike distinguishes between participating in a speech community, which all speakers of a language can do to some extent, and being a member of that community. She also indicates that individuals may be members of several speech communities simultaneously. Most of her examples, however, involve bilingual or multilingual situations rather than contexts in which separate speech communities speak the same language. She suggests several alternatives to the concept of speech community as a unit

for study (nested speech community, discourse community and community of practice) but each of these seems to imply conditions somewhat different from those that apply to the communities of Wildfell Hall. Community of practice for example, often evokes a group working together toward a shared goal or to develop a shared interest rather than a primarily geographically determined community. There is considerable divergence among researchers in defining the speech community (Saville-Troike, 2003, Patrick, 2002), but for our purposes, two groups whose expectations and attitudes related to language diverge to the extent that they may find it difficult to correctly interpret each other's conversational practices might be considered separate speech communities.

Speakers within a speech community generally vary in their language use. In describing the subject matter of ethnography of communication, Saville-Troike refers to one of the central questions asked by research in the area. "What does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, and how does he or she learn to do so?" (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 2) The amount of knowledge that a speaker has and the level of his ability to use it constitute his communicative competence. From a related perspective, Goffman (1967, p. 13) notes that conventions of social interaction that may vary from one nearby group to another, "Each person, subculture, and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices. It is to this repertoire that people partly refer when they ask what a person or culture is 'really' like." If this is the case, then awareness of the appropriate rituals of interaction and competence in performing them would be aspects of general communicative competence within a particular speech community. But, like Saville-Troike, Goffman also recognizes

that there will be differences in competence, what he calls ‘variation in social skill’ (1967, p. 13) among speakers within the same community. Saville-Troike observes, “Within each community or complex of overlapping and interacting communities there exist a number of different language codes and ways of speaking available to its members, which constitute its communicative repertoire.” (2003, p. 41). She argues that, within a speech community, speech may vary according to such factors as setting, activity domain, region, ethnicity, social class, status, role, role-relationships, sex, and age. Given the degree of variation that can occur within the speech community, it might be more practical to describe the slight differences in language between Helen and her neighbors as a result of variation within a community rather than difference between communities.

On the other hand, Helen clearly fails to perceive what the expectations of her neighbors are and she is often unaware of the reactions that her speech acts provoke. Her problem seems go beyond the selection of an appropriate variation from among the community’s repertoire of codes and ways of speaking. She seems, rather, to be unaware of the repertoire and to choose ways of speaking that fall outside the appropriate options. Saville-Troike (2003, p. 89) posits, “Observed behavior is recognized as a manifestation of a deeper set of codes and rules, and a major goal of ethnography is the discovery and explication of the rules for contextually appropriate behavior in a community or group; in other words, accounting for what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community.” If appropriate behavior within the community derives from ‘a deeper

set of codes and rules' then perhaps the actual language spoken is of lesser significance.

Scollon and Scollon observe that

when two or more people talk together, it takes a lot of coordination to keep things going smoothly. Although it does not seem like it, in ordinary conversation the various speakers are careful not to talk all at once or to interrupt or to fail to answer if there is a question. This cooperation takes a good bit of work and common understanding. In interethnic communication there are often differences in the systems of the speakers, so that mistakes happen that lead to further misunderstandings . (1981, p. 22)

The coordination that Scollon and Scollon describe is repeatedly lacking in Helen Graham's interactions. In Chapter 3, for example, we see her alternately challenging and cutting off Mrs. Markham, seemingly unaware of the impression that her speech acts will have on other participants. Her conduct becomes explicable only when we realize that she is failing to pick up on hints and signs that are provided for her. Scollon and Scollon (1981, p. 12) argue that discourse systems are learned in infancy, "through a long and highly involved process of socialization and communication with caregivers. It is unconscious and affects all communication in language." Helen growing up in Staningley, learned to expect certain behaviors, certain responses, and certain types of questioning. Because her early expectations are unconscious she is really not aware of the mistakes she is making in meeting with her neighbors, either at Lindenhope or at Grassdale. She expects them to react as she does, applying the same sets of codes and rules indicators. Not all of Helen's communication difficulties in *Wildfell Hall* can be directly attributed to her lack of integration into the speech community. Her interactions with Aunt Maxwell in the early portion of her diary show that she often does not listen

well even when she is interacting within her own speech community. Although some of her errors may be linked to differing expectations within variant speech communities, her communicative competence even within her own culture may be less than ideal.

In Chapter 5, Rose and Gilbert visit Wildfell Hall to return Mrs. Graham's visit to Linden Car. Here, Mrs. Graham's actions seem to confirm the rumor of ill-treatment of earlier visitors in the first chapter. She leads them into an uncomfortable room, continues painting while they talk, appears secretive, and refuses to answer questions, showing herself to be a singularly inept or perhaps reluctant hostess. She welcomes the guests but her distraction leads them to feel unwanted. When they leave, she apologizes to Gilbert for responding harshly to a question and appears concerned that she may have offended him but she seems not to be aware of her multiple acts that would be taken as rudeness by her visitors. Although, Helen's speech is sometimes inappropriate, the discrepancy between her speech and her actions seems more seriously disconcerting.

And disengaging a couple of chairs from the artistical lumber that usurped them, she bid us be seated, and resumed her place beside the easel - not facing it exactly, but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed, and giving it an occasional touch with her brush, as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests. . . . Bronte (1966/1948, p. 44)

Gilbert eventually asks her to go on painting because he feels like an "unwelcome intruder." She responds "throwing her brush on to the table, as if startled into politeness." The oddity in this scene is that, although Helen's reluctance to receive visitors is already part of community gossip, she seems to be glad to have the Markhams come. Her apparent rudeness is not intentional. Whether her social ineptness leads her to use the painting to shield herself or her divergent idea of correct behavior misleads her into

seeming distracted, she seems to convey an impression to her visitors that misrepresents her feelings. It is also possible, of course, that Gilbert misinterprets this scene, misled by his own vanity into believing that she is pleased by their visit while she may be observing minimal politeness and hoping to encourage their early departure. Gumperz (1981, pp. 131-132) summarizes Helen's problem.

Unlike words that can be discussed out of context, the meanings of contextualization cues are implicit. They are not usually talked about out of context. Their signally value depends on the participants tacit awareness of their meaningfulness. When all participants understand and notice the relevant clues, interpretive processes are then taken for granted and tend to go unnoticed. However, when a listener does not react to a cue or is unaware of its function, interpretations may differ and misunderstanding may occur. It is important to note that when this happens and when a difference in interpretation is brought to a participant's attention, it tends to be seen in attitudinal terms. A speaker is said to be unfriendly, impertinent, rude, uncooperative, or to fail to understand. Interactants do not ordinarily notice that the listener may have failed to perceive a shift in rhythm or a change in pronunciation.

Miscommunication of this type, in other words, is regarded as a social faux pas and leads to misjudgments of the speaker's intent; it is not likely to be identified as a mere linguistic error. Gumperz (1981, pp. 131-132).

Helen seems to be, but is not, sending clear signals about her feelings to Rose and Gilbert through her physical attitude. Her error is not so much a failure to understand the contextualization cues of her visitors but an inability to provide the appropriate cues for them. (In other cases, such as chapter 3, she clearly fails to pick up on the cues of others.) Although Helen and all her interlocutors in *Wildfell Hall* speak English as a native language, she often encounters problems that Scollon and Scollon identify as obstacles to interethnic communication. Helen's problem is one that is probably increasingly common in recent times. Gumperz (1982, p. 7) argues that, "With the disappearance of small, egalitarian face-to-face societies, diversity of background and communicative

conventions come to take on important signaling functions in everyday interaction". Helen, living in a small face-to-face society finds that a geographical displacement of only a few miles makes it difficult for her to communicate. It may then be possible for two groups speaking the same language to be separate speech communities because of sharp divergences in underlying codes and rules. Gumperz, again, suggests that discourse clues can have a significant impact on communication.

We can begin to see why individuals who speak English well and have no difficulty in producing grammatical English sentences may nevertheless differ significantly in what they perceive as meaningful discourse clues. Accordingly their assumptions about what information is to be conveyed, how it is to be ordered and put into words and their ability to fill in the un verbalized information they need to make sense of what transpires may also vary. (Gumperz 1982, pp. 172-173)

As we observe the speech events in *Wildfell Hall*, we note that Helen often struggles to communicate with others. In none of the communities in which she interacts, is her communicative competence adequate for all her purposes. Some evidence indicates that personal traits make it harder for her to communicate. She doesn't always listen well to others and her reactions can seem judgmental at times. There are clear indications, nonetheless, that some of her communication problems derive from differing expectations resulting from interactions in communities with distinct attitudes and values concerning language. Though all the characters in the narrative speak English, other cultural factors may lead them to see themselves as distinct communities. Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities may help to explain how groups that seem

to be geographically similar and linguistically nearly identical to divide into separate speech communities.

The Imagined Community

In contrast to the physical community Anderson (2006) posits the existence of an imagined community. Whereas members of a traditional community may be expected to interact on a regular basis, members of an imagined community may never see one another or know of each other's existence as individuals. However, they may share much of the same knowledge and participate in some of the same activities at the same time and they are aware that many other people are doing and thinking what they are doing and thinking.

In a sense the imagined community is not real. It is formed primarily by people with whom the individual will never interact. But this community may impinge upon the speech community in such a way that people who interact there develop differing expectations among themselves. Anderson uses this theory to explain the development of modern nation-states. His imagined communities are national in scope but imagined communities can be postulated at other levels of abstraction smaller than the nation-state. "In fact", Anderson writes, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined" (2006, p. 6) Just as Anderson argues that it is not possible for all members of even the smallest nation to interact with one another, neither is it possible for all members of any group (Presbyterians, Lions,

Marines) to interact with each other, although it is possible for members of these groups to think of themselves as communities.

A common way for an imagined community to affect a speech community may be through ideology. Saville-Troike has discussed the shared values and attitudes about language that characterize a speech community. Differences in ideology may lead to such different values that individuals living in the same geographical setting and sharing the same language find it difficult to understand each other.

Anderson includes the advent of the printing press and the daily newspapers among the unifying factors in creating the imagined community. Printing first helped to create nation-states by standardizing languages and sometimes giving central prestige to one among a group of mutually intelligible languages. Anderson observes, “Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper” (2006, p. 44). As more printed matter became available in vernaculars, readers of these vernacular languages shared ideas and information. “These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print”, Anderson believes, “formed in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (2006, p. 44).

The members of the small communities where the narrative of *Wildfell Hall* takes place are already part of communities that exist beyond the limits of their small villages. In the case of residents of Staningley and Grassdale, we have seen that the inhabitants sometimes travel for extended stays to London where they mix with others from various

parts of the country. On a more abstract level, they all speak the same language making them to some degree part of the same general speech community, despite regional, social and ideological variations in their actual language use. But they are also tied together by print as members of one imagined community. On the most concrete level, they are united by the daily mail. All of them correspond copiously with friends, relations and business connections from outside their immediate communities. The novel itself is a piece of correspondence. But a more national communion comes to them through the daily papers. Mail extends the limits of community but does not make the community imagined unless it is junk mail (probably a less prevalent genre in the early nineteenth century). The papers are instruments of the imagined community. In *Wildfell Hall*, we see both Gilbert and Huntingdon engaged in reading the papers. Huntingdon, who is not a reader, receives his papers with the morning mail which also brings in a variety of correspondence that he must respond to. Both Gilbert and Huntingdon also sometimes use their papers as barriers to shield them from face-to-face communication in their actual communities.

. Another effect of the printing press noted by Anderson was the mass marketing of books in the national vernaculars. Large printings of popular writers created the phenomenon of the best seller, which in turn led segments of the population to be reading the same books at the same time. Gilbert participates in this process by ordering a best seller of the day, Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*, as a gift for Helen.

The characters in *Wildfell Hall* live in small, somewhat isolated communities, separated from even nearby communities by the time necessary to travel small distances

and the rudimentary communication media of the era. The isolation of the communities leads to variation in interaction conventions that may affect the communicative competence of outsiders and foster the development of small bounded speech communities. Yet they are part of a much larger community that shares English as a native language and they would probably be able to communicate to some extent with most other members of this community. In addition they are integrated into the larger national community through their participation in an imagined community based at least partly on the widespread dissemination of books, journals and newspapers. The effectiveness of the imagined community in building a homogenous speech community is, however, limited by the complicating effects of ideology upon speech.

The Ideological Community

Saville-Troike (2003, p. 19) asserts that the cultural context of speakers is a significant factor in the construction of the speech community.

Ultimately all aspects of culture are relevant to communication, but those that have the most direct bearing on communicative forms and processes are the social and institutional structure, the values and attitudes held about language and ways of speaking, the network of conceptual categories which results from experiences, and the ways knowledge and skills (including language) are transmitted from one generation to the next and to new members of the group. Shared cultural knowledge is essential to explain the shared presuppositions and judgments of truth value which are the essential undergirdings of language structures, as well as of contextually appropriate usage and interpretation.

The significance of abstract elements (values, attitudes, conceptual categories) in the construction of communication immediately suggests itself in her description. Although ideology in general and language ideology in particular no doubt bear upon the

community in many ways, religious ideology provides one of the most salient influences in this narrative. Much of the religious discussion, however, is not made explicit and may not be readily apparent to the modern reader. Maltz (1985) stresses the significance of language ideology in determining the forms and practices of religious worship.

Because variations in Protestant worship consist largely of differences in rules for the use of speech in religious contexts (Samarin 1973), changes in modes of worship are primarily changes in conceptions of when and where speech and silence are appropriate, of what kinds of speech acts are appropriate in what contexts, of who should speak when, and who should remain silent. Because changes in Christian worship involve more than simple adaptations to changing cultural contexts, arguments about worship have often been important arena for conscious protests against the religious status quo, critiques of dominant assumptions about proper modes of worship, and demands for more satisfying ways of expressing one's relationship with God. For several centuries, changing ideas about the proper use and interpretation of speech and silence have been an important part of many of the religious disagreements between Protestants. (1985, p. 118)

To the degree that it is true that religious difference is essentially variation in language use, religious communities may be seen as speech communities. Reference to scripture is frequent throughout the *Wildfell Hall* and is not limited to one character. We have already seen how Gilbert uses parables from Matthew to describe his situation in the opening sentences of the book. Helen's citation of Biblical verses is central to her analysis of her situation throughout her diary. Even in *Grassdale*, the characters, sometimes even Huntingdon, frequently make references to Scripture. Helen refers to the parable of the servant who hid his talent, used by Gilbert at the beginning of Chapter 1, to exhort Huntingdon early in the diary (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 167). But, whereas Gilbert uses the parable to justify his worldly ambition, Helen cites it to encourage Huntingdon to use whatever resources he might have to seek God. Because Gilbert and Helen seem to

represent different ideological communities, we must assume either that their use of religious discourse is distinct or that the differences between their communities are not to be found in religious ideology.

In fact, religious ideology is debated throughout the novel. Many readers (Wolff, 1977; Jay, 1979; Jansson, 1998; Thormahlen, 1999; Colon, 2004, 2008 & Torgerson, 2005) have pointed out the religious conflict that seems to underlie some of the discussion in the novel. Four theological positions seem to be expressed. Mr. Millward is an Anglican clergyman, in many ways conscientious in performing his duties, but also complacent and pompous. Mr. Millward represents conventional Anglican belief and through certain character flaws makes reference to particular religious controversies of the time. For example, his disdain for tea, reminds us of the general Victorian contempt for Methodist tea meetings (Cunningham, 1975, p.13). The community of Lindenhope, so far as we are allowed to glimpse it, is an Anglican community. The people of the neighborhood attend Mr. Millward's services on Sunday mornings and, insofar as they speak about religion, they seem to repeat his teachings.

The community that gathers at Grassdale may not be readily recognizable as a religious community. Its orientation, however, is suggested by Huntingdon's name, recalling the Countess of Huntingdon, a leader of the Calvinist offshoot of Methodism (Gerin, 1976 /1959). As several readers have pointed out, the discussions between Helen and Huntingdon, especially in the final section when she has returned to nurse him as he dies, contrast Helen's universalism with Huntingdon's Calvinism. Thormahlen (1999), in fact, argues that throughout the diary section Huntingdon shows himself to be much more

familiar with Scripture than we might have expected, and that his discussions with Helen during his last illness show clear understanding of orthodox beliefs.

Helen does not fit in either at Grassdale or at Wildfell Hall. We can only assume that she learned her Methodism from her Aunt Maxwell as she was growing up at Staningley. If she did, it might be a parallel with Bronte who some critics suppose acquired Methodist ideas from her Aunt Branwell during her childhood at Haworth. Staningley, however, is not an isolated Methodist enclave. Helen's uncle rarely goes to church (p .146), admits to having been wild in his youth (p .114), and suffers regularly from gout (pp. 110, 125). There are, nonetheless, many elements in Helen's character that reflect Methodism. She keeps a journal for the purpose of self improvement in imitation of the Methodist diarists. She appears to adhere to Methodist or Dissenting beliefs on gender and the rights and duties of women, judging from her statements in Chapter 3 and in her quarrels with Huntingdon and from her action in leaving him, taking their son, and working to support herself. Dissenting groups in the mid-nineteenth century generally expected greater lay participation in preaching and teaching and they often espoused a radically different concept of gender relations, including higher educational aspirations for women and greater equality for women in religious and ethical debate. Women were often expected to take greater public roles in religious education and in the discussion of important ethical issues of the day (Colon, 2000, Henck, 2005). Helen's assertiveness in discussions with her husband and her neighbors suggests a Methodist orientation.

But Helen is not completely orthodox in her Methodism. We can see this in her argument with her Aunt Maxwell in the beginning pages of her diary which is repeated in

her discussions with Huntingdon as he is dying and later in her letter to her brother, Frederick Lawrence. In these episodes Helen espouses an unorthodox variation on Methodist universalism which holds that all souls are eventually saved either through repentance in this life or cleansing in the next. Helen's lack of orthodoxy is, in itself, an indication of her Dissenting background. She shows little deference to the opinions of her husband or her aunt and, in chapter 3, she tells her neighbors that the counsel of Mr. Millward, the vicar, would have no effect upon her. In her insistence upon developing her own ideas rather than passively accepting instruction from others, she is demonstrating Methodist intent to engage personally with Scripture and find truth for herself. Helen's independence of thought and confidence in her conclusions may have been admirable qualities among her dissenting co-religionists but her outspokenness clearly shocks not only Huntingdon but also her neighbors in Lindenhope. As a young woman, before she marries Huntingdon, she is even able to shock Aunt Maxwell with her idiosyncratic beliefs and self-serving logic. Helen clearly does not share with either her husband's set or her neighbors at Lindenhope conventions regarding when and on what terms a woman might speak. Nor does she share Mrs. Markham's automatic deference to religious authority in the person of the vicar.

We can recognize, therefore, four general religious orientations in *Wildfell Hall*. The first is a conventional Anglicism characteristic of Lindenhope; the second is Calvinism as it is expressed in Grassdale; the third is Methodism probably deriving from Helen's childhood home in Staningley; and finally Helen has developed an unorthodox universalism herself, perhaps partly in response to her life experiences. As all the

characters in this novel, Anglicans, Calvinists, Methodists and Universalists speak English as a native language, we could imagine them as forming part of a single speech community.

Hudson (1981) deals with a problem similar to the analysis of speech communities in Wildfell Hall. She seeks to identify features of distinctive speech in the writings of the Lollard community. She begins from accounts written by critics of the movement between 1384 and 1525, many of which, she notes, mention that the Lollards used a distinctive language. She limits her study to whether there was a certain vocabulary specific to the Lollard sect. she ignores other differences in orthography, phonology, morphology, and stylistic practices because she believes that there is insufficient material available for study. Her first examples are such practices as using the terms ‘true preacher’ or ‘false preacher’ to distinguish between Lollard preachers and others. This extends to ‘true men’ or ‘true Christian men’ and also ‘known men’ to designate followers of the Lollard sect. This type of example, she writes raises two questions.

“First, have we anything more here than the usual sectarian tendency to use words of approbation for themselves and for the views they approve, whilst using terms of reproach for their opponents and views of which they themselves were critical? . . . is this language in any way denotive, or was it intended only as emotive, at most as discriminatory shorthand? Secondly is the vocabulary limited to sect naming?” Hudson (1981, pp. 17-18)

Among the difficulties that Hudson encountered was the frequency of anonymous texts that cannot be definitely identified as Lollard. She did encounter some terms, for

example, *alzif*, a variant of ‘even if’ or ‘although’ that always occur in Lollard texts but none of these terms are completely absent from non-Lollard manuscripts. She finally concludes that no words used by the Lollards can be claimed as exclusively theirs and that vocabulary cannot, by itself, prove conclusively that a text is of Lollard origin.

On the other hand, she argues that contemporary critics claimed that the language of the Lollards was distinct rather than unintelligible. As Lollards wished to convert others to their beliefs they could not, in fact, use a completely private language. Hudson argues that the difference in Lollard language, sensed by both contemporary critics and modern scholars, derived from the different connotations they gave to words rather than to the use of different words. She claims that their words are often loaded with special meaning. In some cases, i.e. the use of ‘poor men’ or ‘poor priest’ to refer to Christians, commonly used terms are given particular meanings. She finds a definition in one sermon “*I calle alle Po newe sectis be Pei neuere so olde in tyme, Pat ben brouzt into Pe chirche and not expresli founded of Crist*” (Hudson, 1981, p. 21), but notes that ‘new sects’ is a phrase used often in other Lollard works with the same meaning understood but never explained. She adds,

Such word and phrases are used as a form of shorthand: they carry with them implications that the speaker is expected to deduce without the waste of words of explication, and they carry with them strong emotional loading. At times the shorthand could also usefully conceal. As well as the opaque trewe men, the introductory words many men think/say/feel or it seems to many men regularly introduce an expression of Lollard belief. Hudson (1981, p. 21)

Finally, Hudson observes that, as among the first commentators to discuss theological issues in English rather than Latin, the Lollards were sometimes forced to invent or adapt

words to express concepts not hitherto dealt with in English. Other writers may have then borrowed some terms from the Lollards.

Hudson's preliminary analysis of Lollard texts suggests that a speech community's private language need not be characterized by unique vocabulary. The words that are used may, however, be loaded with special meanings or special emotional content. Hudson argues that the uncertainty over the origin of some texts may lead researchers to assign specific semantic contents to lexical items because they believe the texts to be Lollard or to classify the texts as Lollard because they interpret the words to have certain connotations. She identifies the reactions of the contemporary critics of the Lollards as one method of clarifying distinctions. Researchers can be alerted by "the comments of their opponents on Wyclif terminology, or by the failure of an expurgator to appreciate the force of an expression" (1981, p. 25).

Hudson's discussion of Lollard language provides tools for looking at the ideological communities of Wildfell Hall. We will look at three stages of Helen's life: first her conversations with her Aunt Maxwell in the early part of her diary (chapters 16-22); then, her conversation with Huntingdon in Chapter 23; and finally, her conversations with Mrs. Markham and others in chapters 1 and 9.

Helen in the opening chapters of her diary, much like Gilbert in the opening paragraphs of the novel, is immature and headstrong. In fact, in her impatience with being buried in the country after a glimpse of city life she seems to lament the same limitations that Gilbert complained of when he felt that he had been forced to submit to a county life of farming. In her conversations with her aunt, and in her actions in company,

she combines ignorance, indiscretion, and overconfidence with an exalted view of her own judgment. Aunt Maxwell, like Mrs. Markham, assumes an authoritarian role. She is stricter but that is probably because Helen is female rather than from any cultural variation. But by Chapter 20, after Huntingdon has asked to marry Helen, the religious orientations of both Helen and her aunt begin to become apparent. Huntingdon misunderstands Aunt Maxwell's objections as related to his finances and then offends Helen by speaking lightly of moral goodness. When Aunt Maxwell counsels Helen both she and Helen prove dexterous at developing their arguments through Biblical passages. Helen demonstrates that she has read the Bible closely, though some of her ideas shock her aunt. Thormahlen (1999, p. 76) notes that Helen is clearly aware of the unorthodoxy of her beliefs.

Gerin (1976/1959, p. 186) argues that in their discussion "worldly wisdom and religious convention are routed by the logic and common sense of the heroine," and calls Aunt Maxwell 'bigoted' (1976/1959, p. 246). But it is, in fact, Aunt Maxwell who has all the logic and common sense on her side. Gerin assumes that Helen's uncle is the more sympathetic figure because his religion is more lax. It is, however, Aunt Maxwell who shows awareness of the circumstances that Helen may have to face. She is also clearly more aware of the dangers to a woman from contact with such a person as Huntingdon. Aunt Maxwell is alert to dangers, her warnings prove prescient, and the course of the book serves to validate her arguments. Her warning is an early statement of the theme of the book and in that sense she is at least temporarily a spokesman for the author. Aunt Maxwell also serves as another speaker in the Methodist idiom; the difference between

her reactions and those of her husband may also introduce a voice parallel to Helen's. Helen at the early stage of her quarrel with her aunt is surprisingly adept at quoting scripture but not skilled at applying it. Her arguments seem motivated more by lack of experience, stubbornness and adolescent hormones. She has already seen enough of Huntingdon to know that her aunt's criticism is accurate, as she frequently acknowledges in the diary, even before the wedding. In her final attempt to dissuade Helen, Aunt Maxwell turns to Scripture, clearly states that the opportunity for Salvation is equally open to all men and condemns Huntingdon for not hearing. It is at this moment that Helen responds with a universalist hope that "He that, 'is able to subdue all things to Himself will have all men to be saved'". Helen insists that she has found "nearly thirty" Biblical passages that support her view. This conversation tells us several things about Helen and Aunt Maxwell. First, we know that neither of them believes in the Calvinist theory of the Elect. Helen argues for an extreme and not widely accepted form of universal salvation. Aunt Maxwell argues the generally accepted view that the opportunity for salvation is available to all men. Also, we observe that both of them turn naturally to the Bible when the conversation becomes serious to make their points and they are able to cite Scriptural authority for their arguments. This indicates that their lives probably have a strongly devout orientation and that they are accustomed to studying the Bible as a guide to their actions. Although a strong religious orientation, close study of the Bible and independent interpretation may be characteristic of individuals of any faith, they are popularly associated more with Dissenting groups than with members of the

Established Church. This gives us reason to believe that Helen and Aunt Maxwell could easily be Methodists or members of some Dissenting group.

Helen's Methodism may have placed her among the more evangelical sects that would have been suspected of enthusiasm. From the beginning of their relationship Helen is more devout than Huntingdon. They first attend church together in Chapter 20 while Huntingdon is waiting to learn whether Helen's uncle and aunt will permit him to marry her. Huntingdon angers Helen by behaving much like Gilbert did in the silent church scene in Chapter 1. He spends his time glancing around, looks down at his prayer book only when he senses he is being watched, and eventually he sets to drawing a caricature of the minister in his Bible. Chapter 23 begins Helen's married life describing a quarrel with Huntingdon as they returned from church. Huntingdon accuses her of being "so absorbed in your devotions that you had not even a glance to spare for me" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 166). He argues that she is too religious because she seems to care more for God than she does for him. She responds that of course she does and insists that he should also love God more than he does her. "At this he only laughed and kissed my hand calling me a sweet enthusiast" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 167). This interchange marks a stage in the growing incompatibility of Helen and Arthur but it also helps us to classify the religious beliefs of each. Jay (1979, p. 185) suggests that Helen's beliefs are manifested in the fact that they are walking home at her suggestion rather than using a carriage. She argues that Helen preferred not to travel in carriage to avoid "Sabbath-breaking" and that Huntingdon's introduction of the theme of excessive saintliness may have been provoked by her rigorous observance of the Sabbath. Helen chose to interpret

Huntingdon's comments as an opening for instruction and she proceeded to explain his religious duties to him. If Huntingdon was attempting to instruct Helen on the duties of a wife or if he was only searching for a little reassurance about their relationship, he surely found Helen's response inappropriate. In calling Helen an enthusiast, a term that still retained some of its negative eighteenth century connotation, equating enthusiasm with fanatical emotionalism, Huntingdon is placing her within the radical evangelical community. His action both dismisses her ideas as marginal and tolerates them because he doesn't take her seriously anyway. In terms of defining community, Huntingdon is performing the same service that the critics of the Lollards did for Hudson. He is indicating by his reaction that she appeared fanatical or 'enthusiastic' to those outside her community. After Huntingdon characterizes Helen as an enthusiast, he justifies his own conduct with an observation that allows the reader to form an impression of his religious orientation as well. He asks Helen to feel his skull and, in an implicit reference to theories of phrenology notes that he, "was not made to be a saint" (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 167). Phrenology, suggesting that character is fixed and can be interpreted through analysis of the formation of the skull, implies that our conduct depends not so much upon our own habits and intentions as upon unalterable physical inheritance. This view of character fits well with the Calvinist belief in Predestination, the idea that the elect who will be saved have been chosen since before their birth and that those who are not predestined for salvation can do little to alter their fates through their actions in life. In the discuss that follow Helen and Huntingdon trade scripture as she argues that each needs to devote his talents to God's service according to his own possibilities and he responds that it is wiser

to take the pleasures available today rather than to abstain in hopes of future rewards. Helen's comments shift between the Biblical and the common meanings of "talent" and echo Gilbert's discussion of talents in the opening lines of the book. She stresses the possibility of service for each individual while Huntingdon focuses upon accepting the circumstances we are given. This conversation sets out positions that will be developed further during Huntingdon's illness in the final section of the book.

Helen's discussions of religious duties with Huntingdon, allow him to characterize her ideas as outside commonly accepted attitudes. Huntingdon also assumes a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife, with the Helen obedient to him and accepting his guidance (see also Dredge, 2000, p. 91) whereas Helen views their relationship as equal but expects Huntingdon to learn from her and accept her guidance. Their discussions also show that the two have differing views of what their duties are and to whom they are due hidden beneath common vocabulary. That this private language grows out of shared vocabulary means that the separate speech communities are not only difficult for us to detect but probably only partially conscious, if at all, for Helen and Huntingdon as well. Both Helen and Huntingdon are likely to feel that the other is willful and unreasoning, assuming that their disagreements derive from character flaws rather than variation in their values and their understanding of the concepts they are discussing. Thormahlen observes that Helen's attention is consistently fixed on Salvation, first for herself and later for her son, while Huntingdon won't bother with repentance while he is healthy and then he rejects it as too easy when his health is broken. His view of Salvation is harsher than Helen's. The conflict between Helen and Huntingdon later becomes acute

in their differing concerns in the education of young Arthur. Their concepts of appropriate education are so contrasting that each seeks to remove Arthur from the influence of the other. Previously, in her conversation with Gilbert and Mrs. Markham in chapter 3, Helen has also demonstrated that her ideas of education differ greatly from those expected in the community of Lindenhope. Perhaps the intensity of the arguments over education in both sections confirm Saville-Troike's observation that 'the ways knowledge and skills (including language) are transmitted from one generation to the next' are among the cultural elements with the most direct impact on 'communicative forms and processes'. Thormahlen (1999) argues that 'the occasional awkwardness in their dealings with their fellow men and women' of several Bronte heroines is related to 'the sheer intensity of their efforts to comply with what they know to be right' (1999, p. 80). This intensity is another indication of the enthusiasm that Huntingdon noted in Helen.

If Helen's conversation with Aunt Maxwell demonstrates her strong religious orientation and Huntingdon's evaluation of Helen's words emphasizes her alienation from the ideological community centered on Grassdale, her distance from Lindenhope society is underlined by a pair of observations already discussed. Returning from her first visit with Helen, Mrs. Markham notes that "she said little to any purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 20). Later, stepping outside during the party at the Markhams in Chapter 9, Helen asks, "Is it that they think it a *duty* to be continually talking . . . and so never pause to think, but fill up with aimless trifles and vain repetitions, when subjects of real interest fail to present themselves? - or do they

really take a pleasure in such discourse?” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 74) These two remarks indicate a cultural gulf in the ‘the values and attitudes held about language’. Mrs. Markham believes that serious talk concerns practical household matters and frank disclosure of one’s situation and intentions. Helen assumes that serious talk leads to moral development, clarifying theological and philosophical positions, defining correct behavior, and learning how to apply these insights to one’s life. Helen and Mrs. Markham may very well each suspect the other of insincere or frivolous speech because they remain unaware of the differences in their expectations for conversation. Each woman feels that the other’s conversation is trivial. When Mrs. Markham uses the term ‘purpose’ to describe communication she is loading the term with specific values that would be very different from Helen’s use of the term. The ‘aimless trifles’ that Helen criticizes compose the substance of the ‘purpose’ that Mrs. Markham desires. The Lollard use of ‘true men, and ‘false men’ seems very close to Mrs. Markham’s use of ‘purpose’ and Helen’s use of ‘trifles’ in describing the interactions they participate in.

Helen’s diary might be taken as a final example of the Methodism implicit in Helen’s attitudes and in the reaction to her attitudes by other characters. Diaries and journals were key instrument for self-improvement among the Methodists. Talley (2001) (see also Kemp, 2001 & Henck, 2005) discusses how Bronte uses the conventions of Methodist life histories in the construction of Helen’s diary. Methodist life histories were often published as teaching texts, using one person’s experiences to teach others. In *Wildfell Hall*, Helen uses her diary, not only to help her learn from her experiences but also to transform Gilbert (Colon, 2000; Kemp, 2001, Talley, 2001). Bronte’s models for

the diary, as well as many of the ideas that Helen expresses in conversation with others, come from the Methodist Magazine (Talley, 2001; Kemp, 2001, Henck 2005). The Methodist magazines are not mentioned in the narrative but they provide models for Helen's writing. They also suggest a possible reason for variation between the communities that Helen moves through. If periodicals are a factor in the development of the imagined community, then that community can be fragmented by division among readers. We observed both Gilbert and Huntingdon reading periodicals. If the periodicals they read were of similar tendencies, devoted to similar types of information, they may have contributed to forming an imagined community in which both Gilbert and Huntingdon were members. But if one group of people within the region limited their reading to very different material, their ideas and expectations might be correspondingly different. The Methodist magazine becomes a common source of information for the members of the Methodist community, setting their expectations and modeling their behaviors and goals. If Aunt Maxwell's household were readers of the Methodist magazines and not of the agricultural journals and daily papers read by their neighbors, they might develop quite different expectations and attitudes toward language, ethics, and education. If this is the case, the discussion between Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Markham about education, for example, might be a confrontation of two different ideological communities, not conservative vs. liberal or traditional vs. radical but Anglican or secular vs. Methodist. The virtue of introducing Methodism as a contextual factor in the speech events of the story is that it eliminates a degree of random variation. Helen has developed in a slightly different cultural context and this has made it difficult for her to understand

and adequately adapt to the norms of the communities in which she finds herself. Without the Methodist element, the eccentricity of Helen's conduct at some points might seem arbitrary. Observers, as Gumperz noted, might interpret cultural differences as character flaws. But Helen and Mrs. Markham may struggle to communicate because they do not share the same controlling reading matter. The readers of the Methodist magazine may form an imagined community. Because it is narrower than the imagined communities that Anderson postulates as the basis of nationhood and because it is based upon ideological differences, we call it an ideological community. But all imagined communities are to a large degree ideological. Returning to the cultural aspects advanced by Saville-Troike as bearing directly 'on communicative forms and processes' cited at the beginning of this section, we can see that speech communities, too, are ideological. Allegiance to a specific imaginary community determines to some extent our understanding of the common language. Bronte may not have used the terms 'speech community' or 'ideology' but she quite clearly intuited their effects upon communication within specific speech events. For the juxtaposition of two contradictory descriptions of useful speech to occur in *Wildfell Hall* it was necessary that Mrs. Markham and Helen be unaware of the differences in their communicative expectations and that Bronte at the same time should recognize both the differences in their use of words and the underlying ideological divergences that these differences marked.

The Interpretive Community

We have seen how discrepancies between the ways different groups use language can lead to miscommunication. One way to analyze communication problems in speech events is to identify divergences in attitudes and values concerning language between two participants in an interaction. If these participants, speaking the same language, differ so greatly in their presuppositions and expectations that they consistently misinterpret each other, they may be members of two overlapping speech communities. Within a context where two people seem to speak the same language but do not use that language in the same ways with the same presuppositions the divergence in speech communities may derive partly from the existence of distinct imagined communities. Imagined communities, linking individuals who may not have any contact or even know of each other's existence but yet share the same books, periodicals and cultural artifacts, may impinge upon face-to-face interactions, making communication either easier or more difficult. Ideology may play a significant role in complicating communication between individuals. Another way of looking at impediments to successful interaction across the boundaries of speech communities, however, might be to focus upon the ways that individuals interpret performance.

When Helen interacts with others in Grassdale or Lindenhope she is often handicapped by her failure to correctly interpret the words that she is hearing and a consequent inability to respond appropriately. She also lacks awareness of how others interpret her communication behaviors. Goffman (1967, p. 13) observes that "if a person is to employ his repertoire of face saving practices, obviously he must first become aware of the interpretations that others may have placed upon his acts and the interpretations

that he ought perhaps to place upon theirs. In other words he must exercise perceptiveness". Gumperz (1982) has demonstrated that in cross-cultural speech events, miscommunication often results from erroneous interpretation of a variety of cues and signs although both participants may be fairly fluent speakers of English. To the degree that understanding depends upon successfully interpreting these clues, all speech communities can be characterized as interpretive communities. Although Helen may use the same words as her neighbors in Lindenhope or at Grassdale, her divergent socio-cultural background leads her to interpret the speech events as well as isolated components of speech acts (gestures, facial expressions, tones and inflections) differently than they do. She and her interlocutors misinterpret each other.

Misinterpretation may be possible because they use the same language and because they understand so well that they do not suspect that the opinions they form of each other depend on minor misinterpretations of signals. Even within a speech community there may be different degrees of competence in interpretation. Hymes (1981), building on distinctions first made by Labov, argues that individuals within a speech community may be able to interpret and report, interpret but not report, report but not interpret or neither report nor interpret behaviors. He adds the dimension of repeating behaviors because some speech acts can be interpreted and reported by an individual who may not be able or permitted to perform them.

Each of these dimensions—the INTERPRETABLE, the REPORTABLE, the REPEATABLE—can be regarded as an aspect of the abilities of competent members of a culture or community. Each can also be regarded as an aspect of the circumstances facing the investigator of a culture or community. In either respect, the dimensions would entail

the general questions: what behavior is interpretable (cultural?) in this community? for this person? what behavior is reportable in this community? by this person? what behavior is voluntarily doable in this community? by this person? As an aspect of abilities, the questions would lead to a description of the distribution of kinds of competence typical of the community or culture, including the distribution of capacity for performance. (Hymes, 1981, p. 82)

Failures in these dimensions become apparent often in *Wildfell Hall*. We have seen that Gilbert could report his interactions with his mother and siblings in Chapter 1 but that he was not able to adequately interpret them. Similarly, Helen was often able to report but not interpret Huntingdon's conduct, for example, during the early chapters of her diary and when she went to meet him in the garden in Chapter 33. Her surprise later in the first section, when she hears of the gossip about her, shows that she was also unable to interpret behaviors among her neighbors in Lindenhope. Her comment about Jane Wilson in Chapter 9, however, shows that she was able to report on the behavior, and as Hymes predicted might happen, she asks for an interpretation. It is more difficult to distinguish cases of interpretable but unreportable behavior. In Chapter 9, Eliza was unable to report details that she was clearly able to interpret because she was precluded by what Saville-Troike (2003, p. 22) calls 'the competence of incompetence'. Hymes would say that "it is not culturally appropriate or permissible for [her] to report it". If we take Eliza as a performer of gossip, her unsuccessful struggle to compete with Jane and Gilbert in Chapter 9 shows that her competence or her circumstances did not permit her to perform gossip conflicting with theirs.

If we cannot communicate unless we can interpret the signals of those with whom we are communicating, then a group which shares a system of signals will be an

interpretive community. Handler and Segal (1990, p. 8) argue that all communities are partially interpretable by others because otherwise there could be no transfer between communities. They do not seem to recognize the reality of bounded communities and argue instead that “People can communicate across cultures because any culture can be transformed—conceptually and communicatively—into any other”. Yet small concrete communities are clearly more likely to share contexts, values and attitudes about language. Hymes’ concept of the interpretive community centers on an audience listening to stories. Storytellers vary their performances according to the audience. Members of the community may share many expectations and may be familiar with the story or with the conventions of the genre. Inferences do not need to be made explicit. Telling the same story to a different audience, children or individuals from outside the community, the storyteller might fill in more details or pause to explain certain details.

Fish (1980) discusses the concept of interpretive community in relation to the reading of texts. He argues that readers within a specific community develop specific criteria and particular ways of reading a text. Because they read the text looking for answers to certain questions, those answers are what they find in the text. Fish observes that readers from a different interpretive community may find completely different elements in the text and for that reason he claims that the text does not exist apart from the reader, who creates textual meanings through his interpretive practice. Fish’s formulation of the interpretive community complicates the influence of printed matter upon the development of Anderson’s imagined community. For a sense of community to develop it may be necessary not only that the members have access to and read some of

the same books and periodicals but also that they interpret them in the same ways. Hymes and Fish discuss the concept of interpretive community in terms of the audience for a written or oral text. But all speech communities are by nature also interpretive communities because the community provides the norms and networks of conceptual categories that determine the way messages are received. It determines not only our speaking but our hearing.

what was real and normative occurred within the interpretive communities and what was normative for members of one community would be seen as strange (if it could be seen at all) by members of another. In other words, there is no way of reading that is correct or natural, only “ways of reading” that are extensions of community perspectives. (Fish, 1980, pp. 15-16)

Fish’s discussion of the interpretive community can be seen as parallel to the functioning of the speech community. Helen in the novel is unable to adapt to the speech community and suffers from interpretations of her speech and conduct that are seriously different from her intentions. We can see how things that she says and does, from the topics she chooses to discuss or not discuss to the movements of her eyes as she listens, are forced into the interpretive framework of the community, creating a new text distinct from the one that she believes she is transmitting. At the same time, she often fails equally to correctly interpret the intentions of those with whom she interacts.

Intercultural Competence

From Hymes’ concept of communicative competence, others have derived the more recent concept of intercultural competence. When we speak of intercultural

communication we tend to focus upon interactions between people who are native speakers of different languages. But it may be possible for speakers of a common language to find themselves in situations where cultural divergence leads to misunderstanding. As we have seen, although all the characters in *Wildfell Hall* speak English, Bronte explores interactions among representatives of different speech communities. Helen moves through communities differing enough from hers to create misunderstandings. Her difficulties can be clarified through Hymes' model of the speech community and communicative competence, with speakers separated by cultural assumptions rather than linguistic diversity. Helen sometimes fails to perceive conventions that govern other participants and sometimes refuses to submit to those conventions. She compounds her problems through several ineffective interaction strategies, judging others by standards derived from her home community, closing off communication when she encounters unexpected responses, preferring solitude to social interaction and communicating through writing rather than face-to-face encounters. These strategies limit Helen's integration because she remains unaware of her neighbor's conventions, inadvertently provoking hostility through unconventional conduct, and because she uses her own conventions as standards for judging others. Her avoidance of encounters also limits her opportunity to improve interaction skills. Helen's experiences can help readers gain awareness of how differing expectations and lack of empathy can cause misunderstandings and exacerbate cultural differences. L2 readers may recognize parallels between Helen's experience and their own, leading to greater awareness of issues involved in intercultural competence.

One significant clue to the focus of the novel is offered by the author in the title, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The word ‘tenant’ implies the presence of an outsider, temporarily occupying property that belongs to another. It reinforces the outsider aspect of Helen’s position in the community and thus maneuvers our attention toward the problem of integration into a community. *Wildfell Hall* illustrates how differing cultural expectations can interfere with communication even among members of very similar communities of speakers of the same language. All the characters of *Wildfell Hall* are English country gentry or farmers, living within short distances of each other. Though they vary somewhat in socioeconomic condition, they can all be considered to some degree privileged. Smith (2003) uses Pike’s concepts of etic and emic to explain cultural misunderstanding among native speakers of the same language. He argues, “unique systems of meaning are found in many areas of behavior besides speech and in many kinds of community other than those defined as groups sharing the same language” (Smith, 2003, pp. 75-76). Smith suggests that the desire of social scientists to discover universals leads them to focus more upon similarities than upon differences between individuals and groups. He divides the emic/etic dichotomy into two contrasts: between what is common to all human experience and what is unique to a particular group interacting in a specific historical moment and between theoretical versus experiential thought. Many aspects of culture at the level of unique experience are tacit, capable of being reflected in behavior but not expressed in language. This contrast is useful in attempting to understand Helen’s struggles in related but not identical speech communities. Often her inadequate competence is apparent only in a barely noticed

gesture or a silence. Though the reader may become aware that different characters use certain words with slightly different meanings, the characters themselves seem not to notice.

Because the novel is written essentially as a series of reports on communication events, the techniques of Hymes' ethnography of communication and Goffman's interaction ritual are especially useful in helping us to see what is happening in the narrative. Through analysis of the communication events, we can see how Helen Graham regularly misinterprets what is said to her and misreads what is happening in interactions. Through analysis of the processes of interaction, we can see how the characters inadvertently challenge each other's face, fail to take the appropriate corrective actions and depart from encounters frustrated and angry. As an outsider, Helen lacks a kind of communicative competence that Crozet, Liddicoat and Bianco (1999) call 'intercultural competence'. They argue:

The difference of being a servant of one's cultural boundaries and to be free from them does not lie in the annihilation of one's own boundaries (e.g. through the adoption of another culture or parroting foreign cultural codes) but in the awareness of what those boundaries are. This is the essence of intercultural competence: the ability to recognize where and when culture is manifest in cross-cultural encounters and the ability to manage an intercultural space where all parties to the encounter are comfortable participants. (1999, p. 13)

Intercultural competence involves awareness of cultural differences and the ability to interact smoothly with others from different cultures. Some of Helen's problems are problems of cultural awareness. Some are problems with her characteristic strategies of interaction. Much of Helen's difficulty at *Wildfell Hall* derives, not from the differences

in beliefs and expectations that separate her from members of the communities she interacts in, but from her inability to perceive that these differences exist. Rather than looking for misunderstandings when people do not fulfill her expectations, she is likely to become judgmental. Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1967) have both spoken of the various non-verbal signs and gestures in interaction that may be culturally determined and not perceived by outsiders as meaningful in the same ways. Gumperz insists that we commonly attribute differences in gesture and tone to character traits rather than cultural conventions. Goffman describes some of the subtle signs that can determine the flow of interaction and which might be obscure to outsiders.

In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages. An understanding will prevail as to when and where it will be permissible to initiate talk, among whom, and by means of what topics of conversation. A set of significant gestures is employed to initiate a spate of communication and as a means for the persons concerned to accredit each other as legitimate participants. (Goffman, 1967, p. 33-34)

Helen is at a disadvantage in Grassdale and also in Lindenhope because she does not always share the systems of practices, conventions and rules that that govern interaction in these communities. When she arrives at Lindenhope, she already knows that her speech practices and interpretations sometimes conflict with the practices of others. She had found it difficult to make the transition from Staningley to Grassdale, where she developed few satisfactory friendships. Nonetheless, she continues to betray marked failures of perception in her attempts to interact in Lindenhope. She seems unfamiliar with the conventions of neighborly discourse. She does not perceive the implications of

gesture and expression, nor does she perceive how her own gestures are interpreted. She is not aware of appropriate responses to others. Because she dismisses small talk she appears secretive. She also appears disrespectful because she does not show proper deference to those who would expect it. She sometimes misinterprets the entire tone of conversations. Friedman and Antal (2005) suggest a view of culture that helps to explain much of the inadequacy of Helen's perceptions. Depicting culture as an iceberg, they argue that misunderstanding occurs not only through the misinterpretation of observed events but also through lack of awareness of 'submerged' assumptions. They predict that conflicts will occur, as they do in Wildfell Hall, "when people interpret and judge what they see 'above the waterline' according to their own norms, values, and assumptions" (Friedman & Antal, 2005, p. 72). The authors suggest that surface similarities mask major differences at deeper levels. It is these surface similarities that mislead Helen and her neighbors into believing that they are acting on the basis of similar assumptions.

Helen's failure, as an outsider in the communities in which she interacts, to notice many aspects of the interactions is apparent throughout the narrative. From the first chapter the neighbors are put off by her failure to return visits and apparent lack of interest in receiving them. She does not perceive the implications of gesture and body language in the people she talks with. In chapter 3, for example, on her first visit to the Markham family, she cuts off and lectures Mrs. Markham, dominates the conversation, and dismisses the opinions of others. But she seems completely oblivious to the significance of the silence of her audience. Just as she fails to interpret the gestures of others, she does not perceive how her own body language is interpreted by others. When

Gilbert and his sister visit her in chapter 5, she sits them in her studio, only half turns toward them as she speak, and continues to dabble sporadically at her painting, yet she seems genuinely surprised when he suggests that they may be intruding on her work. She is not aware of the appropriate responses to the actions or words of others and frequently omits necessary social actions. We can see this, not only in her unfriendly reception of visitors and failure to return calls, but in her failure to attend church on her first Sunday at Wildfell Hall and in her unconventional responses in conversation. Because her concept of useful talk differs from that of her neighbors and she dismisses their small talk as trivial and tiresome, they often see her as secretive and uncommunicative. Because she fails to show proper deference to the opinion makers of the community, she appears to be disrespectful. We see this in her rudeness toward Mrs. Markham in chapter 3 but also in her anticipative dismissal of any counsel that Rev. Millward might offer. Helen seems unaware of the expectations of other participants in the communicative events they jointly construct but they attribute her failure to meet their expectations to motivated conduct. Finally, Helen misinterprets the tone of conversations, sometimes, for example, replying to humor with rigid opinions. Her remonstrance to Huntingdon in chapter 23 that provoked him to label her an 'enthusiast' derived, in part, from her misunderstanding of Huntingdon's tone and mood when he questioned her devotion in church.

Because Helen does not always share the systems of practices, conventions and rules that that govern interaction in the communities she moves through, she had found it difficult to make the transition from Staningley to Grassdale, where she developed few satisfactory friendships. Mrs. Markham's summary of her first visit to Helen in chapter 1

clarifies the situation. Mrs. Markham asserts that “if she had not gained much good, she flattered herself she had imparted some” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 20). She feels that she did not gain much from the visit because Helen did not focus on the topics that were of interest to the neighbors and provided little information about herself. She believes that she helped Helen because she was able to advise her about domestic details that Helen seemed to be ignorant about. Yet Mrs. Markham worries that her advice may “be thrown away” because Helen “betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it”. Helen, in Mrs. Markham’s view, “said little to any purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated”. Helen’s later comment about small talk, as she takes a break from the party in chapter 9, illustrates the differences in expectations. What Helen calls ‘subjects of real interest,’ Mrs. Markham characterizes as ‘little to any purpose’. What Mrs. Markham sees as ‘useful advice,’ Helen considers ‘aimless trifles and vain repetitions’. As the narrative develops we see that Helen focuses on abstract moral and philosophical issues while her neighbors are more concerned with practical details of daily life.

Of the central figures in Wildfell Hall, Huntingdon remains most distant from the reader. The closest we get is to see his actions from Helen’s perspective, edited by Gilbert. In the early chapters of the diary, his villainy is clear to the reader although Helen refuses to see it. As Helen becomes more aware of his unpleasant qualities, the reader may begin to understand some of his reactions. From Helen’s point of view, though not necessarily from his, Huntingdon is unquestionably guilty of chronic bad conduct. As Helen describes the interactions between the two, however, we begin to see

that he may not be motivated by bad intentions. At times he seems as genuinely confused by his wife's words and actions as she is by his. During their first major fight, in Chapter 24, for example, each seems to be upset with the other's conduct and each seeks in part to teach the other a lesson that will improve that conduct. It may not be possible to imagine circumstances in which Huntingdon would have become an admirable man. It is, however, likely that he behaved more badly than he would have on some occasions partly because he and Helen never learned to communicate with each other. Failure to communicate can have serious consequences. Esplugas (1999, p. 103), for example, notes that, in England, "in May 1596, 103 Gypsies were condemned to death for idle wandering and speaking a language that could not be understood." In *Wildfell Hall*, the characters believe that they are speaking the same language and those people who harm others do not believe that they are punishing them for poor communication. The experiences of Helen and Huntingdon in their marriage, however, as well as Helen's experiences in Lindenhope, make clear that there are consequences that derive from not understanding and from not being understood. She worried that her exposure to the life that Huntingdon led was contaminating her as well. But she is not always able to recognize moments when she pushed him toward greater dissipation. In a slightly different analysis of the problems between Helen and Huntingdon, Hyman (2008) identifies Helen with the work-centered ethics of the rising middle class and notes how she pushes Huntingdon to assume identities that would undercut his view of himself as an aristocrat. Thormahlen (1999), too, argues that Helen sees Huntingdon's inability to occupy himself as deficiency. Gordon (1989, p. 178) notes, "An unspoken assumption in

the novel is that Gilbert Markham is a better man than Helen's first husband because, as a farmer, he has work to occupy him." Hyman argues that as earnest, hardworking members of the middle class gained wealth and assumed the trappings of aristocracy during the Victorian age, the obsolete rural aristocracy had only leisure and dissipation to separate themselves from the 'strivers' who were replacing them. She notes that Huntingdon is always careful to limit his conversation to frivolity because a gentleman should not be productive. Helen, of course, frequently observes that trivial conversation tires her. Returning once more to the walk home from church in Chapter 23, we can see how Helen compounds her problems. Huntingdon would have been satisfied with a trivial coquettish response from Helen, even if she had not responded directly to his complaint about her overzealous piety. Instead, she confirmed his opinion of her with her unsmiling insistence on educating him. His consequent laughter merely augmented her frustration and her religious passion. Both Helen and Huntingdon may have concluded the conversation disappointed in their partners, but they may not have realized that they were judging each other's conversation by very different standards. Helen seems to have learned some things from her time in Grassdale and it is unlikely that she would be attracted so easily again to Huntingdon's variety of frivolity. Each time Gilbert's words or gestures seem to resemble those of Huntingdon, as when he stares at her in church or smiles at Wildfell Hall, she immediately closes off communication. But it is clear that she is unable to interpret many signs made by others when she interacts with them.

Wildfell Hall is a record of Helen's attempts to adjust to two new communities; she is successful in neither. In the two periods of her life that we are permitted to see,

one from Gilbert's viewpoint and one from her own, she eventually abandons communities where she has not been able to successfully integrate. After Huntingdon's death she abandons Grassdale a second time to return to her aunt's home. But not all her communication problems can be attributed to failures of perception. Her attempts to interact with others are also complicated by inadequate interaction strategies. We are able to develop a clear sense of Helen's interaction style because we are able to view her from the outside through Gilbert's eyes and then from her own perspective. Her failure to achieve intercultural competence seems to derive from several poorly chosen adaptation strategies. First she consistently closes herself off from what is unfamiliar or unpleasant to her. Second, she frequently chooses solitude over interaction. Third she seldom listens to suggestions or opinions of other people and she assumes that she is correct in all her ideas. Fourth she judges actions and people that differ from what she expects. And finally, whenever possible, she turns from face-to-face interaction to writing.

Helen's customary reaction to unexpected or unpleasant moves in interactions is to end the interchange. She dismisses Gilbert several times early in the novel by simply assuming a cold expression and turning away. Gilbert, in fact, notes, when she does this at the end of their first encounter at Wildfell Hall, that the gesture is especially irritating because it seems so natural. The ease of the expression reinforces the sense that Helen uses it frequently. With Huntingdon, she employs long periods of silence and also locks herself in her room. Early in their marriage, she becomes upset at a story he is telling her about a previous romance. She responds, as is her custom, by ending the conversation.

“Without another word, I left the room, and locked myself up in my own chamber” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 170). Later, when Huntingdon retires, he finds the door locked, knocks and asks, “Won't you let me in, Helen?” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 170). Her answer demonstrates a characteristic mode of responding to unpleasantness: “No; you have displeased me . . . and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning.” With her Wildfell neighbors, too, Helen develops a reputation for avoiding contact. By shutting off communication, Helen may avoid unpleasant or confusing interactions but probably limits her opportunities to gain more insight into the speech conventions and underlying ideologies of the community. Carroli, Hillman and Maurer (1999, p. 157) observe, “Acquiring intercultural competence requires conversationalists to be able to recognize how communication takes place so that they can tacitly negotiate a mutually acceptable mode of communication.” Both the ability to recognize how communication takes place and the ability to negotiate modes of communication are enhanced by observant participation in communication events.

Helen's tendency to close herself off from communication with others is so developed that she places barriers even when she does not intend to. When Gilbert and Rose Markham visit her in chapter 5, she invites them into her studio and clears off a couple of chairs. But her whole attitude as she sits at the easel, halfway turning toward her visitors and making occasional strokes with her brush, seems designed to separate her from them. Gilbert finally tells her to go on with her work or they will “regard ourselves as unwelcome intruders”. But Helen is, in fact, happy to have these visitors and she reacts to Gilbert's words “as if startled into politeness”. This incident leads us to suspect

that much of Helen's distancing of herself in interactions is simply awkwardness in social discourse. This awkwardness sometimes encourages her to pursue occupations that require less social intercourse. Apart from her tendency to cut off communication when she encounters difficulties, Helen frequently seeks out solitude. In Chapter 7, she admits to Gilbert that the loneliness and isolation of Wildfell Hall were among its chief attractions, "I take no pleasure in watching people pass the window; and I like to be quiet" (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 56). Her unfriendliness and apparent unwillingness to receive visitors are among the first perceptions of her formed by the neighbors when she entered the community. Even when she joins the excursion to the sea at the close of Chapter 7, she separates herself from the sight of the rest and sets up an easel to paint. It is noteworthy that Helen, an artist and therefore accustomed to observing visual details closely, is so little able to detect social detail. Helen's awkwardness in conversation and her limited contact with others outside her family in her youth probably make social gatherings uncomfortable for her, but by keeping to herself to the extent that she does she reduces her access to the interactions that might enlarge her communicative competence. Helen needs to learn to understand the communities that she participates in and she can do that best by participating somewhat more than she does. Her solitude is also a handicap because, within the conventions of Lindenhope, she thus draws unfavorable attention to herself. Her failure to return visits to her neighbors is among the earliest elements of her conduct to be dissected by her neighbors. When she makes a visit to the Markhams in chapter 3 they are notably unconvinced by the pretexts she offers for not having visited other families. When Mrs. Markham tries to make her social obligations

easier by inviting her to a party where she can offer apologies personally to the others she declines with almost no concern for politeness: “Thank you, I never go to parties” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 31). In the first chapter, Mrs. Markham had remarked upon her odd behavior when they visited and Rose reported on her scandalous behavior in failing to attend church on her first Sunday in Wildfell and on her failure to return any of the visits so far made to her. For a woman who is trying to avoid notice, her actions seem rather to set her apart as a figure of concern. Crozet, Liddicoat, and Bianco (1999, pp. 4-5) are speaking of the importance of learning second languages when they write, “Without a linguistic experience of difference, a cultural experience of difference cannot reach the same depths. Difference is the central aspect of intercultural communication and such difference must be lived in communication.” Their principle, however, applies equally to Helen, who is learning to adapt to an unfamiliar English-speaking community. Greater interaction linked with careful observation would most likely speed her adaptation to the community.

Helen’s struggle to communicate with people of other cultures is a central problem of Wildfell Hall. There are many themes and issues but this underlying lack leads to or complicates many of the other problems. Carroli, Hillman and Maurer (1999, p. 156) suggest that the qualities of adaptability and flexibility are important elements in becoming competent at intercultural communication.

“Intercultural competence requires one to be flexible and adapt to the interlocutor’s cultural style to work out the most fitting conversational, social and politeness strategies, which are essential for effective communication. Adaptability is an essential human quality which can be encouraged in developing intercultural competence.

Flexibility and adaptability are key inadequacies in Helen's communicative style. She struggles throughout the novel with a tendency toward judgment that reduces her communicative effectiveness. She often fails to understand when her problems with others have cultural roots and when she needs to adapt to their cultural conventions. When Helen leaves Staningley, she is arrogant and seems sure of her power to control the worlds she moves through. Although some of her concepts may be narrow and though her orientation to the world may be different than that of many of her contemporaries, she seems to expect everyone to adapt to her vision of the world. At Grassdale she learns that the precepts she picked up at Staningley are not universal and she begins to understand the warnings that her aunt gave before she married. Because she cannot adapt she is gradually ostracized in the new community that she has joined. Though she suffers greatly at Grassdale, her experience is helpful because she has learned a little about the arrogance of her previous beliefs and understands better the limits of her powers. Nonetheless, in Wildfell Hall her negotiation of communicative events shows little improvement. Her conversation on education with the Markhams in Chapter 3 demonstrates her difficulty in handling small talk and expressing unobjectionable platitudes. Rather she asserts her unorthodox opinions almost dictatorially and calls into question accepted wisdom. From such a start it is only natural that the community would worry about her morality and conventionality. As time passes her position inevitably deteriorates as she fails to resolve doubts about her orthodoxy. The gossip about her is a natural defense of a community threatened by unsavory elements.

In the second section of the novel we see how her time in Grassdale followed a similar pattern of comments and behavior that do not quite fit in becoming compounded and gradually alienating her from the community and from her husband. Despite her intentions she is often seen to be the cold distant member of the pair and Huntingdon justifies his conduct as a response to Helen's coldness. Much of her failure in these situations can be traced to her reluctance or perhaps an inability to understand the perspectives of others. Helen often seems more willing to share her opinions than she is to listen to the opinions of others. We see this in her polemic in the Markham home and in her efforts to teach Huntingdon. The problem is clearly summarized in her reply to Gilbert as she prepares to leave after having stridently dominated the discussion of education. Her response, telling Gilbert that he can have all the words he wants, shows that she has come a long way since Grassdale. She has learned to joke, at least on this one occasion, and she displays a lighter touch than she did in her conflicts with Huntingdon or her arguments with her Aunt Maxwell that began the diary. But she also discloses her unwillingness to listen to the ideas of others. Her lack of listening skills coupled with her tendency to judge others when they do not share her values make it more difficult for her to communicate with members of other communities. To the qualities of flexibility and adaptation, mentioned by Mendenhall (2001) and Matveev and Milter (2004), the two articles add inquisitiveness. This is a third attribute that Helen seems to need as her lack of interest in Gilbert's response demonstrates.

One tool for developing awareness of other cultures is fairly successful in *Wildfell Hall*. Helen's diary opens Gilbert's eyes to the struggles that have led her to Wildfell

Hall and help him to understand her better. Nonetheless, Gilbert seems to learn little about how to interact with Helen. At the end of the book he is as evasive as he had been at the beginning. What little he did learn, however, was sufficient to lead Helen to propose to him. Helen's diary, necessary for a variety of reasons, is especially useful because it allows us a rounded view of the process of adaptation to an alien community. The diary allows us to watch Helen failure to adapt in two different communities but from opposite perspectives, her own and that of Gilbert. Gilbert's increased awareness of Helen's struggles demonstrates a benefit of written documents. They can provide background information that makes interaction smoother. Gilbert's use of written documents to complement interaction is a practical strategy for gaining competence. Helen's use of the diary as a confidant in substitution for face-to-face interaction is probably less effective. The diary seems to be only one example of Helen's preference for the written word. When she is living at Grassdale after her marriage to Huntingdon chooses to spend long hours in her room writing letters to her aunt, despite her refusal to listen to the aunt before her marriage. She also shuts out others by reading books. For her both reading and writing seem to be devices for avoiding the confusion of direct interaction with others.

Helen's education continues throughout the novel. She overcomes arrogance and misplaced confidence in her power to influence others. She recognizes her responsibility for her reckless first marriage. Her responses to Gilbert when he travels to Staningley indicate that she has become somewhat more tolerant. But she seems never to become socialized into appropriate interaction within an unfamiliar community. She repeats the

process of alienation and ostracism twice. When she returns to Grassdale she seems to do so on her own terms, forcing Huntingdon to adapt to her rather than seeking to understand his perspectives. She concludes the book where she began, at Staningley. We can not really know either how successfully Gilbert learned to understand or adapted to Helen's norms since we only have his perspective. Circumstances favor her in the end; she returns to her childhood home, marries, and Gilbert lets us believe that her life has turned out well, though we have very little information about her after her engagement to him.

Discussions of intercultural competence are almost always related to bilingual or multilingual situations. The case of Helen Graham, however, demonstrates that it is possible for people speaking the same language to fail to communicate because they lack cultural competence. Multiculturalism can exist in a monolingual society. The communities through which Helen moves are not so different as to be called multicultural but they are not so homogenous that they must be seen as a unified speech community. Multiculturalism often tends to be seen as attached to two or more languages. One benefit of *Wildfell Hall* is that it demonstrates how multicultural even the most apparently culturally monolithic society might be. Hymes (1981, p. 76) observes, "The nature of things, it would seem, is not monolingual. Not to be or to pretend to be bilingual is to lose out; to presume that others are not is to lose out." In *Wildfell Hall*, Helen loses out much of the time because of her refusal or inability to listen to or to understand the language that others are using. Both at Grassdale and at Lindenhope she uses language

and responds to language in ways that are not quite acceptable to those around her because she is unable to consider as valid perspectives other than her own.

Helen tells her diary that she fears she is becoming contaminated by Grassdale. This fear may explain, in part, her difficult interactions. She might have been more willing to comprehend the perspectives of others if she had not felt that they threatened her own. She may have been more likely to fear contamination by others because she viewed many aspects of life as questions of right and wrong, rather than as manifestations of differing conventions. She seems unable to find an intermediate position because to do so would indicate a softening of moral values. This perspective interferes with intercultural communication.

“intercultural communication is neither a question of maintaining one’s own cultural frame nor of assimilating to one’s interactants’ cultural frame. It is rather a question of finding an intermediary place these two positions—of finding a third place. In doing so the participant in the interaction is an experiencer, not an observer, of difference. The ability to find this third place is at the core of intercultural competence”. Crozet, Liddicoat and Bianco (1999, p. 5)

Another way of visualizing this third place is described by Mendenhall, who compares intercultural competence to viewing the world from two simultaneous perspectives.

Developing global competencies does not involve acquiring knowledge and adding it to one’s existing world view. Expatriate adjustment is not a linear accumulation of knowledge. To adjust to a new culture requires learning and internalizing new world views—new cognitive software systems—that must run simultaneously with one’s own traditional cultural software system. (Mendenhall, 2001, pp. 7-8)

To have interiorized the conventions of Grassdale and Lindenhope to such an extent would have permitted Helen to interact more smoothly with her neighbors but would not have forced her to sacrifice the values on which she based her identity. She and her neighbors were motivated by divergent cultural conventions but awareness of other conventions, even internalization of those conventions, would not have required her to give up her own beliefs. She may never have perceived the cultural implications of her conflicts at Grassdale and Lindenhope. She tended to judge differences in values as character flaws or educational deficiencies. If she had recognized the variations in values, conventions and conceptual categories that contributed to her awkward communicative events, she might have been able to adapt to the expectations of others without risking her confidence in her own identity and values. The report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages (2007, p. 2) states, "Language is a complex multifunctional phenomenon that links an individual to other individuals, to communities, and to national cultures." Helen's experiences in *Wildfell Hall* demonstrate that language, used unskillfully, can also erect barriers and separate individuals from each other. The sum of Helen's communicative failures lead her to gradual alienation from the communities in which she lives and in each case she eventually determines that she needs to leave the community. Her position becomes untenable because of misunderstandings deriving in part from her misperceptions of others, in part from others misperceptions of her and in part from her inadequate communication strategies.

One benefit of *Wildfell Hall* as a classroom text is that it demonstrates how multicultural even the most apparently culturally monolithic society might be. Helen

believes she lives in a monolithic cultural environment but she seems unwilling or unable to adapt her communicative strategies to the norms of the communities she dwells in and she often fails even to perceive that different norms are operating. *Wildfell Hall* is a novel that is especially appropriate for use with proficient L2 learners. It demonstrates how much of intercultural communication takes place tacitly beneath the level of consciousness and how cultural differences that we don't notice can lead to assumptions about character traits. It focuses on questions of cross-cultural interaction that may be familiar to L2 speakers as language learners. It promotes awareness of the complexity of all interaction. It allows them to bring their own experience to the analysis of difficulties in intercultural understanding. It encourages students to become aware of the range of elements involved in successful intercultural communication and to consider the implications of intercultural competence.

Community of Affinity

Colon (2008) offers another interpretation of community in *Wildfell Hall*. She sees the book as a record of Helen's attempts to form a new type of community constructed on Christian principles. Citing the examples of Millicent and Lowborough, she argues that, in contrast to Jane Eyre who concludes her narrative isolated from the effects of community, Helen attempts to help others to break out of isolation and to transform the communities she participates in. However, though it can be argued that Helen intervened constructively in the situations of both Millicent and Lowborough,

Helen's actions do not generally show the power of Christian love to effect transformations so much as the power of the community to enforce conformity. Helen is eventually driven from each of the communities into which she enters because of her inability to recognize and adapt to the norms required. It may be that she can effect marginal changes in the community or, rather, changes in marginal members of the community but she cannot substantially alter communities. She ends the novel in the home she grew up in, having failed to become accepted in two other communities. And Lowborough, like Helen, is able to transform himself only by abandoning the community. The book might therefore be said to reinforce the power of communities to resist intrusion and transformation rather than the power of individuals to transform communities. Helen is not, herself, ideally suited for the task Colon attributes to her. Her tendency, when confronted with disagreement or any gesture that displeases her is to close off communication. Rather than transforming community, she typically seeks to avoid it.

Colon's perception that Helen eventually surrounds herself at Staningley with a 'community of affinity', a group of like-minded individuals who share her desire to help others, may be possibly suggested by Gilbert's summing up at the end of the novel. Young Arthur has married Helen Hattersley, thereby showing that Helen has maintained contact with Millicent. On the other hand, the relationship with Millicent was by this time a family relationship, as Lawrence had married Millicent's younger sister. Although a family may function as a kind of community, it is based upon kinship ties rather than affinity. In most contexts, community probably suggests interacting among a group that is

broader than simply the people you choose to interact with. Almost every type of community includes people for whom you feel no affinity but with whom you must at times interact.

What Colon does clearly demonstrate, however, is that there is ultimately no escape from community. When Helen attempts to isolate herself in Wildfell Hall, she becomes a focus of attention and concern for her neighbors. Her attempts to avoid attention only intensify community interest. As Colon concludes, “Anne reveals that disappearing from the outside world is much more difficult than one might expect, for in the universe that Anne creates, we are all integrally connected in community even if we long to escape it” (2008, p. 24). In *Wildfell Hall*, Bronte is clearly concerned with the relation of the individual to the community, especially as she moves through and seeks to adapt to communities based on different values and conventions. The variation in community is one of the sources of complexity in the novel and contributes to the multiplicity of voices, helping to create a world complex enough to represent the real world. People in the three environments in Wildfell use the same words and pronounce them in the same way but they do not load them with the same meanings. Bronte foregrounds the divergence in values and delineates the distinct communities by showing people engaged in speech events. The norms and assumptions of each community are demanding but difficult to recognize for someone like Helen who uses the same language and doesn't immediately perceive that she is participating in communities with conflicting standards. Bronte uses the confusions that arise out of the interactions in the narrative to mark the breaks in cultural continuity.

CHAPTER 15. "I WISHED TO TELL THE TRUTH."

My object in writing the following pages was not simply to amuse the Reader; neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it. But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of a well, it needs some courage to dive for it, especially as he that does so will be likely to incur more scorn and obloquy for the mud and water into which he has ventured to plunge, than thanks for the jewel he procures; (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 13)

I'll make my report as if I told a story, for truth I was taught as a child on my homeworld that truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling. Le Guin, 1969, p. 1)

In her preface to the second edition of *Wildfell Hall*, after dismissing several possible motivations for writing the book, Bronte asserts, "I wished to tell the truth". Bronte's assertion has complicated analysis of the book during much of the 160 years that followed the publication of the second edition. Charlotte Bronte deflected criticism of *Wildfell Hall* by stressing the sense of duty that forced Anne, despite her repulsion, to record all the degrading details of her brother's alcoholism. Later critics, taking their cue from Charlotte and citing the preface, sometimes dismissed Anne's work as simple reporting rather than imaginative creation. But Bronte's preface in its insistence upon her concern with the truth does not differ so much from the standard claims that Victorian writers made for their fiction. Franklin (1999, p. 25) notes, "The paramount concern among Victorian writers was not with mirroring nature . . . or even with the real per se; rather these writers were concerned with the true". In any case, it seems necessary to explore what Bronte may have meant when she spoke of telling the truth, and to identify the kinds of truth that she was concerned with.

Gerin (1959/1976, p. 232), writing of Bronte's two novels argues:

an uncompromising honesty invests both tales. This quality it is which gives *Agnes Grey* its distinctive value. It is the honesty of the author which insists upon that self-analysis of the heroine's feelings and motives which constitutes not only the book's originality but its truth. Character described from without is one thing—and Anne was to show herself a mistress of tersely satirical portraiture—but that which is revealed to us, by growing degrees, from within, is far more rare and nearer the movement of life.

Gerin seems to identify truth with accurate imagination and depiction of the character's feelings. But she assumes that Bronte's novels are strictly autobiographical and she may simply mean that Bronte is honest in reporting her own feelings. Ratchford (1960, p. 366), in contrast, warns against reading too much biographical interpretation into *Wildfell Hall* and criticizes Gerin, as well as Harrison and Stanford (1959) and Moore (1924) for this error. "Drawing upon her novels as strictly autobiographical," she argues, "denies her the degree of imagination and inventiveness to which she is justly entitled." Bronte's own comments consistently indicate that she valued fiction as a vehicle for telling the truth rather than as a source of entertainment. She begins *Agnes Grey* (2005/1847, p. 3), noting "All true histories contain instruction;" and she tells us in the Preface to the second edition of *Wildfell Hall* that, "if I can claim the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense" (1966/1848, p. 13). Some critics (Chitham, 1991 & Liddell, 1990) have linked this comment to Bronte's disapproval of the novels of her sisters, Emily and Charlotte; but, even if this preference includes an implied criticism of their works, the statement discloses something of Bronte's aims. In a January 28, 1848 letter to Charlotte's friend Ellen Nussey, Bronte reiterated the seriousness of her fiction.

“You must know that there is a lamentable deficiency in my organ of language, which makes me almost as bad a hand at writing as talking unless I have something particular to say.”

Bronte’s insistence on truth as her motive would seem to call into question her decision to use fiction as her primary literary form. The third definition of “fiction” in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1973, p.488) is, “A lie.” All the AHD definitions of fiction fictitious or fictive, in fact, relate to something feigned, invented, imaginary, unreal or not based on fact. Yet to make clear to us some truth about the world or ourselves is often recognized as one of the goals of what we call serious fiction. John Fowles (1998, p. 374) expressed this contradiction in a 1995 interview. “Every writer knows this dilemma—that for a novelist, his or her trademark demands the ability to lie, and yet something in him or her is yearning to express the whole truth about the human condition.” Speaking of Conan Doyle, Fowles (1998, p. 127) characterizes novelists as practitioners of duplicity. “Like all novelists he was a dealer in plausible hypotheses, a confidence trickster—though out for your belief and attention rather than your money.” John Gardner (1994, p. 221) makes a similar connection between lying and story telling. “What oral storytellers tell and retell we call legends, a tricky word that, if we derive it from Latin, means, “that which is read, “and that if we take it (by false etymology, a once common one) from Anglo-Saxon means—as a result of the softening of g to y—lying.” Zora Neale Hurston (1969, p. 71) refers to story telling, her introduction to fiction, as “lying contests.” Gardner, Fowles and Hurston seem to agree, then, in suggesting at least a parallel between novel writing and telling lies. Riffaterre (1990, p. 1) counters,

however, that the phrase ‘fictional truth’ is possible only because fiction is a genre that conventionally “excludes the intention to deceive”. “A novel,” he argues, “always contains signs whose function is to remind readers that the tale they are being told is imaginary”

Bronte, too, claims that her purpose is to tell the truth but she has chosen a medium more closely identified with falsehood. Her choice leads us to question what Bronte meant by truth, whether truth can grow out of fiction, and, if so, what kind of truth she was seeking. Some readers have assumed that Bronte’s novels are faithful recounting of her own experience. The heroine of her first novel, like Bronte herself, is a governess successively in two different families. Gerin (1976, 1959, p. 230) argues that the book simply relates Anne’s experiences as a governess. Although the narrative of *Wildfell Hall*, on the surface, is clearly distinct from Bronte’s life, Gerin (1976, 1959, p. 236) views it as the most closely tied of all the Bronte novels to the circumstances of their lives. This view of truth associates it with faithful adherence to the facts of life. Another way of looking at truth might be verisimilitude. Early reviewers generally credited the book with realistic characters and events and close observation of daily life. A third perspective, also discussed by early reviewers, would equate Bronte’s claim that she was telling the truth with the moral truths she was illustrating. Finally, Bronte’s truth claim might have rested on her close observation and reporting of interaction within her society.

Reactions by reviewers and critics

In his introduction to *Wildfell Hall* (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 7), Trevalyan writes of the novel that, “her narrative skill, her minute, unflinching observation, gave it a

permanent place in the Bronte canon". However, although it is true that early reviewers and critics often acknowledged the truthfulness of *Wildfell Hall*, there was disagreement over the degree to which such truthfulness was a desirable element in fiction. Even before Bronte published the Preface to the second edition, several reviewers had identified the truthfulness of the narrative as a salient feature. The August 1848 issue of the *Literary World*, after questioning the realism of some of the characters, defended this quality.

Prims and Prudes may decry passages exhibiting the heart as it is, but as honest Jack Falstaff says, 'Is not the truth the truth?' what more can we say? However objectionable these works may be to crude minds which cannot winnow the chaff of vulgarity from the rich grain of genius which burdens them, very many, while enjoying their freshness and vigor, will gladly hail their appearance, as boldly and eloquently developing blind spaces of wayward passion in the human heart, which it is far more interesting to trace than all the bustling lanes and murky alleys through which the will-o'-wisp genius of Dickens has so long led the public mind. (Allott, 1974, p. 261)

The *Literary World* review of *Wildfell Hall* otherwise worries that the realism of the natural descriptions will obscure the lack of taste and the falsity of the descriptions of society. The reviewer traces the genius of *Wildfell Hall* to "vigor of thought, freshness and naturalness of expression, and remarkable reality of description" (Allott, 1974, pp. 257-259). But, he argues, because the writer is a genius, she can portray scenes from her imagination so vividly that we cannot distinguish them from reality. Despite the apparent realism of the novel, he objects that *Huntingdon* is not a believable example of modern life and that Helen could not possibly have been attracted to Gilbert. Altogether, his principal objection seems to be to the complexity of the characters who thereby fail to conform to the social stereotypes that he feels need to be maintained. Chitham (1983, p. 103) distinguishes Anne Bronte's characters from those of Emily on the basis of their

complexity, “All of them are flawed, and in many ways, although none are villains.” He attributes the distinction to Anne’s interest “in character and emotional conflict in the live world” (Chitham, 1983, p. 104). Charles Kingsley, discussing *Wildfell Hall* in Fraser’s Magazine, responds to precisely this truthfulness that offended the Literary World, attributing the depiction of ugly undercurrents of society to observation rather than imagination. “It is,” he writes, “taken altogether, a powerful and interesting book. Not that it is a pleasant book to read, nor, as we fancy, has it been a pleasant book to write; still less has it been a pleasant training which could teach an author such awful facts, or give courage to write them” (Kingsley, 1849, pp. 423-424).

Among Bronte books, *Agnes Grey* was especially praised for its realism in the early reviews. *Athenaeum* (12/25/1847) notes “much that is the real bond of a governess’s endurance,” while *Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper* (01/15/1848) suggests that author was either a governess himself, or that he “must have bribed some governess very largely, either with love or money, to reveal to him the secrets of her prison-house, or, he must have devoted extraordinary powers of observation and discovery to the elucidation of the subject” (Allott, 1974, p. 227). *Atlas* (01/22/1848) calls it “a tale of every day life, and though not wholly free from exaggeration (there are some detestable young ladies in it), it does not offend by any startling improbabilities” (Allott, 1974, p. 232). The early appreciation of Anne’s realism has continued to be reaffirmed by modern critics. Golden (2003, p. 236) notes that the portrayal of the governess in *Agnes Grey* is more “developed and realistic” than Charlotte’s parallel portrait in *Jane Eyre*. In *Revue des deux mondes* (08/1857) Emile Montegut calls the book, “fundamentally a realistic novel;

none of the sharp angles of reality has been softened, no coarse or wounding detail has been omitted” (Allott, 1974, p. 376). Duthie (1986, p. 110) sees it as “a study, remarkable for its realism and its lucidity, of the inevitable and often dramatic decline of a marriage between incompatibles.”

The first review of *Wildfell Hall* (*Spectator* 07/08/1848) found it to also be less forceful than *Wuthering Heights* (which he supposed to be by the same author). “In escaping from his extreme and violent manner, however,” he writes, “he loses somewhat of his strength and interest. There is nature, undoubtedly, but it is of a common kind. The daily life of a young and self-sufficient gentleman farmer and his family, with the characters and gossip of his neighborhood, are scarcely enough to sustain the reader for a volume.” (Allott, 1974, p. 249). He later observes, however, “There is power, effect, and even nature, though of an extreme kind, in its pages” (Allott, 1974, p. 250). The reviewer of the *Athenaeum* (07/08/1848) objected to the “fond minuteness” (Allott, 1974, p. 251) of the description of *Huntingdon*. The *Examiner* (07/29/1848) focuses on the roughness and hardness of the *Bells*, the vigor and simplicity of their language and the originality of their characters and descriptions of nature, which have been taken from observation of the world rather than borrowed from other writers. But he criticizes the conversation in *Lindenhope* as “commonplace”. On the other hand, he wishes to quote from Helen’s diary “a drunken scene of considerable power” (256), but doesn’t consider it appropriate. E.P. Whipple writing in the *North American Review* (10/1848) adds that “All the characters are drawn with great power and precision of outline, and the scenes are as

vivid as life itself” (Allott, 1974, p. 262). The reviewer of Sharpe’s London Magazine (08/1848) praises the first section of *Wildfell Hall* for its realism.

The character of Gilbert is cleverly drawn, original, yet perfectly true to nature; that of Helen, interesting in the extreme; and the scenes between them, though occasionally too warmly colored, life-like and engrossing, while the description of village society is sufficiently amusing to afford relief to the more serious business of the novel. (Allott, 1974, p.264)

He finds the diary unreadable, however, due to the ‘revolting’ scenes it depicts with ‘disgustingly truthful minuteness’.

Bronte’s extreme realism led in the course of the century that followed to the construction of the bromide that she lacked imagination. This cliché grew in part from the concept that Victorian readers held of the imagination. Like the reviewer of the Spectator, many Victorian readers looked for improbable or exotic scenes and characters. Lewes (1865) devotes a chapter of *The Principles of Success in Literature* to defining imagination as the power of forming images. “The amount of that power,” he writes, “has been too frequently estimated according to the extent of departure from ordinary experience in the images selected” (1865, p. 577). Lewes argues that the strength of a writer’s images is revealed through their effect on our emotions rather than through “any rarity or surprisingness in the images themselves” (1865, p. 578). He goes on to insist that it is precisely common images familiar to all that most task the imagination of the author, who must select telling detail that will strike the reader as true from the surfeit of information. Because Bronte focused on the complexities of ordinary events and people, she was often dismissed by those reviewers who sought idealized characters, exotic

settings, or extraordinary events. Bronte's complex characters were too much like real people for many Victorian critics. More modern readers have sometimes restated this complaint. Eagleton (1988/1975, p. 137) states "The language of Anne Bronte's work is that of morality rather than imagination". He complains that she though she faces real issues, she focuses on the criteria by which people should act.

The criticism that Bronte received for imagining 'ordinary' characters and 'commonplace' events may be a typical objection to realism. Furst (1995, p. 6) notes,

the key words in the realm of realism, 'copy,' 'imitate,' and 'reproduce' are all double-edged, in having the simultaneous sense of faithful representation and plagiarized repetition. The implications of "All is true" could thus be derogatory to the artist, if his powers of acute observation and representation were now to take precedence over the traditionally prized skills of manipulating readerly sensibilities. The image of itself that realism nurtured thus turns out to be strangely self-defeating.

Furst argues that in insisting that they were reproducing reality objectively, realist novelists undermined their prestige as imaginative artists, though they may have increased their popularity. She notes that nineteenth century realism tried to combine illusion and truth in a product that was "both metonymically and figuratively true". Rather than focusing on the accuracy of the details, they insisted on the overall authenticity of the representation. She cites various authors who use what she considers a highly ambiguous image, the mirror, to describe their novels. Writing early in the Victorian era, Bronte may have faced a critical establishment not yet accustomed to so strong a dose of realism.

Even at the end of the century, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, in the preface to a new edition of the Brontes' novels could still minimize *Wildfell Hall*, observing, "But the book's truth, so far as it is true, is scarcely the truth of imagination; it is rather the truth of a tract or report" (Allott, 1974, p. 459). Altogether, nineteenth century reviewers and critics recognized the truthfulness or realism of *Wildfell Hall* and in some cases they applauded this quality in the book. Those who questioned the book either felt that it was uninteresting because it was too much like ordinary life, found it disgusting because it was too truthful about unpleasant aspects of life, or considered it unedifying because the characters were too complex to provide clear moral models. Those who doubted the truthfulness of the book argued that some of the characters were too repugnant to be believable.

Truth as a convention of Victorian fiction

Although Bronte's Preface to the second edition has provided a principle basis for the discussion of her intentions, it is possible to question it. There are several ways to look at the Preface that might undermine it as a straightforward expression of her purposes. First, claims of truthfulness might be taken as conventional indicators of fiction. They might also be taken as indicators that the novel in question is intended to be taken as realism. They might be an attempt to position the novel in contrast to romance. In any of these cases, Bronte might have been expected to stress the truthfulness of her narrative in the preface. In addition, her lack of specificity when she speaks of truth leaves her claim open to a variety of interpretations.

One of the indicators of fiction has always been the claim to truth. From the Middle Ages on, Romances were often condemned as untrue. Writers of Romance, according to Ross (1991) could justify their works on several grounds: by claiming to be poetic rather than truthful, by insisting upon the historical or allegorical truthfulness of the work, or by writing about people or places about which the truth could not be known. Stories could be set in exotic places and times or written about ordinary people whose lives were not part of historical record.

Stories of the contemporary lives of ordinary people, which began to be called novels and to be distinguished from romances, were often believed to be more truthful than romances. Ross traces the development of the novel from the fiction of Aphra Behn in the late seventeenth century, through the novels of Jane Austen in the early nineteenth century. Each change in fashion during the period can be seen as an attempt to get closer to the real lives of the readers. Ross (1991, p. 17) notes:

it is the novelist's job to convince readers that fiction is true and the critic's job to identify and label fiction as fiction. Thus the first novelists had to keep a step ahead of the definitions that gave the game away: if romances were false, they wrote novels; and if novels were also exposed, what then.

The custom of insisting upon the truth of narratives, pre-dated the development of realism, but continued to be an element of the realistic novel. Twycross (1998, p. 24) cites in the preface of Sarah Stickney Ellis's *Family Secrets* a disclaimer only slightly different than Bronte's later preface to the second edition of *Wildfell Hall*:

If the occupation of writing books were simply an amusement, how pleasant might the task be made, by dwelling only upon popular or pleasing themes—But when the office of the writer is undertaken as a duty, rather than a pleasure . . . Human life must then be described, not as it might be, but as it is; in order that truth may be recognized under the garb of fiction; and that error of opinion may thus be traced out to its inevitable consequence—error of conduct.

Like Bronte, Ellis dismisses the entertainment aspect of the novel and stresses rather the educational benefits of truthfulness. Twycross notes that “in no other writer of the decade, apart from Anne Bronte, is so apparent an agenda for woman-power so clearly expressed or given so firm a religious base.” Though Twycross’s interpretation implies that Ellis and Bronte were defining moral and political purposes for their texts, the crucial claim of both prefaces is that they are telling the truth, and that truth-telling sets their novels apart from most novels of the time.

Jansson (1998, p. 33), comparing *Wildfell Hall* with Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*, calls *Wildfell Hall* “the most obviously subversive text”. She notes that Bronte’s preface never specifies what truth she wishes to tell; she lets it emerge through the novel. Like Twycross, Jansson focuses on truths about women’s lives.

In fact several truths are inscribed in *Tenant*: the truth of the ignorance in which young girls are raised, and the inadequacy of the information upon which they base marriage choices; the truth of the power relations between the sexes; and, finally, the ineffectuality of ‘woman’s influence’, that mysterious and nebulous power to which so much was ascribed and by which so little is achieved, at least in this novel. (1998, p. 33),

Truth claims in Victorian fiction may perform contradictory tasks. On the one hand they are conventional indicators of fiction. As an element in the creation of verisimilitude, novelists traditionally began their works with a claim that they are

recording fact. On the other hand, claims of truth might be intended to position a specific work of fiction as realism in contrast to romance. Of course, in this realist writers did not differ greatly from writers of romance who also opened their exotic adventures with claims that they were telling the truth. Ross notes:

Both romance and novel writers sometimes claimed that their works were literally true while expecting the reader to know that they were fictional; both were also capable of claiming that their stories were fictional while expecting the reader to recognize in them references to current events.(1991, p. 4)

Ross (1991, p. 4) claims that it was difficult to distinguish realism from romance partly because all fiction is false but also because the truths that fiction represents are variable, limited and often remote from the reader. Davis suggests that Victorian realism approached truth partially through the juxtaposition and multiplication of these truths.

In some primal paradisiacal world, thoughts would not continually “come across” each other; the chronology of feelings would be in step with their importance. But in this fallen Victorian second world, one time one thought, one person gets overlaid upon another, like threads in a skein, like lenses through which we have to peer. One thought is simple; two may be a contradiction or a conflict; but the generation of three, four, five and more are what creates the melting-pot, or the holding-ground, or the deep reservoir of the realist novel, and demands readers who do not seek merely a single theme or a simple idea. (Davis, 2008, p. 29)

Davis identifies realism with multiplicity of viewpoints, uncertainty of characters, and the complexity of life. “The Victorian,” he writes, “is a literature no longer of epic openings or great endings but of middles” (2008, p. 98). It is a literature of middles because the focus is on complications rather than resolutions. Ross, focusing upon female novelists from Behn to Austen, suggests they “used romance to assert the legitimacy of feminine

‘truth’”; but she observes that their construction of truth “does not accord with the present belief in the partial and provisional nature of truth itself” (1991, p. 15). Unlike several of the authors that Ross analyzes, Bronte seems to question most of the truths that her narrators proclaim. She does propose a structure of feminine truth. Throughout the novel she keeps reminding us of the relative positions of men and women. Rose frequently points out to Gilbert the injustices of the domestic relations within their family; just as Helen observes for her diary the injustices within her marriage. The truth of women’s lives is an obvious concern for Bronte and the novel illustrates many of the dilemmas confronting Victorian women. But like the novelists Davis studies, in a world where circumstances continually undercut intentions, she seems unable to lead her characters to satisfying endings. Davis (2008, p. 85) sees Victorian realism as a reflection of a new way of seeing the world that is also apparent in the work of Lyell and Darwin, what he calls “the shift from ever-fixed categories to change and chance and flux over unimaginably long periods of time.” Bronte’s realism is complicated, in addition by the myriad conflicting impulses, duties and expectations that confront her characters

Davis (2008, p. 4) suggests another way in which Victorian writers may have approached truth. “Normal” and “normality” are themselves Victorian words,” he writes. “In a normal world the problems that concern you are not so much dramatic and romantic as continuous and probably unsolvable, because they are part of what is involved in accepting what Freud called the reality principle.” Davis not only describes the Victorian treatment of problems in such a way as to recall *Wildfell Hall*, he uses a sentence from the novel to illustrate the complex contradictory impulses of Victorian characters.

You could almost count how many different thoughts, coming from how many different levels or directions, there are in a single sentence that Helen Huntingdon writes in her lonely diary. “Not so much for the sake of my son’s affection (though I do prize that highly, and though I feel it is my right, and know I have done much to earn it), as for that influence over him which, for his own advantage, I would strive to purchase and retain”: three ‘though-type’ clauses in a parenthesis, a “not so much” on one side matched by an “as for that” on the other, while the crucial “for his own advantage” seeks its rightful justificatory place within the overall sentence . . . and so on.

Such relativism, especially in those who would be absolute in their principles, is what makes for an increasingly complicated syntax in the rich dense life of the Victorian novel. It is a syntax that stands for the internal struggle toward an integrated, mapped out orientation within the world. . . (Davis, 2008, p. 27)

The sentence chosen by Davis reflects the characteristic styles both of Helen’s diary and of Gilbert’s letters. Both narrators say things and then unsay them through explanations and modifications. We can see in Gilbert’s explanation of how he came to be a farmer that begins the first chapter the same statement and retreat that Davis points out here. But beyond the tentativeness of narrative statement in *Wildfell Hall*, Bronte inserts a second level of contradiction by having her narrators provide details of events that undercut their own interpretations. We have seen this repeatedly in the earlier chapters as Gilbert describes his interactions with his family and neighbors without understanding the implications of what he reports. Davis writes,

Like a person, an initially simple sentence in the Victorian realist novel has to take in more and more. It tries to be receptive to the imagined world impinging upon it, to trace out the interrelations of clauses as of people, in the struggle for “some key” from within itself that would create connective understanding. But connective understanding does not mean that everything easily joins together. It also has to let in more difficult inclusions, syntactically close to contradiction or negation . . . (2008, p. 28)

In looking, as Davis does, at the confusion of ideas within a single sentence of *Wildfell Hall*, we can see how Bronte constructs the polyphony of the novel from the uncertainties within each sentence. The incertitude illustrated by the slow construction of an idea, the difficulty of the narrators in making their thoughts clear even to themselves, lends verisimilitude to their voices. We can't trust what they say but we can believe that they are real.

Some of the early reviewers of *Wildfell Hall* were offended by the book because they did not feel the principal characters, Gilbert and Helen, provided clear enough moral examples for the reader. The occasional ambiguity of their conduct and their ideas, however, can also be seen as an element of Victorian realism. Both Gilbert and Helen begin the novel sure of themselves and of the soundness of their ideas about the world. But neither is able to successfully apply these theories to the conditions of their lives. Helen is sometimes given to moralizing on the pages of her diary but her resolutions and interpretations are seldom adequate to the circumstances she describes. She continually finds that her problems are more complex than she imagined. Or at least we imagine she does. We have no access into the minds of either Helen or Gilbert, the two narrators of *Wildfell Hall*.

Considering a paragraph written by George Eliot, Davis writes

Those minute processes," "those invisible thoroughfares," "that delicate poise and transition": this is the novel as analogous to research into the substructures of the brain. The realist imagination of the novel is not interested in fantasy but in finding deep within that ordinary named reality that we think we already know something stranger, more serious, and more complex than we ever thought it to be (2008, p. 33).

Eliot writes in the third person, analyzing the thought processes within a character's mind. This is something Anne Bronte never does. Her characters are always speaking to somebody else, even Helen when she is writing to herself in a diary, is formulating a mask, a justification. Because Helen and Gilbert are always performing, they always wear masks and we never observe thought processes unbiased by consciousness. For this reason, Bronte seems more an anthropologist than a psychologist. There is always interaction present in every sentence of her novel, even when it is only Helen interacting with her diary. Yet, though the narrative never reaches into the minds of the characters, it does, in focusing on the shifting details of the individual speech event, dwell on the 'minute processes' deep within ordinary reality.

In Wildfell Hall, there is no narrator who can tell us what other characters are thinking. Neither of the narrators, in fact, is particularly skilled at describing his own thought processes accurately. Gribble (1983, p. 7), discussing Todorov's 'law of criticism', argues that truth is sought but always absent from narrative. "The truth, as Todorov conceives it," she writes, "is something from which protagonist, tale and teller remain alike shut away." Bronte manages the narrative so that the reader is aware of contexts and conflicts that elude the narrators (or that they may wish to hide) but she seems unwilling to resolve many of the puzzles of the novel. The elusiveness of truth may, in fact, be one of the truths that she wishes to tell. Gribble notes that "the great Victorian novelists, however fascinated they are by the gap between individual consciousness and the world it creates, have a much firmer grasp than their protagonists can command on a dense quotidian world" (1983, p. 7).

Reynolds and Humble (1993, pp. 73-74) develop a related aspect of the Victorian novel in their discussion of the role of heteroglossic language in the construction of femininity. When multiple challenges to the authority of the dominant voice cause it to break down, “subversive voices are liberated to speak, resulting in a ‘plurality of independent, unmerged voices and consciousness . . . which are not subject to the authoritative control’” (1993, p. 74). They see the process of change and fragmentation accelerating with the accession of Victoria to the throne in 1837. We can see this breakdown clearly in *Wildfell Hall*. Not only do both narrators challenge the voices of authority but their narrations are themselves challenged by the voices they report on.

Although there are many kinds of truth that a novelist could express, we might reduce our study to four that are closely related to *Wildfell Hall*. First, Charlotte Brontë and many successive critics chose to interpret *Wildfell Hall* as thinly disguised autobiography. If this interpretation is true then Anne might be understood to mean that she was accurately reporting events that actually took place. A second interpretation might be that Anne was positioning herself as a realistic novelist and asserting that *Wildfell Hall* was a true picture of the world. Because critics have generally considered Anne to be more concerned than her sisters with moral questions and because *Wildfell Hall* was an early treatment of various social and moral issues of Victorian England, we might also assume that it was moral truth that she was concerned with in her preface. Finally because Anne observes society with minute and scientific precision, we might understand her preface as a claim that she was acting as an objective observer of social interaction.

Factual Truth

Novelists, we assume, frequently adapt material they find around them for the construction of their fiction. The proponents of the theory that Bronte was a recorder of real events, however, have been generally more successful in finding parallels between her life and the plot and incidents of *Agnes Grey* than in finding real-life models for *Wildfell Hall*. Neither the narrators nor the characters of *Wildfell Hall* seem to share many qualities with either Bronte or members of her family and neither Linden Car nor Grassdale are close approximations to the Bronte household. Beyond the clear discrepancies between Bronte's life and most of the material in *Wildfell Hall* there is some interior evidence that she did not mean to claim factual truth for the novel when she defended her intentions in the preface.

Buzard (2005, p. 202) defines *Agnes Grey* as a me-narrative, which he describes as a work whose principal motivation is a the impulse "to assert and exercise the right to tell one's own tale". He credits me-narrators with a 'hunger for justification' sometimes because they have been silenced in the past. Although *Wildfell Hall* is a different kind of narration from *Agnes Grey*, we can see some of the same motivation in Gilbert. Despite his affected nonchalance, he often seems desperate for Halford's approval. Buzard argues that me-narrators treat the public, as Gilbert does, as though it were a single listener. Also they define themselves in contrast to their formerly powerless selves by pointing out the difference between who they are now and who they were. The intense involvement with the story of the me-narrator might imply the truth of the narrative and a number of critics have suggested that this is so regarding *Agnes Grey*. It is more difficult though to

imagine that Gilbert Markham utilizing many incidents from the life of Anne Bronte in his narrative.

Riffaterre (1990) provides an overview of some of the principal signs of fictionality that novelists use to remind the reader that what he is reading is not the truth:

. . . narrator's intrusions; multiple narrators; humorous narrative that acts as a representation of the author or of a narrator that suggests an outsider's viewpoint without fully intruding; metalanguage glossing narrative language; generic markers in the titles and subtitles; in prefaces and in postfaces; emblematic names for characters and places; incompatibilities between narrative voice and viewpoint and characters' voices and viewpoints; incompatibilities between viewpoint and verisimilitude, especially omniscient narrative; signs modifying the narrative's pace and altering the sequence of events (backtracking and anticipation, significant gaps, prolepsis and analepsis); mimetic excesses, such as unlikely recordings of unimportant speech or thought (unimportant but suggestive of actual happenings, of a live presence, creating atmosphere or characterizing persons); and, finally, diegetic overkill, such as the representation of ostensibly insignificant details, the very insignificance of which is significant in a story as a feature of realism. (Riffaterre 1990, pp. 29-30)

The list reads like a summary of Bronte's narrative techniques. As narrators, both Gilbert and Helen continually intrude upon their narratives to offer interpretation and explanation. Much of the humor of the novel, in fact, derives from the inadequacy, error or transparent prevarication of their intrusions. Also, the book is divided by the presence of two narrators, a device that allows us to consider Helen's behavior from her own viewpoint and from the perspective of outside observers. Although this device allows us to know Helen better it also calls into question the truthfulness of both versions.

Riffaterre sees humor as a pervasive trope of nineteenth century fiction, and one that underscores the fictionality of the text in various ways. Humor based upon repetition of an image, for example, creates a continuity of viewpoint that is inconsistent with

verisimilitude. Much humor, Riffaterre argues, suggests an outsider's viewpoint. He speaks of this as an implicit intrusion by the narrator into the narration. In the case of Wildfell Hall, because it is the narrators who are most often the targets of the humor, we have to assume an authorial viewpoint beyond that of the narrator and contrasting with it. Actually several types of humor seem to be interacting in the novel. Fergus is included to provide comic commentary upon the activities of others. Huntingdon also indulges in comic descriptions of the activities of his companions. Because Gilbert fancies himself clever, he also often maintains a comic tone in his recounting of events. The presentation of Rev. Millward in the first chapter, for example, is satirical and most of Millward's interventions in the events of the novel are described satirically. But it is Gilbert, himself, who more often becomes a figure of fun. In the early interactions with his family, with Mrs. Graham, and with Eliza, described in previous chapters, the reader is continually aware of the foolishness of Gilbert's position although he often seems unaware himself. The comic undercutting of his posturing may be attributed in part to greater insight of the narrating Gilbert who has aged twenty years since the events of the novel. But it is the older Gilbert who refuses to admit to the reader the intention of his younger self to walk to Wildfell Hall in chapter 2. The older Gilbert still gossips as avidly as ever and seems to have matured only marginally in the intervening years. Helen's diary makes the author's distance from the narrator clearer because there is no older Helen to filter the words of the diary. But, though Helen often fails to perceive what is happening, the reader is expected to recognize the humor of her adolescent quarreling with her aunt and the inappropriateness of some of her responses to her husband. Riffaterre argues that a

humorous description of characters or narration of events presupposes the existence of a neutral version of the same material and is always, therefore, a distortion of the truth.

Bronte also uses the conventions of novel writing to stress the fictionality of her work. When Gilbert begins his first letter to Halford, he calls his father “a sort of gentleman farmer in ___shire” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 17). At the beginning of chapter 23, Helen begins her first diary entry as a married woman writing that her husband had gone “to meet the ___ hounds” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 164). It is not believable that Gilbert would have sought to hide the location of his father’s farm from his brother-in-law, Halford, who would know very well where it was. Nor would Helen have hidden from herself in a personal diary, the place her husband was riding to. These dashes substituting for place names function only to remind the reader that what he is reading is not a true account, that it is a work of fiction.

Bronte does not, on the whole, depend much upon the use of emblematic names in Wildfell Hall but the major exception to this observation, Arthur Huntingdon’s name, provides significant thematic clues to the novel. Recalling the Countess of Huntingdon, a leader of the Calvinistic wing of Methodism that subscribed to the doctrine of predestination (Gerin, 1976/1959, Cunningham, 1975), Huntingdon expresses Calvinistic attitudes toward salvation on various occasions. His name alerts readers to the debate over redemption that plays out in the events of the novel. While the use of an emblematic name in this case, clarifies Bronte’s thematic program, it also undercuts her claim to truth. Riffaterre (1990, p. 33) observes that this device is generally seen as “the most obvious hindrance to verisimilitude.” Huntingdon, of course, is more than simply an

exemplary character illustrating Calvinist doctrine; and Riffaterre concedes that verisimilitude can be achieved in a major character despite an emblematic name when that character is made sufficiently complex.

Both Gilbert and Helen seek to guide the reader toward a correct interpretation of the events they narrate. Both, however, are detailed enough in their narration of events to permit the introduction of many contradictory voices. These additional voices often tend to undercut the interpretations of events that the narrators offer. Both Fergus and Rose, for example, periodically puncture Gilbert's inflated concept of himself. And, as we saw in an earlier chapter, Gilbert's first encounter with his mother in Chapter 1 effectively undermined the image he had tried to construct of himself earlier in the chapter. Even details such as Helen's contemptuous glance at Gilbert in church in chapter 1 serve to call into question his presentation of himself. Helen is also unable to impose her own interpretation upon the events she records in her diary. Aunt Maxwell's warnings against Huntingdon and admonitions about marriage are clearly more convincing than Helen's justifications of her thoughts and actions. Even Annabella Wilmot (Chapter 35) is able to call into question Helen's interpretation of the nature of her problems with Huntingdon.

Several critics have argued that Bronte constructed the elaborate narrative framework of *Wildfell Hall* to distance herself from the events of the novel but it also undermines the verisimilitude of the story. Whereas *Agnes Grey* had been narrated directly by the protagonist, *Wildfell Hall* was ostensibly written down in a letter from the narrator to his brother-in-law twenty years after the events. Within the letter he has copied Helen's diary comprising half the text of the novel. Both the letters and the diary

undermine the verisimilitude of the novel in various ways. The letter and diary formats are, in fact, typical frameworks for the fiction of the time. The length of the letter is itself incompatible with verisimilitude. It is difficult to believe that Gilbert would sit down and write a 177,000 word letter to Halford in response to a request for a story about his youth. Within the letter, Gilbert includes information that would have been well-known to his brother-in-law, telling him, for example, in the second sentence that his (Gilbert's) father was a farmer. Although he modifies this information with "as you know," the clarification serves principally to draw attention to the incongruity of the comment. In contrast to the things Halford already knows, Gilbert also informs him of many marginal details that he would not have wanted or needed to know. Some of the details he shares about his opinions of and relations with Eliza Millward seem inappropriate considering Gilbert's situation at the time he writes the letter. In fact, Halford's experience of reading the letter would necessarily have been much different from that of the common reader because he knows from the first chapter on that Gilbert has now been married to Helen for many years. To some extent, the problems with verisimilitude in the letter are repeated in the diary. Helen would not necessarily have told herself some of the things she puts into the diary. And she might have been likely to speak at greater length about other things. Despite the hurried tour of Europe on her honeymoon, for instance, she almost certainly would have retained some impressions of the trip that she would have recorded. Kingsley (1849, p. 424) objects that Helen would have been incapable of recording the "oaths and curses" or "details of drunken scenes" she witnessed, but, in a personal diary, we might expect her to also record positive experiences early in her

marriage, as well as events that do not relate to her marital problems. Scott (1983, p. 81) notes that “the book is so faithful an accountant of human nature it works at a deep level as one of the most solidly embodied pieces of determinism ever sent forth into the world.” He argues that Bronte focuses on “seeing people’s inextricability from their own natures and the consequences which follow.” Other critics have also noted the naturalistic approach of some elements in *Wildfell Hall*. Duthie (1986, pp. 110-111) compares the book to Zola’s *L’Assommoir* in the precision with which she traces the deterioration of Huntingdon. These observations suggest that the events of the novel form a clear pattern and mark a steady progression. The clearness of the pattern implies a selection of detail that distorts reality.

Another way in which reality is distorted in the novel is through the ordering of events. The entire novel is an example of analepsis. It opens in 1847 or 1848 but, with the first sentence of chapter 1, the narrator tells Halford, “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827.” The story focuses on a week at the end of October and beginning of November for a few chapters and then moves forward into 1828 eventually ending in 1829 with a few glances forward to fill us in on the situation in 1848. The center of the novel is occupied by Helen’s diary which takes us back to 1821 and gradually moves forward to approximately the point at which the basic flashback begins in 1827. The progression is not steady; blocks of time amounting to years are passed over while several chapters may cluster around the events of a few days. Within the principle flashback, Gilbert occasionally breaks the sequence by bringing Halford back to 1848 with a question, clarification, or observation. He closes chapter 6, for example, asking,

“Is it so, Halford? Is that the extent of your domestic virtues; and does your happy wife expect no more?” He also periodically brings Halford into the story through procateleipsis, imaging an objection that Halford might make to one of his statements and answering that objection, as, for example, at the conclusion of chapter 3 where he asserts, “Perhaps, too, I was a little spoiled by my mother and sister, and some other ladies of my acquaintance; and yet I was by no means a fop—of that I am fully convinced, whether you are or not.” Through this combination of techniques, Bronte has altered the sequence of events in Wildfell Hall, moving the reader forward and backward in time and consequently interfering with the suspension of disbelief.

Another sign of fictionality noted by Riffaterre (1990, p. 29) is mimetic excess, which he characterizes as “unlikely recordings of unimportant speech or thought”. The problem is that Gilbert, writing to Halford twenty years after the events, would not be likely to describe communication events as precisely or exhaustively as Bronte needed them to be described. As a result, information that is key to the novel sometimes seems incongruent as part of the letter. We can see this clearly in the first chapter as the major characters are introduced. Gilbert describes encountering Rose and then Fergus on the stairs and provides detailed transcripts of parts of the interaction among the members of the Markham family. While this information is crucial to the novel, it is unlikely that Gilbert would have recorded these details or remembered them so long after the events and they seem irrelevant to the story that Gilbert is trying to tell Halford (but central to the story Bronte is writing for her readers). Most of the variety of subplots and sub-themes that comprise Wildfell Hall would fall outside the story if the text were really a

letter from Gilbert to his brother-in-law. Rose's complaint in chapter 6 about the unequal treatment she receives or Mr. Millward's passionate defense of alcohol in chapter 4, for example, are only slightly related to the history of Gilbert's courtship of Helen.. The details, though they advance the narrative and bolster Bronte's themes, thereby call into question the reality of the letter.

Just as the detailing of the speech and thought of the characters, especially minor characters or remote themes, is often far greater than we would expect in a real letter, Gilbert also tells more about the scenes he describes than we might expect in a typical letter. Despite the twenty-year time lapse between his walk to Wildfell Hall recorded in chapter 2 and his description of the event, he minutely describes the changes in the vegetation he encounters along the way. Similarly, he carefully describes not only the cushions and hangings in the church pew where he first sees Helen Graham in chapter 1 but also the shifting facial expressions and gestures of the people he glances at around the church. He closes chapter 1 with a review for Halford of the characters and circumstances of most of his neighbors, though they will be only slightly related to his central story and can be of little interest to Halford.

Although Bronte insists in the preface to the second edition that she wishes to tell the truth, she has clearly filled her narrative with indicators of fictionality. Riffaterre argues:

Verisimilitude depends on a fairly uniform sequentiality. It spins a yarn that limits the number of narrative strands to those absolutely required by the need to develop now this and now that character, and to interweave only as many subplots as can be combined

without distracting readers and without confusing their perception of simultaneous events and the order of occurrence of successive ones. (1990, p. 68)

Bronte, in contrast, strains verisimilitude by breaking up the sequence of events and developing numerous sometimes clashing narrative strands and subplots. Augustine condemns metaphors and myths intended to be taken as true far more than fiction which we know isn't true. Anne Bronte in scrupulously signaling the fictionality of *Wildfell Hall* may be maintaining a superior truth.

Fictional Truth

Eagleton (2003, p. 14) discovers two contradictory impulses in the realistic novel; it must both capture routine reality as it is and find the patterns in it.

The novel is born of the subversive, soap-opera-like recognition that routine reality, the sheer quotidian flow, can be endlessly captivating, and that the mere representation of this process can be an enthralling end in itself. But this pleasure in the real is ideologically suspect, since like most pleasure it appears to be amoral. Reality must have a point and narrative must double-code the stuff of the world so that it is at once itself and symbolic, empirical and moral, individual and typical. Otherwise we are in danger of wallowing in our senses, becoming enmired in the material signifier, mistaking the trees for the wood. The basis of major realism is thus also the rationale behind tabloid exposures: from the *Newgate* novel to the *News of the World*, the sensational is in the service of the socially responsible.

Bronte seems to acknowledge both of these goals in her preface. She wished to tell the truth but only because the truth leads us to understand the pattern. "For truth always conveys its own moral," she writes; or, as Eagleton phrases it, "narrative must double-code the stuff of the world so that it is at once . . . empirical and moral."

The double goal Eagleton sets up for realistic fiction has been developed more fully by Riffaterre as distinct systems for establishing truth in the novel. Riffaterre (1990, pp. 2-3) argues that verisimilitude was traditionally viewed as relying upon reference to factors external to the text whereas it is now more frequently understood to depend upon relations within the text. The shift in perspective, he suggests, is not great because “exterior referentiality is but an illusion.” ‘Verbal representations in the text’ actually refer to ‘verbal givens’ already explicitly or implicitly present in the text. Verisimilitude substitutes “an idea of truth for an actual experience” (1990, p. 6) and thereby makes the text less vulnerable to change and to the variation in the individual reader’s experience. This is necessary, he argues, because the experiences and assumptions about reality of readers vary so widely that “narrative must contain features that are self-verifiable and therefore resistant to the vagaries of reference” (1990, p. 10). Repetition, equivalence, tautology and circularity in the text are devices that create truth in fiction.

Riffaterre (1990, pp. 32-33) suggests that narrative texts, rather than compensating for signs of fictionality such as those discussed in the previous section by increasing verisimilitude, use them to build a truth not dependent on verisimilitude. In addition to the signs of fictionality, used to forge a more stable truth, fictional texts construct separate but related truth systems through symbolism. He describes two symbolic systems, sustained metaphor and subtexts, both of which operate through repetition. A subtext usually involves a minor character or insignificant object. In *Wildfell Hall*, Rose provides an example of a subtext when she struggles to gain the attention of her mother and brothers in chapter 1. Although Mrs. Markham says she likes to know

what her children have been about, she questions only Gilbert and Fergus. Although Rose has been in the house most of the day, Mrs. Markham has obviously not yet bothered to question her because she is surprised by the news she announces. In chapter 1, we might note that Rose is expected to wait on the table and that she must fight more than her brothers for attention, but we find no explicit complaint. In chapter 3, we may note that though Mrs. Graham has visited Linden Car ostensibly to return the call made by Rose and Mrs. Markham, she soon forgets Rose and eventually focuses her entire attention on Gilbert. At the conclusion of the chapter, Gilbert admits that "I was a little spoiled by my mother and sister," for the first time explicitly focusing attention on the disparate treatment of the Markham children. By the close of chapter 6, Rose finally reaches a limit, when Gilbert comes home late and then complains about the taste of the tea his mother has been keeping warm for him. Mrs. Markham throws out the remaining tea and has Rose fix a new pot. She performs her task grudgingly while she comments on the unfair treatment.

'Well! - if it had been me now, I should have had no tea at all; - if it had been Fergus, even, he would have had to put up with such as there was, and been told to be thankful, for it was far too good for him; but you - we can't do too much for you. - It's always so - if there's anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, "Don't eat so much of that, Rose, Gilbert will like it for his supper" - I'm nothing at all - in the parlour, it's "Come, Rose, put away your things, and let's have the room nice and tidy against they come in; and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire." In the kitchen - "Make that pie a large one, Rose, I dare say the boys'll be hungry; - and don't put so much pepper in, they'll not like it I'm sure" - or, "Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain," - or, "Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus likes plenty." If I say, "Well, mamma, I don't," I'm told I ought not to think of myself - "You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done, and secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house - anything will do for the ladies.'" (Bronte 1966/1848, p.52)

On the one hand, Rose's complaints seem to be typical of the sibling quarrelling characteristic of Gilbert's relationships with both Fergus and Rose. But Rose's comments and Gilbert's response also afford Mrs. Markham an opportunity to explicitly set out the roles of men and women in marriage. This discussion parallels Aunt Maxwell's later discussion about marriage with Helen and also serves as a background for looking at all of the marriages considered in the course of the narrative. Mrs. Markham here uses her own marriage as an example of what one should expect. But Gilbert closes the chapter by moving forward to 1847 and questioning Halford about his marriage to Rose. The book will also eventually raise questions about the nature of the marriages of Helen's father and of her Aunt Maxwell. (Sutherland (1996, pp. 73-77) argues convincingly that Helen is illegitimate.) All of these repetitions of patterns of married life resonate in the narrative of Helen's marriage to Arthur and the parallel situation of Millicent Hargrave's marriage to Hattersley. Mrs. Markham also introduces Eliza Millward and Helen Graham into her discussion of marriage as examples of unsuitable partners for Gilbert and she dismisses Gilbert's objections as "mere boy's talk" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 53). Thus she also links this discussion to Gilbert's treatment of Eliza and the questions that occur at the end of the book about his marriage to Helen. Rose's complaints are about unequal treatment among siblings but they illuminate other aspects of the condition of women in the 1840s.

Wildfell Hall was a shocking novel in 1848, partly because of the depraved society around Arthur Huntingdon and more so because of the extraordinary response of Helen to her situation at Grassdale. The subtext centered on Rose's sense of injustice is

part of a cluster of subtexts that repeat variations on the central conflict between Helen and Huntingdon. Dredge (2000, p. 89) claims that ‘to tell the truth’ Bronte “assembled different narratives, assumptions and histories of marriage”. This variation and repetition helps to establish the truth of the situation Bronte develops in the narrative. Helen’s situation may be extreme but it is not so very different from the situations of other women in the novel. In the diary section of the novel, Bronte frequently draws our attention to these parallel marriages. When Hattersley and Helen discuss Millicent in chapter 32, they contrast her responses to those of Helen and Hattersley, though wishing Millicent were a little more forceful, admits that Huntingdon wishes Helen were more like Millicent. Earlier in the chapter, as Millicent and Helen discuss their husbands, Millicent insists that her unwillingness to give up on her husband is justifiable because he is not as bad as Helen’s. The marriage of Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot, the one situation that we observe in Wildfell Hall in which the husband seems to be a victim, Helen makes the differences in circumstances between the two very clear. In chapter 38, when they compare their sorrows, Helen tells Lowborough; “you are a man and free to do what you want” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 265). Thus, even the Lowborough marriage is used to reinforce the themes related to women’s lack of power. Rose’s situation reinforces the truth of Helen’s and also helps to generalize the theme from the story of a woman contending with a dissipated husband to an examination of the position of women in Victorian domestic life.

The clownish Rev. Millward offers another example of a subtext, some aspects of which modern readers may miss. Rev. Millward is strong despite his age, seems to be

dedicated to his work, is energetic in attending a large parish without assistance, and claims to be moderate in his actions. Nonetheless, the introductory portrait Gilbert draws in chapter 1 is heavily satirical. He is pompous, opinionated, unbending, self-centered and obsessed with his health. His habits of eating and drinking seem extreme enough to contradict his self-proclaimed moderation. Gilbert calls him “a great despiser of tea and such slops and a patron of malt liquors” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 24). This characterization links Millward to two of the themes of Wildfell Hall. First, his defense of ale and his willingness to drink it places him obviously in opposition to Helen’s views. At the Markham’s party in chapter 4, Rev. Millward refuses wine and asks instead for some of Mrs. Markham’s homebrewed ale, remarking, “I always prefer your home-brewed to anything else” (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 40). When he receives the ale he demonstrates extensive experience in pouring it so that it produces maximum suds and then drains the glass in one swallow and immediately pours another. He then compliments Mrs. Markham again, saying, “I always maintain that there’s nothing to compare with your home-brewed ale” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 40). This scene is repeated later in the narrative when Rev. Millward stops by the Markham home returning from parish duties and refuses the offer of a cup of tea. Instead he tells Mrs. Markham, “I’ll take a glass of your excellent ale” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 84).

Rev. Millward complements his consumption of ale with vigorous arguments in favor of alcohol. The party in chapter 4 occurs shortly after Helen Graham’s description in chapter 3 of the desperate measures she has taken to prevent her son from being attracted to drink. After Rev. Millward drinks his first glass in chapter 4, Mrs. Markham

asks whether it is wrong to drink a little wine. He answers, “these things are all blessings and mercies, if we only knew how to make use of them” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 40). She then summarizes Mrs. Graham’s comments about alcohol, which Rev. Markham calls ‘criminal’. “Not only is it making a fool of the boy,” he explains, “but it is despising the gifts of Providence, and teaching him to trample them under his feet” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 41). As he talks the Wilsons drink gin, but Frederick Lawrence first appears unconvinced and then undertakes to defend Mrs. Graham’s position. Lawrence speaks with much more courtesy than Helen Graham had and qualifies his position by insisting that he has no expertise. Gilbert ties the argument to Lawrence’s life, remarking that Lawrence’s father was believed to have died of intemperance. Rev. Millward, nonetheless responds strongly, “Have I not proven to you how wrong it is—how contrary to Scripture to teach a child to look with contempt and disgust upon the blessings of Providence, in stead of to use them aright” (Bronte ,1966/1848, pp. 41-42). Lawrence answers his argument with a simile taken from the abstinence movement but then finishes his glass to avoid offending anyone. Mrs. Markham presses him to have another but he refuses.

Rev. Millward’s partiality to and defense of ale converts him into the major proponent and most visible consumer of alcohol in the sections of the novel narrated by Gilbert. The discussion centered on his position on drinking links him to the debate over alcohol that will later form a central strand of Helen’s diary. Just as Rose’s domestic complaints allowed Bronte to expand the depiction of the situation of women beyond Helen’s marital problems, the development of Rev. Millward’s views on alcohol, allows

her to expand the references to alcoholism beyond the circle of Arthur Huntingdon and his friends. The brief interaction between Rev. Millward and Mrs. Markham permits Gilbert to portray drinking in Lindenhope (the Wilsons and Rev. Millward) and to refer to cases of alcoholism (the elder Lawrence). This subtext brings home alcoholism as a general problem rather than a condition of the particular group of Huntingdon and his friends and, like the subtext of Rose's complaints, reinforces the truth of the narrative of Huntingdon's drinking through repetition and variation in Lindenhope. In addition, despite his fondness for ale, Rev. Millward is a responsible community leader. His ideas may often be foolish, but he is a dependable and conscientious minister to his parish. Thormahlen (1999), though, questions the degree to which he is an effective pastor, noting that he seems to bully his parishioners more than minister to them. To the extent that he is a serious clergyman, however, he can dignify alcohol in terms that Huntingdon and his companions would never be able to. His arguments permit Bronte to introduce and eventually dismiss justifications for alcohol that some readers may have shared but that her alcoholic characters could not have used. Also his tendentious pronouncements at Lindenhope provide a humorous anticipation for the sinister effects of drinking at Grassdale. Not only do Rev. Millward's comments and practices amplify the themes of Helen's diary but his position on tea also serves to situate him within the Victorian kaleidoscope of religious practices and attitudes. Cunningham (1975) observes that Sunday evening teas were a Methodist practice sneered at in Victorian society and frequently satirized by Victorian novelists. Knowing this, Millward's objection to tea can be taken as an indication of his snobbish rejection of Dissenting practices.

The division of attitudes to drink among religious lines provides insight into some of the sources of the conflict and misunderstanding between Helen and Huntingdon. It also creates a test for evaluating the characters. There is a contrast of tea and alcohol working through the novel and it is Rev. Millward who makes explicit the opposition between the two. Although Mrs. Markham brews ale and offers wine and gin to her guests, Linden Car is associated with the rituals of tea. Although Gilbert drinks tea frequently, we never hear of him drinking alcohol. Torgerson (2005) argues that Bronte chose alcohol as an ideal metaphor for disease and many critics (Duthie, 1986; Federico, 1990; Macgregor, 1992; Twycross-Martin, 1998; McCormack, 2002 & Hyman, 2008) have discussed the alcohol motif in *Wildfell Hall* but, without the juxtaposition of tea, the implications of alcohol are incomplete.

There is one final way in which Rev. Millward is able to draw together the themes of the novel. During her stay at *Wildfell Hall*, he had been severely critical of Mrs. Graham. After she had left and the truth of her identity and situation had become generally known he criticized her action in leaving her husband. "It was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife," he proclaimed, "and a tempting of Providence by laying herself open to temptation" (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 355). Whereas abstaining from alcohol is to despise the gifts of Providence, leaving an abusive husband is tempting Providence. Rev. Millward's language seems to meld together the two sins of despising alcohol and violating 'the sacred duties of marriage'. As a representative of the established church, his views on both issues are orthodox and, from the perspective of the novel, wrong.

They may suggest a link between conventional tolerance of alcoholism and conventional tolerance of the oppression of women.

The cases of Rose Markham and Rev. Millward demonstrate how subtexts repeat central themes in altered contexts and thereby reinforce the truth of the narrative. Neither subtext is a necessary part of the basic narrative. If they were omitted, they would not alter or obscure the main plots and themes. Nor is either subtext a single event. Both reappear successively with modifications through the course of the narrative, reminding the reader of significant motifs. Riffaterre posits, in addition to subtexts, sustained metaphor as a second device for establishing fictional truth. The Angel of the House is a Victorian metaphor that many critics have identified as a central theme of *Wildfell Hall*. This image recurs throughout the novel, with both Huntingdon and Gilbert explicitly referring to Helen as an angel and Helen herself consciously setting out to perform the role of angel in her marriage.

She enters into her marriage to Huntingdon believing in the concept of angel in the house and looking forward to being a positive influence in reforming her husband but, once married, she finds that she has little influence over him. Aunt Maxwell's warnings to Helen prior to her marriage allow Bronte to state the arguments against belief in a wife's ability to influence her husband. As the marriage progresses (Jansson 1998), Helen struggles unsuccessfully to fulfill the role of angel, thereby permitting Bronte to demonstrate how ineffectual the wife's influence is within the power structure of the Victorian marriage. In continuing to insist on her duty towards her husband long after it

becomes apparent that it is her husband who has failed, she is able to maintain her moral superiority even as Bronte discredits the angelic ideal that she embodies.

Auerbach (1982) argues that before the nineteenth century, angels were nearly always imagined as male beings and their presence was typically frightening. She notes that angels in the Bible often need to tell humans not to be afraid. In the nineteenth century, angel's became less threatening, less powerful and more sentimentalized. It was at this point that angels began to be portrayed as female, and it became possible to picture the wife as an angel in the house. But the image of the angel is open to further interpretations. Jansson (1998, p. 41, see also Torgerson, 2005) sees one variation of the angel in the house in the stance adopted by Helen when she returns to nurse Huntingdon in his final illness. Helen's decision to return might have been taken as a reflection on her original decision to leave Huntingdon. Jansson and Torgerson, however, argue that Helen returns as an avenging angel, empowered by her previous flight. Her return permits Bronte to reaffirm the ineffectuality of the angel's influence but it also allows her to reassess the role of angel, which Torgerson considers unhealthy because excessive femininity (submission) is unhealthy, and excessive attention to her husband undermines her own health and risks her child. She is not able to influence Huntingdon positively but she does confine him and keep his situation before him. The Rambler (09/1848) had complained that there was nothing edifying, truthful nor full of warning for the profligate in Huntingdon's death (Allott, 1974). He was wrong on all three points but he was right that there was no conventional repentance, an absence that strengthened the realism, the warning, and the author's theme that no one can save anyone else.

Jansson (1998) observes that Helen is still governed by her conception of the angel of the house and only stops herself from submitting to Huntingdon's demands because she considers that to do so would be weakness. But in choosing to leave him, choosing to come back and choosing how to relate to him in the new situation she reinterprets the role of angel, acquiring greater power than she previously had. The empowerment that she gains from having left Huntingdon makes it possible to assume the role of angel more effectively than she had before but still does not permit her to assume responsibility for him.

A convention of Victorian criticism argues that women were viewed through a dyadic model sometimes called the 'two women' (Reynolds & Humble, 1993). Auerbach (1982) observes that the figure of angel in the house requires an opposing demonic figure and discusses the ways in which women in Victorian writing were often given demonic characteristics. She finds this demonic figure embodied principally in the mermaid, although she argues that Victorian victims, like Alice in Wonderland, easily turned in to queens and giantesses. Although Auerbach suggests that Victorian men were not capable of seeing women as women, but only as angels or demons, she adds two more earthly categories—old maids and fallen women—to her list of roles for women. She includes women who leave their husband's homes among the types of fallen women. (Jansson, 1998), too, doubts that Bronte believed that men could see beyond the angel-demon dyad. She argues that Bronte makes this point by having Gilbert echo Huntingdon in referring to Helen at the end of the novel as his angel.) Though the selfless angel, popularized in the 1840s by Dickens is the official Victorian ideal, she suggests that women were more

likely to be seen as dangerous by the Victorians and that even the angels shared many traits of the demons. The ideal of the angel in the house contained many contradictions. Obedience to God conflicted with obedience to a husband. Her duty towards her children also conflicted with her duty toward a husband. The influence that she was expected to wield was undermined by the denial of power. But the absence of power was called into question by the possibility that she actually possessed dangerous supernatural powers. Auerbach suggests that perhaps the oppressive marriage laws and the limiting ideals of feminine models of the Victorians were a response to their fear of the vast power of women.

During his last illness, Huntingdon clearly fears Helen and he bitterly complains of the power she holds over him and the ascendancy he senses she must feel. When he calls her “my immaculate angel,” the adjective ‘immaculate’ is clearly meant to affront. It sums up what he must have felt was her untouchable and unfeeling attitude. At this moment, when Helen is most clearly a ministering angel, she also seems most like an avenging one. From the first publication of the book in 1848, reviewers and critics have pointed out Helen’s fearsome qualities. Sinclair (1922, p. vii) credits her with “unbounded power to lay waste and destroy”. Thomson (1956, p. 128) notes that, though Helen stays with Huntingdon as long as possible, she never misses an opportunity to point out his deficiencies to him, and that her attendance during his protracted decline and death must have “kindled a flicker of sympathy for the sinner.”

Though the Angel of the House was a familiar image for the Victorian reader, Bronte, in testing the limits of the metaphor, has managed to reattach some of the awe

that characterized angels in an earlier period. Riffaterre (1990, p. 77) identifies syllepsis, the simultaneous activation of two meanings of a term, as a primary symbolic technique of narrative. In her exploration of the angelic metaphor as a metaphor for the Victorian wife, Bronte has used syllepsis to construct a complex symbol. Her complication of the angel metaphor illustrates a movement that Davis identifies as typical of Victorian literature.

Whatever the ideas held beforehand, or the names given from the outside, it is different inside—the golden rule of nineteenth-century/experimental realism. Something strange is going on within something ostensibly familiar, something uncertain within something apparently safe, something personally big within something conventionally small. (2008, pp. 5-6)

Like the subtexts that we looked at above, the metaphor of the angel recurs periodically in the narrative in different guises and constructs truth through repetition. “It has been suggested that the true root of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis lies in accepting this worldlike self-consistency,” Fleishman notes, “rather than in directly imitating external reality” (1978, p. 7). The repeated appearances of the angel metaphor are instances of internal self-reference used to modify an established meaning.

Another source of fictional truth discussed by Riffaterre is the unconscious of fiction. He argues that unconscious is to the conscious what reality is to appearances. “Consequently whenever the text appears to hide something, that something is supposed to be true (Riffaterre, 1990, p. 85). The text contains indicators suggesting there could be another interpretation. Riffaterre suggests two sources: double-take which he defines as the reader’s perception of syllepsis and comparative reading which he describes as the

reader's reader's "empirical perception of structures" (Riffaterre, 1990, p. 86). The reader either perceives alternate meanings for the words of the narrative or forms expectations based upon invariant structures he has experienced in other narratives. He argues that the unconscious of the text is provided partly by other texts to which the narrative refers. He uses the example of a scene in a novel by Victor Hugo that gains clarity from its relation to other scenes in other novels by Hugo. As in the case of subtexts the variation increases as the intertext is repeated. Comparative reading occurs when one reads several works of an author or perceives a work to belong to a particular genre. The genre regulates and directs comparison as if it were a multi-author corpus. Riffaterre says that as we repeat a subtext or an intertext we reduce the reference more and more until references are accomplished by "an isolated word or phrase" (Riffaterre, 1990a, p. 98) reminding the reader of the intertext. He says that "the literariness of the written text is built on a circularity of memory" (Riffaterre, 1990b, p. 99). Readers rely on their knowledge of literature to perceive the common structures of stories, but these structures can be identified from the language of the narrative. "The intertext is hidden like the psychological unconscious and like that unconscious it is hidden in such a way that we cannot help finding it (Riffaterre, 1990c, p. 86).

We have already discussed a revealing sequence in chapter 2 when Gilbert walked purposefully to Wildfell Hall while seeking to create for the reader the impression that he arrived there purely by chance. This sequence discloses an inability to admit his intentions even to himself that will be his defining characteristic throughout the novel and a motivation of much of the complication of the plot. Riffaterre notes that hidden truth is

uncovered by “the presence of ungrammaticalities in the mimesis, of unacceptable images—in short, of faults or rents in the fabric of verisimilitude”. (Riffaterre, 1990d, p. 102) We can see this in Gilbert’s walk to Wildfell Hall, requiring, as it does, that the reader accept a series of inconsistencies and implausibilities before he can believe Gilbert’s explanation. Rather than do this, the reader picks up on the simpler explanation that Gilbert has deliberately left his farm duties and walked to Wildfell Hall because he is curious about the new tenant and interested in seeing more of her.

Helen’s narrative utilizes a similar device. Early in her diary she explains her desire to rescue Huntingdon in various ways but never as what it obviously is, physical attraction. Riffaterre speaks of the structure of desire as a structural invariant in narrative comprised of a desiring subject and an attractive and frustrating object. The desired object must be either in some aspect repelling or for some reason unattainable or there could be no motivation for narrative. He adds that sexual desire is the motivation most likely to be related to the unconscious as it is the most frequently repressed. Huntingdon functions ideally as an object of desire because, from his first encounter with Helen, his attractive qualities are clearly offset by obvious defects of character calculated to confuse or repel. The reader might assume that by the time she reached Wildfell Hall six years after wedding Huntingdon, Helen’s marriage would have taught her to look beyond sexual attraction in her choice of mates. Despite her distant attitude, however, she continually places herself in Gilbert’s path. Because Gilbert’s attitudes and actions often mimic those of Huntingdon, Helen is easily offended by him. Nonetheless, she had already learned who he was before he visited Wildfell Hall in chapter 2; she visited only

his family among her neighbors; while there, she invited him to visit her; during the weeks that followed she frequented country walks where she was likely to encounter him; she displayed annoyance when he visited her accompanied by Eliza Millward; and she placed him in a situation where he was compelled to invite her to take an excursion to the ocean. No explanation is attempted for these details of her behavior, but the reader can only conclude that Helen is attracted to Gilbert and that she is hiding that attraction. What is more, early in her residence at Wildfell Hall, her interest in him could not have been based on any qualities other than his physical attractiveness. Later he is able to demonstrate some elements in his character that make him a more promising prospect than Huntingdon had been, but his early encounters with her (the rudeness in church in chapter 1, the arrogant smile in chapter 2) stress rather his similarities to Huntingdon. The physical basis of Helen's interest in Gilbert is significant only because Helen is silent about it, preferring to speak in more spiritual terms. The reader notes Helen's ambiguous conduct as a hidden clue to her true feelings.

Wildfell Hall, as various readers (Liddell, 1990 & Chitham, 1983, 1991) have noted, also develops through reference to other texts. Chitham (1991, p. 16) refers to Bronte's "attempts to 'de-Romanticize' the Byronic hero, so beloved of Charlotte and Emily". Charlotte Bronte, in fact, reacted defensively to the suggestion that Huntingdon was very like Rochester. We could argue that *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are often in the background of Wildfell Hall. Speaking of *Wuthering Heights*, Liddell (1990, p. 10) says, "she believed that it would do harm and created an antidote in her novel the Tenant of Wildfell Hall". Eagleton (1988/1975, p. 130) calls *Wildfell Hall*

an inversion of *Wuthering Heights*. Liddell later argues that the triumph of conscience in Wildfell Hall “is in some sort an answer to the triumph of passion in *Wuthering Heights*” Liddell (1990, p. 94). Chitham calls the book, “Anne’s artistic and moral challenge to the content of her sisters’ novels” (1991, p. 134). He argues that “Anne used her story to show how very different was her ‘moral’ view from Emily’s ‘poetic’ one. This argument, involving matters of realism, morality and indeed differing world views, began to pervade the new book” (Chitham, 1991, p. 142). This dialogue is notable on Gilbert’s walk to Wildfell beginning chapter 2 for example. He sets up a wildly Romantic setting but rather than dwelling on its sublimity, he focuses on the meagerness and deformity of the vegetation. This description depends upon and defrauds expectations that readers brought with them from Romantic writings, perhaps *Wuthering Heights* especially. The old mansion of Wildfell Hall also shares the Romantic potential of *Wuthering Heights* but, once the suggestion is made on this early excursion, the subsequent treatment the hall and its environs, with the possible exception of some impertinent comments by Fergus, is coldly realistic. Duthie (1986) notes that, although Helen is an artist, she complains that there are no suitable subjects around Wildfell Hall and claims that she has only painted the hall itself because there is nothing else to draw. Chitham (1983) argues that Gilbert’s assault on Lawrence in chapter 14, is out of character and also unnecessary for Bronte’s plot and themes but that it is included as a correction of Heathcliff’s attack on Linton in *Wuthering Heights*. Whereas Emily did not attempt to portray a realistic fight or describe the violence, Anne was careful to detail all the effects of the struggle. As Liddell (1990, p. 12) says, “blood is shed and seen to be shed”. Chitham also views the

scene of Huntingdon's death as a commentary on Heathcliff's death (Chitham, 1983, pp. 106-107). These examples suggest moments when Wildfell Hall refers to Emily's text. Riffaterre observes, "Once the intertext is in the background its productivity ceases only at the end of the author's corpus" (1990, p. 92). Bronte's matter-of-fact descriptive realism occurs within and is enhanced by the context of Romantic expectations.

The subtexts involving Rose and Rev. Millward, the probing of the angel concept, the inadequate explanations provided by the narrators that force the reader to seek truth elsewhere and the interaction of the text with an intertext comprised of previous reading are all examples of ways in which Bronte fabricated fictional truth in Wildfell Hall. Riffaterre argues that fictional comes about through the suspension of verisimilitude and of time duration in the narrative. Both are elements that Bronte questions in Wildfell Hall through a variety of techniques. She repeats her themes in multiple contexts and synonymous forms each tending to confirm the truth of the whole.

Moral Truth

In the excerpt that began the previous section, Eagleton (2003, p. 14) stressed, among other points, the role of moral purpose in the development of the novel. "The sensational," he concluded, "is in the service of the socially responsible." Many critics (Brimley, 1918; Ratchford, 1960; Scott, 1983 & Thormahlen, 1999) have insisted that Bronte's concern in writing Wildfell Hall was primarily moral. Torgerson (2005, p. 15) argues that "Of the three sisters, Anne Bronte is the most direct and straightforward in her

use of literature as social critique”. Colon (2008) refers to Bronte’s remarks on telling the truth in the preface and calls it a Christian purpose. Scott (1983, p. 6) elaborates further.

In the only sense which ultimately matters Anne Bronte has not been read. . . . The reasons for these things are readily penetrable. She offers a different vision of life from her sisters’ works and a vision not all that congenial to the 135 years since she published. 1847-1982 has not been the best of epochs in which to be a specifically Christian writer—working out, however freshly and honestly, religious themes in a social aspect.

Since *Wildfell Hall* has enjoyed a fairly steady readership over the past 160 years, Scott seems to be saying that it has not been read from a specifically Christian viewpoint.

Bronte, nonetheless, has generally been categorized as a moralist and critics have often pointed out the moral lessons to be taken from *Wildfell Hall*. Colon (2004, p. 405), for example writes:

Like *Agnes Grey*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* focuses upon the moral education of its characters and its readers. Helen is transformed by her experiences. Gilbert is educated through Helen’s diary . . . and readers are exhorted in the preface to learn from the character’s mistakes. . . . In *Wildfell Hall*, Bronte examines what happens to people whose lives do not follow the perfect model of moral regeneration. In fact, she presents a world where the perfect model may not even exist. Like *Agnes*, Helen has an insufficient education that does not prepare her for the reality of her life, and she struggles between hope and despair as she attempts to survive.

Colon’s interpretation of the structure of *Wildfell Hall* responds to a complaint of some early reviewers who found that neither Gilbert nor Helen provided unambiguous moral examples for the reader. Whipple’s *North American Review* article (09/1848) directly blames the author’s character for the unpleasant elements in *Wildfell Hall*. “The work seems a convincing proof, that there is nothing kindly or genial in the author’s powerful

mind, and that, if he continues to write novels, he will introduce into the land of romance a larger number of hateful men and women than any other writer of the day” (Allott, 1974, p. 261). He accused Acton Bell of a tendency “to degrade passion into appetite, and to give prominence to the selfish and malignant elements of human nature” (Allott, 1974, p. 262). He predicts that because the book wallows in depravity while providing no uplifting vision of mankind, it will leave little impression. However, while admitting that the experience of Wildfell Hall or at least of the Brontes is new to him and that he finds it unpleasant, he is nonetheless remarkably able to identify the strengths of the book, that the scenes are truthfully imagined and therefore powerful. *The Rambler* (09/1848), on the other hand, refuses to accept the characters and scenes as truthful and considers the religious sentiment “false or bad, or . . . vague and unmeaning”. He hopes that the author will not write anything else (Allot, 1974, p. 268). Even Kingsley (1849), who generally admires the book complains that “The superior religious tone . . . is . . . quite neutralized by the low moral tone which reigns throughout”. In contrast, though the editor of *Sharpe’s London Magazine* (08/1848) finds Wildfell Hall offensive and the author’s religious thinking faulty, he considers the moral themes excellent (Allott, 1974, p. 264). The moral lessons of the novel are lessons that the protagonists need to learn along with the readers rather than attributes they can model for the reader. We can see the difference looking at the moral judgments that Helen often makes in her diary, either to herself as she comments on the events she is recording or to other characters as part of the conversations she records. Some commentators on the book have assumed that these judgments always reflect Bronte’s viewpoint. We could argue however that they as often

illustrate Helen's ignorance or her inexperience in social interaction. The lecture that she gives Huntingdon when he complains of her excess religiosity in chapter 23, mentioned earlier, is amusing because she misinterprets the situation and responds in such a way that she seems to confirm Huntingdon's judgment. In this encounter Huntingdon is, of course, expressing objectionable views that Bronte probably wanted to dismiss, but he does so in a half-teasing manner that may not have required so stern a rebuttal. In choosing to reply as she did, Helen possibly appeared cold and doctrinaire and may have pushed Huntingdon away. She records the incident as an example of how Huntingdon is failing to measure up to her expectations but it demonstrates equally how she fails to measure up to his. The ambiguity of the conversation is typical of Bronte's complex view of human interaction. Eagleton (1988/1975, p. 124) contrasting Bronte's moral position with what he describes as Charlotte's self-righteousness observes, "For such a resolutely moral writer, Anne Bronte is remarkably unsmug". The lack of smugness that Eagleton notes derives at least partly from Bronte's ability to show that the moral situations are always more complex than the character's pronouncements might lead us to believe. If early reviewers found the complexity of the characters to be a flaw because they didn't provide clear moral stereotypes, later commentators have sometimes criticized the book because they failed to perceive the complexity of the situations.

Scott, (1983, p.73) touches on this characteristic of the novel in a comparison.

It is like Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* in working, at a primary level, as a moralist's cautionary tale—a warning to the gullible or the emotionally uneducated—and one which is well realized. But additionally it throws, like Austen's first publication, so much more into the measure than the formula (careful-parable-about-living) bargains for.

In one sense, the moralist's tale that Scott perceives may have been simply a framework, one that would have been familiar to the Victorian reader. Davis (2008, p. 17) argues that the Victorian novel nearly always centered on a moral dilemma. "In the background to reading the Victorians there is always something problematically tough, hard, and narrow, the demanding claims of which have either to be met or resisted. Its name was morality or conscience." Davis uses an example from chapter 37 of *Wildfell Hall* to demonstrate how moral problems developed in Victorian fiction.

For there a wife who would just about manage to go along with the ways of her dissolute husband becomes a mother who cannot. At a deep primal level Helen Huntingdon fears the father's influence upon her boy—in both genetic and environmental terms, as we would call them—as she had not been able to fear the man's influence upon herself. But her absolute and transcendent need to counter the father's influence, and to provide what in abstract could be called a moral example, which is compromised within the particular relative circumstances in which she finds herself. Davis (2008, p. 26)

This is the moment when Helen discusses in her diary her inability to provide sufficient counterweight to Huntingdon's influence on Arthur because she is too grave to be an adequate companion for the boy. Her inadequacy with Arthur mirrors her prior inability to influence Huntingdon partly because she was too heavy-handed in her attempts to guide him. Agnes Grey, in Helen's first novel, similarly finds that it is much more difficult than she had imagined provide moral education to other people's children.

Whether or not Bronte's principal concern was moral instruction, Helen's moralistic language is a necessary element in the novel. Rivers (2005, pp. 126-127) argues that

Helen's central actions are so questionable that she needs to be otherwise very orthodox in her ideas and behavior.

Helen is presented as hyper-moral for the rest of the novel in order to compensate for the transgression of her flight and for her dubious position as self-supporting woman artist. Even in the very grip of her husband's oppression, she voices the proper rhetoric of the married woman whose first and absolute loyalty must be to her husband. Mr. Hargrave aids Helen against her husband's drunkenness by limiting his periods of after-dinner drinking, and Helen worries that "It seemed wrong that there should exist a secret understanding between my husband's friend and me, unknown of him, of which he was the object" (p. 263).

Rivers suggests that several of the plot complications, Hargrave's pursuit of Helen, her return to Grassdale to nurse Huntingdon, her dismissal of Gilbert after he has read the diary, are present to show Helen's moral steadfastness and dedication to duty. The difficult moral crises that she must surmount and the intensity of her moral discourse serve to redeem Helen, who "in the eyes of contemporary readership would have been so battered by her disobedient, unwomanly desertion of her husband" (2005, pp. 126-127). In contrast, Thormahlen (1999) identifies Helen as the most clearly Christian character in any Bronte novel and observes that, after her youthful error of using religious discourse to clothe her own desires, she never swerves from her paramount interest in salvation. Thormahlen also argues that the theme of salvation is the central preoccupation of Wildfell Hall.

If there seems to be a consensus among many critics that Bronte's primary concern was with moral truth, there are differing opinions over what moral truth she was advancing. This difference in interpretation may be a natural response to the Victorian novel. Shaw suggests that the realist novel introduced the concept of the inner life but

that this consciousness interacted in the world in complex ways. He argues that we should “engage realist novels in a dialogue concerning the issues that most concern us”. He adds “I believe that realist novels ask to be read in such ways” (1999, p. 37). Readers historically have responded to his call in discussing *Wildfell Hall*, using it as an exhibit in advancing a wide variety of theories concerning nineteenth century culture. One critical tradition focuses upon Bronte’s portrayal of the condition of women in Victorian society. Torgerson extends the theme to include a condemnation of all forms of oppression of the weak by the strong: of women by men, of children by adults, of the poor by the rich, and of animals by humans. Eagleton (1988/1975, p. 127) focuses upon the class conflict in Bronte’s novels. Speaking of *Agnes Grey*, he writes, “a major index of virtue is in fact the straight class-issue of how one treats the poor.” He faults *Wildfell Hall* for developing Gilbert “as psychologically interesting individual rather than as social symbol” (1988/1975, p. 135). Comparing *Wildfell Hall* to *Wuthering Heights*, he praises the latter for including mostly types rather than individuals. On the other hand, he argues that Bronte demonstrates in both her novels that the world of the upper class must be reprovved but cannot be reformed, leaving ‘disengagement’ as the only available course. Finally, *Wildfell Hall* has often been read as an embodiment of Christian morality. At no time in the preface does Bronte claim to be teaching morality although she does suggest that the truths she presents might serve as warnings to youth. Helen Graham frequently points the reader to moral truths that can be abstracted from the interactions occurring in the narrative but Helen also sometimes fails to perceive the reality of her situation and she often fails to respond wisely in social interactions. We are sometimes left with the feeling

that Helen would have liked to explain moral imperatives to us but that Bronte didn't let her speak unchallenged. Perhaps Bronte would have liked to provide clear moral lessons as well but she was too aware of the complexity of reality to permit herself to suggest that any courses of action were clear or predictable. She may have been too much like Booth describes Joyce to allow her moral concerns, related either to Christian witness or social justice, to surpass her commitment to report the facts of social interaction. Booth (1983, p. 54) writes, "And the youthful Joyce . . . argued that the artist has no interest in making his work religious, moral, beautiful or ideal; he wants only to make it truthful to fundamental laws." Bronte certainly wanted her work to be moral but not at the expense of truth.

Ethnographic Truth

Ethnographic truth is a variety of truth that has not been directly discussed in the criticism of Wildfell Hall, but the frequent critics who point out Bronte's detailed realism may sometimes be thinking of something like it and some critics (Torgerson, 2005 & Buzard, 2005) have used anthropological or ethnographic theory to interpret elements of the book. In an excerpt previously quoted, Eagleton (2003, p. 14) spoke of the attraction of 'the quotidian flow' of 'routine reality' but also argued that reality must be both 'individual and typical'. He suggests that the details of realism can lead us to mistake 'the trees for the wood' unless we capture both the telling detail and the pattern. Essentially Eagleton's prescription for the realist novel duplicates the goal of ethnography of communication—to provide a thick description of the event that reveals the patterns that

govern it. Fiction has often been linked to science. Fleishman (1978, p. 13), for example, describes the convergence of the two.

As in the human sciences which have been shown to operate by conceptual schemes tantamount to fictions, the role of literary fictions is to locate us in our human world, to contrive for us a securer perch in reality by all the arts at its disposal.

We might argue that Bronte's aim in her fiction was close to that described by Fleishman. Though she may not have had the terminology to speak of interaction ritual or ethnography of communication, there are indications that she was skilled at ethnographic observation. Her description of her wish to tell the truth in the preface can be interpreted as a desire to come closer to the truth of interaction in the real world. She says that the parts of *Agnes Grey* that critics objected to "were carefully copied from life with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 13). She continues that, in portraying vicious characters in *Wildfell Hall*, "I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear." We can see Bronte's concern with ethnographic truth in various ways.

First, the structure of her narrative focuses attention on ethnographic detail. In *Wildfell Hall*, much of what happens may contradict what is being said by the narrators, but it is the daily activity and the events that occur that are important rather than the perceptions that the narrators form of those events. Though the narrators often attempt to guide our perceptions of the other characters and of the events of the novel, Bronte rarely tells us how to interpret an action. "Anne Bronte's narrative manner operates like a transparent pane of glass," writes Scott (1983, p. 14). "We stare straight through it at the

subjects under consideration". She gives us enough information to allow us to go beyond the intuitions of the narrators. For example, she never states the implications of Helen's choice to visit Gilbert's family and not to visit any of the other neighbors though she makes clear early in the visit that she has not and does not intend to visit any of the other neighbors. It soon becomes clear as well that despite the surface coldness between the two she devotes her attention mainly to Gilbert during the visit. She records the conversation in which Huntingdon calls Helen a sweet enthusiast but does not comment on the obvious implications of the word. Although Mr. Millward's disdain for tea can be seen as a theoretical position against the Methodist tea gatherings and can place him at least somewhat in an anti-evangelical camp, Bronte draws no explicit inferences from his pronouncements. Victorian readers may have made the connections more readily than modern readers but, nonetheless, Bronte leaves the possibilities unstated. She merely observes what is happening with as slight an interpretation as possible. The most obvious demonstration of her concern with detail, however, is in the slight gestures and reactions that accompany dialogue and convey the primary significance of the encounters. In each interaction of the narrative, she reports words, gestures, actions, expressions, and silences but she does not report thoughts. Booth (1983, p. 45) suggests that the perspective that Bronte and her narrators assume is the closest to reality "The process most like the process of life is that of observing events through a convincing, human mind, not a godlike mind unattached to the human condition." It is also, however, the closest to ethnography. Bronte's narrators perform the role of participant observers. Like all participant observers the narrators are sometimes blinded by their theoretical and cultural

expectations but, though they constantly interpret, the recorded interactions undercut their perceptions. Wildfell Hall is, in fact, a series of speech events tied together by narrative description that serves to fill in the context of the encounters. Every sentence of the book involves social interaction. When no communicative event is occurring, the description is nonetheless a communicative event. Gilbert is always reporting to Halford in the narrative and Helen is debating herself in her diary as she attempts to understand her situation. The narrators are ethnographers not only in their focus upon the communicative event but in their compulsion to maintain field diaries of their observations.

Bronte implies that the characters that people her narrative are drawn from life, writing, "I know that such characters do exist" (Bronte 1966/1848, p. 14). The previous chapters of this study have considered specific communication events in the light of theories such as interaction ritual and ethnography of communication. Specific scenes were chosen because they illuminate different aspects of Bronte's narrative technique or help to clarify the complexities of theme or plot. Throughout the novel, however, each successive instance of social interaction is easily interpretable as a communicative event and each illustrates the theoretical expectations of such events. Franklin, using the terms of speech act theory argues, "the 'constative' truth of realist novels is that truth inherently is 'performative': conventional, socially contingent, negotiated through its enactment" (1999, p.30). Although Bronte could not have been familiar with sociological and anthropological theories that were developed more than a century after her death, her writing precisely embodies those theories and leads us to speculate that she bases her fiction on careful observation of human interaction. We can only assume that when she

constructed the interactions of the narrative she was guided by at least an intuitive awareness of the processes of social interaction described by Goffman as interaction ritual. We may conclude that, like Hymes, she grasped at least subconsciously what elements were significant in the communication event and that she was careful to provide the reader with the contextual details necessary to grasp the implications of what the characters were saying. Whether Bronte was imagining a narrative and inventing all her speech events or, as some earlier critics imagined, merely recording events that she had witnessed, she is clearly exercising imaginative power. Lewes (1865, p. 578) wrote that “it is in the selection of the characteristic details that the artistic power is manifested”. Lewes claimed that most individuals are incapable of clearly imagining what is familiar to them and that even if they could form images of the scenes of their daily lives they would not be able to describe them. To do so, “they would need the delicate selective instinct to guide them in the admission and omission of details, as well as in the grouping of the images” (Lewes 1865: 578). What Lewes speaks of is related to Eagleton’s (2003, p. 14) requirement that the novel be both ‘individual and typical’.

Morson (2007, p. vi) considers the problem of describing reality from a slightly different perspective, citing Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein writes, “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.) . . . And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen is most striking and powerful.” The key details of the communicative event may be too familiar for the casual observer to notice. The task of the ethnographer or the novelist is to

perceive these details and identify them as significant. Handler and Segal (1990) in their study of Austen's novels describe this process, when applied to research into one's own culture, as defamiliarization. Ethnographers also have such tools as Hymes SPEAKING grid to aid them in analyzing the communicative event and identifying the key details. A novelist in the 1840s may not have had a clear research design to guide her observations, but she might, nonetheless, be an equally perceptive observer. Gilbert's interactions with his siblings in chapter 1 and with Helen and Eliza in chapter 2 or Helen's coldness when Gilbert visits her in chapter 7, bringing Eliza with him, play out as classic demonstrations of interaction ritual, though Bronte would not herself have had access to Goffman's theoretical arguments.

Parman (2005, p. 3) is introducing an ethnography of a Scottish farming community but could easily have been speaking of a novel such as *Wildfell Hall* when she writes that "Meaning is generated through interaction. When ethnographers interact or observe interaction, they are observing how people create and maintain meaning in various contexts. Meaning is always contextual." In *Wildfell Hall*, reality is seldom what the narrators interpret it to be and events rarely progress according to their predictions. Even when one of the narrators indulges in character descriptions, as Gilbert does when he introduces his neighbors in chapter 1, they serve more to reveal the narrator than to guide the reader's response to the neighbors. Each social interaction revises and refines the meanings that the narrators have stated. Bronte (unlike her narrators) doesn't insist on explaining the facts of daily life. She records the encounters and then allows the reader to evaluate them. Des Chene (1998, p. 40) notes, "It is in the minute practices of daily

living, mundane and extraordinary by turn that the working out of chance, pattern and worldview that anthropologists seek to portray is best discerned.” On the other hand, Des Chene argues that the conclusions intended to “illuminate general principles” are usually weak because they “strip away detail [and] idiosyncracies”.

Riffaterre (1990) argued that when the reader discovers details that the narration seems to be hiding or that the narrator may be unaware of, he assumes that such information is more truthful than the details that the narrator is stressing. These details also work to reduce narrative authority and open the text to other voices. This openness is in line with the trend in ethnography to disempower the participant observer. Tarn (2007, p. 183) advocates ‘getting rid’ of the influence of the participant observer, calling for “ever more exhaustive, purely descriptive ethnography with minimal ‘interpretation.’” Emery (1996, p. 19) speaks of “a growing distrust of master narratives and totalizing sciences” and the recognition that “truths can only be partial, situational and local”. She argues that anthropologists “can only know what their specific situational positioning allows them to know”. Buzard (2005, p. 9) criticizes the “restrictive significance” of modern ethnography in which ‘culture’ is essentially “that which it takes a Participant Observer to find.” By undercutting the authority of both Gilbert and Helen as narrators, Bronte has allowed the reader access to the detail and the voices of the text somewhat outside the limits of narrative interpretation. The nature of truth and falsehood are venerable questions for writers of fiction but the questions probably apply equally to writers of ethnographic works. We might ask whether truth can be seen as a product of insights obtained from unbiased ethnographic observation, even when those insights are

embodied in fictional characters. But ethnography also involves fictions. Kloos (1990, p. 2) argues that “in the case of the novel on the one hand, and the ethnographic account on the other, the differences are not so obvious and boundaries between the two are ambiguous”. He adds that, if ethnography is very well written, we say that it ‘reads like a novel’. Among the parallels that he finds between novels and ethnographies is the difficulty that both have in demonstrating reliability. Riffaterre argues that the novel, though fictional, has no intention to deceive and that it therefore clearly announces its fictions. We might conclude that ethnographers who claim that their interpretations of society are factual are guiltier than Bronte who puts her facts into a fictional mode and amply warns the reader that it is fiction.

One of the effects of Bronte’s plurality of voices is to bring the characters to life. The vividness of the characters and encounters of *Wildfell Hall* derives in part from the multiple perspectives deriving from the author’s willingness to let the reader interpret for himself. Booth (1983, p. 30) cites Ford Madox Ford’s statement that the novelist’s aim is “to take the reader, immerse him in an affair so completely that he was unconscious either of the fact that he was reading or of the identity of the author, so that in the end he might say—and believe: ‘I have been [there] I have been!’” Tschachler (1995, p. 254) relates a similar description made by Ursula Le Guin, “The place is there, the person is there. I didn’t invent him, I didn’t make her up: he or she is there. And my business is to get there too.” The careful choice of details, thick description of context, and close observation of interactions are the tools that Bronte uses to bring the reader into the narrative so that he feels he is there watching the encounters. *Wildfell Hall* can, in fact, be

a frustrating book because it brings us in to observe the details of interaction. The reader often wants to go in and shake the narrators, to tell them to wake up because they overlook the significance of details that they have set out for the reader or because they act on the basis of misunderstanding.

In the end all the forms of truth may be compatible. Essentially they are different ways of looking at the narrative, each different interest capable of aiding in the extraction of meaning from the text. Smith and Mosenthal (2001, p. xx) recount a classroom experience where students, asked to describe a slide under a microscope, were given microscopes calibrated to different magnifications.

While each looking glass has a calibration that yields understanding, each view yields a different impression and experience. It is by understanding the range of ways of observing and knowing that we come to understand the broader picture.

They conclude that “the world is replete with possible ways for seeing, experiencing, interpreting, and believing” (2001, p. xx). The early reviewers and later biographers who chose to look at *Wildfell Hall* as a factual account of experiences Bronte passed through may have insights to provide us. Her description of the progress of alcoholism, for example, clearly depends upon first hand observation of an alcoholic and her theories of education developed, no doubt, as part of her experience as a governess. Yet she also clearly transformed the foundation of experience turning the narrative into a work of art. Pinon, for example, comparing *Wildfell Hall* with *Agnes Grey*, calls it “less a transcript from life” (1975, p. 243) and stresses its “inventiveness,” “creative power,” “complex plot,” and “exceptionally well-organized detail.” Although *Wildfell Hall* is a masterful

performance, Bronte said it was not written to entertain. Her insistence recalls Hymes description of the Chinook stories: “One does not seem to find much display of performance for its own sake. The fuller the realization of performance, the sharper the etching of the moral point, which amid all the enjoyment which the stories provided, remained their primary *raison d’etre*” (Hymes, 1981, p. 322). Bronte clearly stated that she had no gift for speaking unless she had something to say. And she expressed the hope that the novel might serve as a warning for others. It is not surprising that many critics have stressed the narrative’s strong moral content, despite their disagreement about what her central moral concerns are. But the moral truths that may be contained in the novel are always embedded in social interaction. Bronte explores the dynamics of the speech community, examines the social functions of gossip, delineates the context of the speech event, probes the role of silence in communication, demonstrates the nature of interaction ritual, questions the relation of literacy and orality, identifies unexamined assumptions underlying speech, analyzes the social construction of reality, and suggests how greatly the complexity of reality surpasses what an individual narrator can imagine. Her analysis of these aspects of communication and social interaction imparts psychological truth to the narrative and helps us to understand the dynamics of our own lives. It is perhaps in her ethnographic verisimilitude that Bronte most surprises and speaks to the modern reader. It is possible to argue that in the preface to the second edition, she was speaking of her clear awareness of how social interaction develops or fails to develop when she wrote, “I wished to tell the truth”.

**PART 3: APPLICATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS TO THE TEACHING
OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

CHAPTER 16. FOPPISH ATTITUDES, HIDDEN INTENTIONS, FALSE REASONING AND WILLFUL BLINDNESS

An ethnographic analysis of a literary text can prove to be a significant tool for initiating a literary analysis. When we become alert to what is happening in the interactions of the text, we can begin to speak about the book on the basis of a firmer understanding of the details. Ethnographic analysis differs from such forms of textual analysis as stylistics by focusing on the language as it occurs in speech events rather than simply looking at it as the language of the text. The unit for ethnographic analysis is the communication event and the focus upon the event makes a difference in how we see the text. Many types of textual analysis focus on the language but thereby draw the attention of the reader away from the story. Stylistics at times basically dismissed the literary text as anything except a source for language samples. With ethnography of communication we are always focused upon understanding the communication event, understanding language in the specific circumstances in which it occurs. Thus, our insights into the language lead directly to insights into the characters.

This chapter centers on a literary question to show how ethnography helps to provide access to details that may lead to literary insights that change how we interpret a text. Hymes (1981) has suggested the utility of a close study of speech events to disclose literary insights in his re-analysis of "Seal and her younger brother dwelt there", a Clackamas Chinook story first collected and interpreted by Melville Jacobs. Jacobs had reached conclusions about the roles of the characters and the psychological import of the events that did not seem to Hymes to be fully supported by the action of the story. He

reconsidered the narrative focusing upon the participants in the interactions and the discourse they employed. In his comments, Hymes gives considerable importance to who speaks to whom and to what they say, especially within the context of a possible range of statements, derived from similar situations in other myths, that they could have made. While Jacobs assigns primary importance within the story to the uncle's wife, a character who does not intervene in the spoken interactions, and situates the primary conflict as between Seal's daughter and the uncle's wife, Hymes focus on the communicative events led him to conclude that the central conflict is between the two characters who interact in them, Seal and her daughter. He argues that Seal is not only the central figure in the narrative but also the character whose actions most directly lead to the tragic finale. In contrast Seal's daughter, interpreted by Jacobs to be the character whose inappropriate behavior caused the tragedy, emerges as the most prescient participant in the events. Hymes also demonstrates how the events focus upon the efforts of the daughter to warn her mother of the danger and the daughter's emotions in response to the murder that she could not forestall. Hymes distinguishes the two interpretations on the basis of the processes through which they are developed.

The first can be said to plunge into the heart of what is taken as the psycho-social core of the myth and to view its structure as unfolding from that vantage point. The second does not discover an import for the myth until a series of lines of evidence as to its structure has been assembled. (Hymes, 1981, p. 275)

In exploring the events of Wildfell Hall, I have attempted to follow the model that Hymes uses in interpreting "Seal and her younger brother dwelt there". We first direct attention

to what is happening in the communicative events and only when those events can be explained sufficiently to account for the responses of the various participants, can we begin to develop more general theories about the characters.

The six sentences that open *Wildfell Hall*, as Gilbert walks home from the fields on a cold October evening meditating upon the circumstances that led him to this particular life, illustrate how focus on the communication event can lead us to particular insights. In chapter 1 of the study we considered this scene in some detail. A number of points became clear; that Gilbert is unhappy with the direction his life has taken, that he cannot accept the label 'farmer' as a marker of his identity, that he believes he has great potential which he cannot realize as a farmer, that the compensations he suggests don't convince him, that he is trying to convince himself, and perhaps his friend Halford, of things he does not believe, and that he ties his actions to his parents' desires rather than his own decisions. Each time he expresses his submission to what he calls his father's 'express desire', he undercuts his statement of conformity with enough modifications to nullify it.

The opening chapter of *Wildfell Hall* introduces the narrator and all the important characters of the Lindenhope community as well as some of the conflicts that will be the central elements of the narrative. The chapter is notable, however, for the skill with which Bronte discloses the character of the narrator indirectly as she takes care of the overt housekeeping tasks of introducing the story. Before Gilbert even enters the house he has called into questions his opening remarks with several details that he mentions as he approaches the house and stands at the door. The communicative events that will

occur when he enters the house demonstrate that his situation is not precisely what he has led us to believe it is, and that he is not skilled at interpreting the words and actions of others. Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, and 12 of this study all focus on chapter 1 of *Wildfell Hall*, partly because that chapter is key to establishing our attitude toward Gilbert. The distance of Gilbert's image of himself from the image his family members apparently have of him undercuts our confidence in the accuracy of his narration and leads us to question his reliability.

The question of the reliability of the narrator is a significant one because it affects how we view everything in the book. Gilbert's unreliability may be very apparent to modern readers but generations of angry critics seem to have overlooked it. Helen, too, is given to false reasoning, willful blindness, and hasty judgments. Her unreliability may not be so readily apparent and fewer critics seem to have been upset by her actions. Because readers have not generally been as hostile to Helen as they have been to Gilbert and because many readers have identified her closely with Bronte and assumed that she speaks for the author, the discovery that she is unreliable is likely to have even greater impact on our approach to the book. The anger that some critics direct at both Helen and Gilbert may come from their belief that these narrators speak for the author, an obviously untenable position when we observe the interaction of the novel. Booth (1983, pp. 158-159) suggests that the degree of reliability may be the most important attribute of the narrator.

If the reason for discussing point of view is to find how it relates to literary effects, then surely the moral and intellectual qualities of the narrator are more important to our

judgment than whether he is referred to as “I” or “he,” or whether he is privileged or limited. If he is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed.

If the reader of *Wildfell Hall* is expected to assume that Gilbert and Helen are accurate interpreters of their society, then much of the anger of early reviewers is justified. Gilbert’s shabby treatment of Eliza and of Lawrence can not be justified. Helen marries Huntingdon despite the clear warnings of her Aunt Maxwell and her friend Millicent Hargrave, and then contributes by her attitude to the problems she later endures. Both of them can irritate the reader with their explanations and interpretations. But through analysis of the communicative events, we can see that Gilbert and Eliza are not competent interpreters of their society. Helen is, in fact, often confused by the simplest interactions and her clumsiness in social discourse awakens our empathy. Gilbert’s mistaken image of himself and his inability to let himself know what his intentions are also leave him vulnerable in society and allow us to empathize with him even though we may deplore his actions. The defects of Gilbert and Helen as narrators are, in large part, those that Booth (1983, p. 159) mentions as most common. “The narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him.” That Gilbert is mistaken in assessing himself is fairly obvious, and many critics, though they may not have accused him of unreliability, have, nonetheless, shown in their disparagement of his character that they do not share his estimate of himself. Helen is equally unable to assess her character adequately. Although she prides herself on her insight into the character of others she is often woefully inept at recognizing the qualities of those around her. She sometimes believes that she is behaving morally when she is merely reacting petulantly

and, though she believes that she bases her actions on prudent thought and intelligent analysis, she is more likely to act out of emotional impetuosity.

Gilbert

From the time of the first reviews of *Wildfell Hall* to the present day, Gilbert has provoked hostility among some critics. The reviewer of the *Literary World* (08/1848), shocked by the brutal criminality of Gilbert's boorish conduct and the brazen insufficiency of his apology to Lawrence, doubts he would be tolerated in any civilized community. He objects to the attachment of "intelligence and taste like that of Markham to his clownishness" (Allott, 1974, pp. 258-259). The reviewer especially criticizes the author for making so repulsive a character her hero. The *Rambler* (09/1848) considers his "morals, religion, cultivation, and talents . . . about on a par with Jane Eyre herself" (Allott, 1974, pp. 267-268). To a large degree, some reviewers seem to criticize Brontë for creating complex rounded characters drawn from life that do not fit easily into the patterns of stock characters responding to carefully selected stereotypes drawn from previous fiction. The complaint may be essentially that the characters are not easy to figure out, that they are too multifaceted. On the other hand, the early reviewers seemed to expect a straightforward identification between the author and narrators. Whipple, in the *North American Review* (09/1848), criticizes Gilbert as unpleasant although he appeared to be a great favorite with the author. The implication of this comment is that the author is unaware of or indifferent to the negative aspects of his personality or that she generally approves of Gilbert's attitudes or even his actions in the narrative.

Gilbert's quick anger 'and bitter tone' toward the characters around him are questioned by Charles Kingsley, who feels that the attitudes he discloses make it unlikely (though not impossible) that Helen would be attracted to him. Kingsley also feels that Gilbert acts in two quite different ways among his friends and with Helen so that, rather than being seen as a character tottering between two standards of conduct, he seems to be two separate characters with no unifying center. He notes that Gilbert demonstrates "a very passionate and somewhat brutal temper, and, . . . a wanton rejection of a girl to whom he has been giving the most palpable and somewhat rough proofs of affection, and whom he afterwards hates bitterly, simply because she rallies him on having jilted her for a woman against whose character there was very possible ground for suspicion" (Kingsley, 1849). Kingsley brings out several of the principal controversies about Gilbert's conduct. The objection to Gilbert's treatment of Eliza is exact and possibly the only mention of this conduct in the early reviews.

Later critics have looked at Gilbert from three perspectives. Some have seen him as a flawed character because he is not plausible as a suitor to Helen (Kingsley, 1849) or because his flaws make him unsympathetic to the reader. Others (Colon, 2004) view the novel itself as the story of the education of Gilbert necessary to make him a worthy suitor. A third viewpoint suggests that Gilbert's inadequacy may be the result of Anne's intention to show that the system itself made it unlikely that Helen would encounter a satisfactory husband. Chitham (1991), viewing *Wildfell Hall* as, in part a reaction, to the novels of Charlotte and Emily, believes both Helen and Gilbert were designed as antidotes to the excesses of their protagonists. To this end, Bronte made her protagonists

everyday normal people. “The mysterious stranger at the old deserted hall would be de-romanticized and Gilbert, the impetuous and sometimes peevish young farmer who falls in love with her would be as unByronic as possible” (Chitham, 1991, p. 142). Chitham argues that Bronte’s success in making apparent Gilbert’s flaws may have discredited him as suitor to Helen.

Rochester is a hugely warm-hearted, larger-than-life Byronic hero. Anne splits him in two, giving his intensity in love to Gilbert (though realistically damping down his selfless ardour) and his thoughtlessness, arrogance and riches to Arthur Huntingdon. Gilbert would walk through the book with a host of male faults. He would be petty, self-centered, impulsive, short-sighted and insensitive. Through him, Anne intended to make the male of the species as she really found him: very unheroic. In choosing to make her hero so uncouth, but without Heathcliff’s attractive excess, Anne imperiled the book. She borrowed aspects . . . to create a character whom she, the author, could hardly love. Unfortunately the reader may begin to doubt whether Helen can. (Chitham, 1991, pp. 142-143)

Though Westcott (2001, p. 218) is perhaps more explicit than Chitham in enumerating the defects in Gilbert’s character, she does not question Helen’s ability to love him. She notes that though the reader is given enough evidence to judge Gilbert’s conduct, “Helen is only permitted to judge his ‘best face’”. She does, however, doubt that Helen’s marriage to Gilbert could be happy and suggests that “Bronte could no more imagine a traditional happy ending for Helen’s second marriage than she could for the tenant of Wildfell Hall’s first soul-destroying experience” (Westcott, 2001, p. 223). In contrast to the critics who see the novel as a depiction of the process of transformation of the narrators, Westcott argues that there are “too many illustrations of her first narrator’s strong prejudices and manipulative actions for us to think Markham’s nature capable of the necessary metamorphosis”.

Twycross-Martin (1998, p. 24) notes that Gilbert himself demonstrates in his letter that his earlier self was “egotistical and selfish” but also showed that he admired Helen’s moral superiority and that he was capable of learning from her. Gilbert also demonstrates his plausibility as a romantic interest for Helen in his reaction to her art. Gilbert first intruded on Helen’s painting, Rivers (2005, pp. 124-125) notes, when he interrupted her during the excursion but, in keeping quiet, helping her with her equipment and then speaking knowledgeably when she asked his advice, he demonstrates his sensitivity and gains her trust. Rivers writes that discussion of art creates a space for greater intimacy where characters demonstrate their moral worth. Huntingdon, in his self-centered focus on the drawings of himself and general lack of interest in Helen as an artist otherwise, shows his lack of sensitivity (as does Gilbert on an early visit when he looks without permission at the painting turned against the wall in her studio). Morse (2001) argues that Gilbert’s recognition of Helen’s moral superiority demonstrates his worthiness. She notes that his discourse style seems to have been influenced by Helen and that, by ceding his inheritance to Fergus and living on his wife’s property, he has signaled his rejection of the unjust property laws of England.

In analyzing Gilbert’s character, Kingsley (1849, p. 425) can find no characteristics that he feels would be sufficient to attract Helen, “absolutely no reason at all, except the last one in the world, which either the author or she would have wished, namely, that there was no other man in the way for her to fall in love with”. His intuition that the only cause Helen might have had for choosing Gilbert is that she had no other prospects around is close to the feminist argument that the book was intended to show

that the problem was not simply the choice of a bad husband but the fact that there was little prospect for any Victorian woman to obtain a good husband. Therefore Gilbert was not an ideal mate but he might have been the best she could do. Some more recent reviewers suspect that Bronte may have been suggesting precisely what Kingsley believed she would not have wished. Colon (2004, p. 405) argues that “Bronte examines what happens to people whose lives do not follow the perfect model of moral regeneration. In fact, she presents a world where the perfect model may not even exist”. Jansson (1998, p. 45) finds many details implying that Bronte also doubted Gilbert’s references to his happy marriage. She points out that in the final section of the book Helen is silenced and we have only Gilbert’s perspective.

Even supposing that Gilbert is inadequate as a consort for Helen, she may have had several reasons for choosing him, especially given the limited range of alternatives that she may have felt were available. Throughout the first section of the book, Gilbert has shown himself to be a positive masculine influence on her son, despite Helen’s initial reluctance to permit much interaction between them. Helen has admitted in her diary that she cannot fulfill all of Arthur’s needs alone and she has noted that she lacks the ability to play with her son. And after experiencing Huntingdon’s pernicious influence on the boy (Jansson, 2005), she probably values someone capable of providing a safer masculine image. He has also taken her opinions seriously, in contrast to Huntingdon, and proved himself capable of learning from her and accepting her counsel. She frequently meets him as he appears to be engaged in farming activities and thereby exhibiting a more productive and serious lifestyle than the one embodied by Huntingdon. (At times, Gilbert

manipulates her into encountering him, but the space of the encounters is important. he demonstrates that he is a responsible farmer, rather than an indolent landlord.) Gilbert drinks tea but Bronte never shows him drinking anything stronger. Helen's original reaction to Gilbert motivated in part by her experiences with Huntingdon was disdain and possibly dislike. When he smiles at her on their first meeting or stares at her in church he seems to be behaving as Huntingdon did and he produces an immediate rejection by Helen but during the course of the first section and then after the diary during final part of the book, Gilbert goes through a series of tests. His first gift to Helen is a book setting him apart from Huntingdon who had no interest in books. His response to Helen's painting, as has often been pointed out shows greater empathy and greater knowledge of and interest in painting than Huntingdon's reactions did when he first looked at Helen's painting. His reaction to learning of Helen's marriage to Huntingdon is, after initial hesitation, more moral and patient than Hargrave's reaction. Gilbert has a varied set of responses. Whenever he must explain himself he fails because of his indirection and unwillingness to risk rejection. But when he responds to Helen's ideas and interests he shows himself to be more aware of issues relating to art, literature and education and he shows himself to be more teachable than Arthur Huntingdon. Helen had said that she wanted to rescue Arthur and was unable to do so. With Gilbert, previous experience led her to believe that he was a safer subject for improvement. Beyond these practical defenses of her choice and despite Kingsley's argument, there are several strong indications in the book that Helen is attracted to Gilbert. This is obvious when she shows that she already knows who he is when he first visits her. Also, she returns Mrs.

Markham's visit whereas she doesn't return the visits of any of her other neighbors. Helen fosters the relationship with Gilbert and comes to take him as a friend before she is forced to let him know that she is married. His circumspect dealings with her, his teachability, and his interest in her interests, all demonstrated before he had any idea who she really was helped him to build her trust. As someone who had been attracted to Helen and interacted with her before she became a wealthy widow, Gilbert may also be a safer choice for Helen who otherwise would risk, once again, the danger of choosing a suitor interested primarily in her property.

Whereas earlier critics assumed that Gilbert spoke for Bronte and that his numerous defects represented flaws in her vision, more recent critics suspect that Bronte created him with serious defects that emphasize certain themes of her work. Those who criticize Gilbert's character often point to specific actions or words, his attack on Lawrence, his egotistical reading of Helen's diary. What an ethnographic reading of Wildfell Hall does is to stress how clearly Gilbert's reading of events is mistaken from the earliest moments of the narrative. Eagleton, in fact, speaking of the moment that Gilbert stands outside the farmhouse and then enters to encounter his sister on the stairs, notes "the deliberate falseness of tone with which he and his domestic context are presented. There is a gossipy, self-indulgent, complacent domesticity about the Markham family which is intended to put the reader on guard" (Eagleton, 1988/1975, p. 129).

Gilbert wants to be admired. He postures, he brags, he praises and defends himself. He appeals to the reader for his approval, always anxious to make a good impression, not only upon his neighbors but also upon the reader. This being the case he

might well be disappointed were he to read the reaction of reviewers and critics who have often reacted negatively to him. Because he has been somewhat spoiled by his family and taught to think better of himself than he might strictly have reason to do, he no doubt would have expected greater leniency from reviewers than he has received.

Gilbert's unreliability as a narrator is apparent from the opening lines when he introduces himself and is immediately shown to be misleading when we witness the reactions to him of his mother and siblings. We become used to and expect his prevarication each time he describes his motives and the consistent problems he gets himself into for dissimulation are the motivating forces of the novel. Because he is an accurate recorder of events, even including his own actions, we may not immediately perceive his unreliability. However, when we focus upon the details of events, we notice that though Gilbert records significant details, he often fails to interpret them correctly. In the encounters with his siblings and mother early in chapter 1, Gilbert is trying to present himself positively to Halford. Yet, his comments about correcting Fergus on the stairs and his mother's dismissal of his criticism of Fergus shortly after this in the parlor lead us to suspect that, rather than trying to distort his situation to impress Halford, he is genuinely unaware of how other members of his family perceive him. Mrs. Markham clearly addresses her sons as children, demands their obedience and displays rigid impartiality in responding to their summaries of their activities for the day. Although she does not really listen to either Gilbert or Fergus, she firmly demonstrates that she is the only authority in the family. Yet Gilbert seems not to realize that in presuming to correct Fergus he is encroaching upon her prerogatives. And he seems unaware that Rose and

Fergus continue to view him as an equal rather than as the substantial farmer he believes himself to be.

His unreliability is much more immediately apparent than Helen's and derived from sources somewhat different than hers. Most importantly, his natural evasiveness prevents him from disclosing his intentions even to himself twenty years after the event. Secondly his theatricality forces him to forever posture. The difference in tone between the letter and diary sections partly derives from a difference in purpose. Helen is attempting to convince herself of the truth of things she doubts but believes she should not whereas Gilbert is posturing before Halford. Helen has a strain of self-righteous moralism that goes beyond Gilbert's but he takes himself more seriously than he should and manifests a stuffy vanity that Helen is more or less free of. Eagleton's (1988/1975) observation of the false complacency and overdone refinement of the Markhams provides a clue to the smugness that Gilbert repeatedly manifests. It helps to explain how Gilbert can condone his mother's gossip and condemn Mrs. Wilson's despite their identical activities. One clue to the unreliability of Gilbert is that the comments that he makes so often appear ridiculous. His narrative is in one sense more complex because it is the middle-aged Gilbert who is the narrator and a much younger one who is the actor in the narrative. The middle-aged Gilbert can safely ridicule his younger self and, in fact, feels he is stressing his greater maturity in distinguishing differences between his present and former selves. Of course the differences between the two are not as great as the narrator would have us believe and there are many indications that the mature Gilbert is no more reliable than before. A close comparison of his words with his participation in events

demonstrates that he is unable or unwilling to correctly interpret what is happening around him. His vanity, like Helen's certainty that she knows, distorts his view of events.

Gilbert's interactions with Eliza Millward throughout the novel, as Kingsley (1849) noted, are worthy of censure and call his character into question and yet he tells us enough about them to condemn himself. The kiss that he extracted at the close of chapter 4 provides an example of some of the questions raised by his treatment of Eliza. First, kissing Eliza in the doorway was inappropriate behavior if he did not have serious intentions toward her. The kiss was likely to be more compromising for her than it was for him, and thus raises doubts about his concern for her. In kissing her as he did, knowing that he could easily be seen (in fact was seen) and that his action would make both Eliza and him the objects of gossip, he wasn't behaving responsibly toward her. Eliza's reputation would be especially important to her because she has no property or inheritance to add to her attractiveness. But he acknowledges from the beginning that he does not find Eliza pretty and, though he seeks to justify his interest by praising her eyes, he really seems to be only flirting to gratify his vanity and pass the time. Mrs. Markham doesn't consider her a suitable match for her son and he tells his mother that he has no serious interest in Eliza. He claims to Halford that he only kissed her out of pique because Rev. Millward stopped the dancing. All of this could be blamed on youthful heedlessness but he tells Halford about the incident although it took place twenty years before and does not materially affect the story he is recounting about his marriage. He has now been married to Helen for twenty years and this discussion of his former liberties with Eliza is a gratuitous slur on Eliza, who has long since married someone else, as well

as probably vexing to his wife, who in her diary stated emphatically that she did not wish to hear about Huntingdon's previous romances. The younger Gilbert acts inappropriately but has not yet developed a mature conscience and seems not to perceive any error in his actions. But the older Gilbert, who seems almost to be bragging as he recounts the incident, also fails to show any awareness of wrongdoing. Although he writes "I fear I must plead guilty," he seems almost to be smirking as he writes it. The kiss that Gilbert gave Eliza was only a minor trespass but the tale telling of the older, narrating Gilbert is a more serious breach of propriety.

Gilbert has chosen Eliza as a romantic interest because there are few choices in the neighborhood. Jane is two years older than him, more educated, and emphatically uninterested in a spoiled and immature farmer. She no doubt fails to treat him with the kind of deference he expects. Mary Millward is older, unattractive and unflirtatious. There isn't anyone else that we are aware of. In contrast to Eliza, Helen is beautiful, more highly educated and as we later learn much more economically desirable. Gilbert's first thought on seeing her is that he wouldn't want to marry her, an idea that wouldn't have entered his mind unless she struck him at first sight as someone he would like to marry. In Helen, he simply finds someone he is attracted to more than he is to Eliza and he decides to trade up. But he needs to justify his switch in allegiance to himself and others by finding fault with Eliza and convincing himself that his change is caused by her faults. The faults that he finds are often subjective or at least not readily apparent. After praising her eyes immediately before seeing Helen, he notes later that there is something in her eyes he does not like. Though he becomes angry at her for gossiping, she is clearly not

effective as a gossip. Both Gilbert and Jane surpass her and both also humiliate her in the gossip at the party in chapter 9. He treats her very badly on several occasions, most notably at the party and he is not able to justify his actions. His anger at her when she tries to communicate information to him is uncalled for because she is behaving as she normally would whereas he has changed unexpectedly. The day of the walk to the ocean, his conduct toward her was also unkind. Yet as the narrative progresses, his aversion to her becomes more pronounced and he injects unnecessary criticism whenever he mentions her. The middle aged Gilbert has not yet developed very far from the twenty-four year old Gilbert of the narrative. He claims to be different from his younger self, but his extreme and unjustified criticism of Eliza as well as his gloating about the kiss show that he is not much more capable of seeing himself clearly than he had been at twenty four.

Frederick Lawrence is a second touchstone that helps us to judge Gilbert. His conduct toward Gilbert is consistently more tolerant and gentlemanly than Gilbert's toward him, yet Gilbert repeatedly questions his character. This discrepancy leads us to question Gilbert's objectivity. When anyone fails to sustain his line he is highly critical in his response. Kingsley points this out when he criticizes his uncalled for hostility toward Eliza after he has behaved badly toward her. Gilbert tends to be especially critical toward those he has wronged. Frederick and Eliza are both essentially blameless in their actions toward him and this may be what pricks Gilbert's anger in his discussion of them. Gilbert introduces Lawrence briefly at the end of chapter 1 as an element in his gossip about Jane Wilson but does not begin to describe his character until he arrives at the Markhams'

party in chapter 4. Here he labels Lawrence polite and notes that he is the object of Jane's attentions. Mid-chapter, he develops an extensive portrait that begins with positive terms (gentlemanly, inoffensive) describing his interaction at the party. He notes that he and Lawrence are "on tolerably intimate terms," later adding that they are best friends. But then he begins to criticize Lawrence as too shy, reserved, and sensitive so that he can flatter Halford and assure him that he is a better friend. He also calls Lawrence misguided because he prefers Jane to Eliza although Gilbert has already described Jane as superior in every way to Eliza. This remark later becomes ironic when we see how violent Gilbert becomes when he believes that Lawrence is his rival for Helen. As the party continues, the guests besiege Lawrence for information about his tenant but he changes the subject. Toward the end of the party when Rev. Millward is condemning Helen's views on alcohol, Lawrence defends her position, though much more politely than she had in chapter 3. Finally Lawrence asks his opinion of Helen and seems annoyed that Gilbert does not like her.

In chapter 6, Gilbert, returning from walking Helen part way home, encounters Lawrence and each man aggressively questions the other's conduct toward Helen and toward their respective interests: Jane and Eliza. Lawrence declines to join the others on the excursion to the ocean in chapter 7, apparently because Helen is going. At the Markhams' second party in chapter 9, Lawrence is an object of the gossip that is being exchanged. The party ends with another argument between Lawrence and Gilbert, who reacts angrily to Lawrence's attempt to warn him against becoming interested in Helen. By the time they meet in chapter 10, Gilbert has become physically abusive and

threatening toward Lawrence and is prevented from greater violence only by the arrival of Rev. Millward. In chapter 12, Gilbert observes Lawrence conversing with Helen and believes that his fears have been confirmed, leading him to violently attack Lawrence with a whip in chapter 14. He leaves Lawrence lying in the rain, severely injured and semi-conscious, alongside the road to town. When news of Lawrence's serious condition becomes known, Gilbert refuses to visit him. Following this incident, Helen loans Gilbert her diary and he learns that she is Lawrence's sister. When we return to Gilbert's narration in chapter 45, he is anxious to make up with Helen and doesn't remember Lawrence until she observes, "we can hear of each other through my brother". When he leaves Helen, he goes directly to Lawrence to try to resolve the situation created by the attack. The encounter between Lawrence and Gilbert in chapter 45, the first between the two since Gilbert's savage attack in chapter 14, but chronologically occurring three days after the earlier encounter, is a useful communicative event for observing the relation between the two. It serves to re-establish interaction between them and to link the events of the final section of the book with those of the opening section. Arriving at Lawrence's home, Gilbert learns that the owner is very ill but nonetheless insists upon entry. Despite being told once by a servant and twice more through responses sent from the sickroom by Lawrence that his condition did not permit him to receive visitors, Gilbert bursts into the room. Lawrence, visibly ill and feverish, is startled by Gilbert's forcible entry and seems to believe he is about to be attacked again, but Gilbert selfishly insists on being heard. He ignores Lawrence's discomfort, tells him to be quiet, advances threateningly toward him, stopped only by Lawrence's motion to ring for help and then embarks upon a grudging

apology mixed with criticism of the victim's conduct. To Lawrence's initial challenge, Gilbert makes no response and his apology is, itself, only a reluctant, "I have not acted quite correctly toward you of late" (Bronte, 1966/1948, p. 315), tempered by the assertion that he doesn't care whether Lawrence pardons him or not. This minimal offering is rejected by Lawrence who restates it unflatteringly. Gilbert then revises the offering, justifying his conduct as a mistake and insisting that Lawrence had himself provoked it. But when he adds that he has agreed not to see Helen again, Lawrence applauds his action, chooses to accept Gilbert's previous offering, and expresses regret for his own part in the misunderstanding. Gilbert responds with his first real apology, which Lawrence accepts graciously. When they shake hands, Gilbert realizes how feverish his friend is. Only now, when he has taken care of his business does he have time to take any notice of Lawrence's condition. Hitherto, his selfish focus on his own problems has been apparent. The conversation turns next to Helen, leading Gilbert to agree to take a letter from Lawrence to the post office. In this encounter Gilbert, despite having earlier admitted to Halford that he felt shame when he thought of the attack, displays an inability to ask for pardon. Though he now seems to be clearly aware of the inexcusability of his conduct, he cannot bring himself to truly apologize until Lawrence has already forgiven him. Gilbert both knows that Lawrence deserves an apology and understands that his own future communication with Helen depends upon Lawrence, but he is too thin-skinned to risk rejection of a real apology or to submit to possible remonstrance. He makes no serious apology until he has already been forgiven. Gilbert's refusal to confront his errors in this encounter, reinforces the impression that his negative comments about both

Lawrence and Eliza throughout the narrative may derive from his defensiveness about his perceived guilt in his actions toward them. Though initially offended, Lawrence behaves generously toward Gilbert and by the end of the interview invites, almost begs him to visit again. In chapter 46, though Lawrence remains weak and ill, Gilbert spends much of his visit bothering him with questions about Helen and expresses annoyance with Lawrence's responses. A week later, when Lawrence is able to leave his house, Gilbert encounters him on the road, and despite Lawrence's objections, he insists on sharing what gossip he knows or imagines about Jane Wilson. Because he realizes his conduct here is questionable, he spends considerable time insuring us that his intentions were good. In chapter 47, he looks for Lawrence to ask about Helen and, finding him, begins to interrogate him without even an introductory greeting. When Lawrence mentions that he has a letter from Helen, Gilbert demands to see it and then snatches it from Lawrence's hand. Nonetheless, Lawrence remains friendly, allows Gilbert to keep the letter, and agrees to write Helen with a request from Gilbert. In chapter 48 Lawrence visits Gilbert to bring Helen's response, which he also allows him to keep. Chapter 49 describes the routine of frequent visits to Lawrence that Gilbert settled into, and the content of the letters that Lawrence passed on to Gilbert despite his disapproval of Gilbert's continued interest in Helen. In chapter 50, Gilbert sees Lawrence off when he goes to Grassdale on the death of Huntingdon, but then complains that, though he was gone ten or twelve days, he sent Gilbert no letters. On Lawrence's return Gilbert is furious that he doesn't volunteer information about whether Helen spoke of him. At this point, Gilbert the narrator admits that Lawrence was behaving correctly and that he should have had no

cause for anger against him but he adds that the younger Gilbert had not been able to view things so objectively. As the chapter progresses Gilbert becomes very touchy with Lawrence and then ceases to visit him for several weeks. Lawrence finally visits Gilbert to tell him he will be traveling to Grassdale. Gilbert senses that Lawrence expects Gilbert to entrust him with a letter to Helen but he chooses not to do so. In chapter 51, Lawrence returns to the vicinity of Grassdale to be married but Gilbert, receiving a garbled version of the news from Eliza, believes Helen is to be married. Gilbert rushes to Grassdale, intrudes upon Lawrence's wedding, complains that he was not informed, and is treated very well by Lawrence. Throughout the extensive interactions with Gilbert, Lawrence is patient and forgiving. Gilbert, on the other hand, tends to be peremptory and bullying. He is easily offended and, when he realizes that he is at fault, unable to apologize. The history of Gilbert's interactions with Lawrence is significant because it consistently contradicts what Gilbert says about Lawrence.

Helen

Early critics sometimes also reacted negatively to Helen. Whipple in the *North American Review* (10/1848) credits her as "strong-minded" and brave but complains that "if there be any loveable or feminine virtues in her composition, the author has managed to conceal them" (Allott, 1974, p. 262). Whipple's commentary may be less even-handed than it appears. To describe a Victorian woman as strong-minded was not entirely complimentary. This view of Helen has continued to find echoes up to the present day.

Sinclair, in her passionate dislike for Helen, seems to identify most of what early twentieth century critics found unpleasant in her character.

You suspect her of having endowed her heroine with beauty to make her go down. Only by her beauty and her horrific capacity for monologue does Helen Huntingdon shadow forth her role. But she doesn't go down. There is no bearing with Helen Huntingdon. If Agnes Grey is a little prig, Helen Huntingdon is a prig enormous, and a bore, monstrous and indefatigable, with unbounded power to lay waste and destroy. She is Anne Brontë's idea of noble womanhood, the first of the modern, large-souled intellectual heroines; and she has the large-souled, intellectual heroines's furious propensity to preach. (Sinclair, 1922, pp. vii-viii)

Shorn of Sinclair's emotional intensity, her objection to Helen seems to be that she is self-righteous and that she exacerbates her own problems through her words and actions. Thomson (1956, p. 128) similarly argues that like all Brontë heroines, Helen shows "heavy-handed tactlessness". She notes that, though Helen stays with Huntingdon as long as possible, she never misses an opportunity to point out his deficiencies to him, and that her attendance during his protracted decline and death must have "kindled a flicker of sympathy for the sinner." Sadoff (1989, p. 311) argues that Helen "sermonizes her husband to death". Jansson (1998, p. 39) suggests that Helen's reluctant and secretive manner of telling her story to Gilbert indicate she may be ashamed of her part in it, and that although Helen claims she is not to blame for her failed marriage, Brontë implies that she shares, unfairly or not, some of Huntingdon's degradation. Scott insists neither Helen nor Brontë ever suggest that Helen is an innocent victim in the marriage.

For one thing Anne Brontë is well aware that it takes two to make an unsuccessful marriage. Not only has the heroine herself to thank for getting in to this matrimonial trap, her awful match with Huntingdon, in the first place, against reasonable advice, good

evidence and her own best judgment. Both she and the book attribute the blame where it is due—herself—through all that follows, and there is no question of our ever being allowed to develop sympathy for her as a woman who was wronged by a social conspiracy, or unmitigated ignorance, or any other moral alibi. Spiritual pride combined with inexperience got her into the mess; these things make her a being long tormented and leave her heavily scarred; and whether through her Preface to the second edition or in the whole tone and trajectory of the text itself, the author operates no double standard of blame for the male and excuse for the female parties to the tie. (Scott, 1983, p. 78)

Having gotten into the marriage for whatever reason, Helen could not leave it without arousing condemnation from some Victorian critics (and from Rev. Millward when he learns the truth of her circumstances). Cunningham (1978, p. 36) asserts that Victorian convention offered only one possibility of escape to a woman in a bad marriage—the death of her husband. Although, as several early reviewers and later critics have pointed out, Huntingdon did conveniently die, his death came too late to completely justify Helen’s conduct. On the whole, however, modern critics have treated Helen sympathetically. Pinion (1975, p. 253) argues that of all the heroines created by the Bronte sisters, “Helen, despite her piety, is the most attractive”.

Helen was never adept at assuming the role of angel in the house that she consciously tried to embody. Even in the early period of her marriage, she found it difficult to follow the conventions of submission and obedience. On a practical level, managing a household may not have been one of her skills. Pal-Lapinski (2005, p. 1) quotes from Dr. Johnson’s dictionary the line from Richardson’s *Clarissa* that he uses to illustrate his definition of ‘domestick’: “The practical knowledge of the domestic duties is the principal glory of a woman.” In the first chapter of *Wildfell Hall* before we meet Helen, we learn from Mrs. Markham that it is precisely this practical knowledge that Helen lacks, a defect in her education that may have provoked some of the neighborhood

suspicion of her and which may also be one of the causes that early reviewers found her so unfeminine. For Mrs. Markham, it is a defining characteristic. In chapter 6, she directly warns Gilbert against, “some misguided, obstinate woman like Mrs. Graham, ignorant of her principal duties, and clever only in what concerns her least to know” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 58). Helen’s weakness in domestic knowledge, however alarming it may have been for neighbors and reviewers, may be an indication that Bronte was suggesting that alternate sets of priorities were also possible for women.

Though Helen often judges Huntingdon fairly severely as she recounts the history of her deteriorating relationship with him she does not reject her own part in the breakdown of their marriage. On the other hand, she is often clearly unable to see what is going wrong in their interactions. Huntingdon’s responses and comments demonstrate that he does not always understand the interactions between them in the same ways that she does. We glimpse the real problems of their marriage only through comments that each lets slip from time to time in conversations. In Helen’s diary we see her reactions to the interactions she experiences and through her reactions we get a glimpse at the interactions themselves. Helen generally believes that she acts morally in these encounters but the reactions of others toward her that she reports can give us a clearer idea of Huntingdon and of her own perceptions. She consistently takes a self-righteous tone with him. Huntingdon’s easy conquest of Helen demonstrates the inadequacy of her education, thus reinforcing the theories that she espouses in Chapter 3. The diary makes clear, though she does not directly admit it, that she was at least partly responsible for the failure of her marriage. At the outset of their marriage Huntingdon had many notable

defects and few virtues but he was not purely bad, just as Helen's virtues were mixed with some serious defects. He is at first only careless, conceited, spoiled, selfish, irresponsible and given to certain vices. His vices were more serious than Helen ever imagined but his later dramatic fall, provoked by alcohol, may not have been either so complete or so rapid without the influence of Helen. He suffered from having the wrong wife just as Helen suffered from having the wrong husband. It is doubtful that he could have been an adequate husband for anyone, but another kind of wife may have been able to establish some sort of *détente*. Someone whose beliefs and expectations were more attuned to his own might have suffered less from his vices and perhaps have been more successful in ameliorating his excesses. Brontë offers little evidence of this possibility but she does seem to suggest that the dissolution of the marriage was a joint enterprise. Helen doesn't come across as too perfect in her judgment of herself. There are many ways in which she calls into question her own actions. She is aware of her own excesses, though often unable to control them. She behaves willfully, ignorantly and foolishly when she is being courted by Huntingdon. She is unable to communicate with him when he becomes her husband. She is harshly judgmental toward him. Later, she is quick to judge Gilbert and find him wanting, although her reaction to him is much more complex than he realizes. Helen has gone through several years of suffering and is currently a fugitive in hiding because she trusted one suitor. She has also had to repel the advances of another equally untrustworthy suitor while still married to the first. In her years at Grassdale she has seen nothing that might cause her to trust men. But, nonetheless, as the novel demonstrates, she is attracted to handsome men. Her pursuit of Gilbert may be an

indication that she, despite the sufferings of her first marriage, has not grown as much as she thinks beyond her original failings. Both Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham are shallow and conceited. Yet, despite being married at the time she comes to Wildfell Hall, she has already begun to mention Gilbert in her diary soon after arriving. At least Gilbert and his readers are left with that suspicion when she pulls some pages out of the diary before entrusting it to Gilbert. She is also willing to lead Markham on when he is unaware of her situation though she senses his intentions and knows they are impossible. In one sense, Helen never learns. Even after her disastrous marriage she continues to be swayed by pretty faces. She moves from Huntingdon to Gilbert, despite clear evidence that he is neither open nor honest. As on the previous occasion, she chooses a new husband without sufficient observation and trial, proposing to Gilbert on first meeting him after a year's absence, without waiting to judge his current attitudes and expectations.

Helen's most serious defect may be her refusal to listen to others and the judgmental attitude that accompanies her certainty in her own opinions. This is highlighted in her invitation to Gilbert to have all the words he wants while she declines to listen to them. She got herself into the situation later described in her diary because she didn't know how to listen to others. Her ostracism by the community of Lindenhope derives partly from her unwillingness or inability to listen. She demonstrates this trait when she behaves rudely in the Markham home, cutting off Mrs. Markham, dismissing her counsel and reprimanding her for her comments about child-raising. She reaffirms it when she tells Mrs. Markham that she cannot imagine that Mr. Millward would have

anything to say that might influence her. She tends to assume that she is right and she seldom bothers to check whether it is so. Her principal joke (You may have all the words you please) is directly tied to the comments on useful talk. Helen dismisses talk on several occasions: her visit to the Markhams in chapter 3, for example, and the party at the Markhams in chapter 9; she also, in a sense, dismisses talk when Mrs. Markham visits her in chapter 1 by failing to show interest in and to respond adequately to Mrs. Markham's remarks, and when Rose and Gilbert visit in chapter 5 by paying halfhearted attention to her guests. If we believe the neighborhood gossip, and there is no reason to doubt it, Helen has shown no interest in the communications of any of her neighbors. Her distaste for listening can be seen in another light when we compare her conduct to that of Mrs. Murray, one of Agnes Grey's employers in Bronte's first novel. Mrs. Murray criticizes Agnes unfairly, almost provoking her to respond, "but she sailed away as soon as she had concluded her speech. Having said what she wished it was no part of her plan to await my answer: it was my business to hear and not to speak" Bronte (2005/1847, p. 149). Agnes's complaint about Mrs. Murray is substantially identical to Gilbert's complaint about Mrs. Graham. The exchange between Gilbert and Helen, however, is comic and Gilbert retells it to entertain Halford by making himself look foolish while the parallel exchange between Agnes Grey and Mrs. Murray demonstrates how unappealing the character trait behind both events can be.

Helen's refusal to stay to listen to Gilbert's words is especially amusing because she doesn't have much of a sense of humor most of the time. If she had had one she might have exerted more influence in her first marriage although her situation was always

pretty hopeless there. Her inappropriate response to Huntingdon's teasing as they walk home from church in chapter 24 is an early demonstration of how her seriousness would interfere with her ability to interact with her husband. She laments something akin to lack of humor in her diary when she laments her inability to be playful with her son. In this context, her joke to Gilbert, is even more significant, because it indicates an infrequent attitude. It shows in part her high spirits at the moment of her visit to the Markhams. At the same time that the joke indicates her high spirits and emphasizes, in her refusal to listen to Gilbert, her fault of not listening to others, it also shows her failure to perform the proper interaction rituals in her dealings with others, a failing that she has already exhibited in this sequence by insufficiently recognizing the deference due to Mrs. Markham's position as an older woman, respected in the community and owner of the home she is visiting.

The visit to the Markham's highlights not only Helen's unwillingness to listen but also her stubbornness. She dismisses the helpful counsel of Rose and Mrs. Markham, and insists on continuing her rude isolation from the rest of the neighbors despite Mrs. Markham's efforts to smooth her path. Helen's stubbornness is such that she is not even willing to listen to herself. Her early diary shows that she was clearly aware of the inappropriacy of Huntingdon's actions and her own behavior before her marriage but that she allowed herself to be carried away by infatuation when she should have been forewarned enough to avoid entanglement. Sutherland (1996) has demonstrated fairly conclusively that several elements in the novel can only be adequately explained by supposing that Helen was an illegitimate child. Other readers (Morse, 2001 & Eagleton

1988/1975) have argued that her probable illegitimacy has important implications for the themes of the novel. If she was an illegitimate child, raised by her father's sister, Aunt Maxwell, and if her father, whom she apparently met only briefly, if ever, was an alcoholic, then Aunt Maxwell has sufficient knowledge and experience of the problems Helen might be expected to encounter to warn Helen against people such as Huntingdon. In the conversation before going to London in chapter 16, Helen challenges her aunt (Have you ever been troubled in that way, aunt?), gives flippant responses (But what are all the poor fools and reprobates to do, aunt?), and stubbornly insists she knows what she is doing (Well, I shall be neither careless nor weak. I know it is. I *know* it is so.). In chapter 17, after Helen has behaved very improperly at a party, Aunt Maxwell conducts a long discussion with her. In this interaction, Helen makes foolish excuses, regularly interrupts her aunt, tries to respond with irrelevant information, distorts the meaning of questions, admits that the aunt is right about Huntingdon but refuses to accept the implications, tries to divert the aunt with flattery, turns flippant, then presumptuous, lies, denies facts she knows to be true, asserts facts she knows to be false, and makes irrational statements simply to disagree with the aunt. Helen concludes both interactions upset with Aunt Maxwell, but not only are the aunt's counsels sound they coincide with what Helen already knows and parallel comments that she has made about Huntingdon in her diary.

We can imagine that her lack of receptivity to the ideas of others will later cause her to have problems with her son Arthur at some point in his childhood though these conflicts are only occasionally hinted at in the novel. Thaden (1997) argues that Victorians believed that mother-child dyads were unhealthy, especially if the child was a

boy. Despite her arguments in chapter 3, Helen seems to accept this idea, at least partially. Though she blames many of her problems with her son on the influence of Huntingdon she is yet aware that, even after dispensing with her husband, she continues to be unable to supply all her son's needs. Though she at first discourages Arthur's desire to interact with Gilbert, she seems to accept that he provides access to activities that she cannot. Helen is over-judgmental in her dealings with others and over-protective toward her son, as she admits in her diary, but she is uncertain about her abilities as a mother to wrestle in her diary with her shortcomings and doubts. Like Gilbert, she is honest and aware enough to report events accurately enough to give readers insight into her situation and in the case of her role as a mother, she can also describe her feelings accurately. Because she doubts the adequacy of the mother-child dyad, as she shows in her diary, she is probably aware, despite what she told Mrs. Markham in chapter 1, that at some time she will need to remarry.

Helen thinks of herself, overall, as devout, intelligent, and rational. Gilbert credits her with superior intellect and moral integrity. But she is clearly more confused than she realizes much of the time. The portrait that emerges from her diary and Gilbert's letter is of a woman who struggles to interact effectively with others and creates many of her own problems through her social ineptness.

Reliability

In *Wildfell Hall*, the distance between the reader and the narration is lengthened by intermediaries. The "I" who is acting in the narrative is not the same "I" as the one

that records the experience. The older Gilbert distances himself from the younger Gilbert through various comments evaluating his younger self and seeking to separate his present self from words or actions of his youth. But despite his condescending attitude toward his younger self, the older Gilbert's attitude is equally suspect. We can laugh at his posturing before Halford and question his affirmations about the elements of the narration because the author encourages us to doubt him. Armitt (2000, p. 47) suggests that the enunciated "I" is never identical to the enunciator.

Lacan's famous claim is that the subject who enunciates the "I" is not identical with the "I" that is enunciated, because we project our own self continually onto a perceived other/self called "I" (the linguistic equivalent of our own mirror image). The signifier "I" is, in that context, one of mediation as much as one of connection.

But though Gilbert may mislead the reader to some degree simply in speaking of "I": as though the "I" he discusses is an accurate reflection of himself, he consistently goes beyond the expected dissociation, first by dividing "I" into two beings, sometimes using the pronoun to refer to the middle-aged farmer who is writing the letter and sometimes meaning his younger self, a personage he does not accept as fully identical with his present self. His distortion goes even further as he deliberately distorts the nature of his thoughts and acts even to himself. Booth (1983) categorizes relationships in fiction as more or less distant. The narrator for example may be more or less distant from the implied author, the characters of the story, and the reader's own norms. The implied author, at the same time, may be more or less distant from the reader and the other characters. Booth (1983, p. 158) argues, "For practical criticism probably the most important of these kinds of distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and

the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator.” Our ability to see implications that Gilbert does not see and to laugh at his misunderstandings and posturing discloses the presence of an implied author whose perspective differs from Gilbert’s. Westcott (2001, p. 216) argues that Bronte keeps Gilbert’s dual role as character and narrator before the reader. “His personal evaluations serve to expose more fully the difference between his perception of himself and the reality perceived by the reader.” Westcott also credits Gilbert with honesty in his narrative, for example reporting his true feelings on reading the diary rather than expressing pious wishes for Huntingdon’s recovery. His honesty, however, leads him to expose qualities in himself that he is mostly unaware of. “We must never forget,” Booth cautions, “that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear” (1983, p. 20). In *Wildfell Hall*, the author appears most clearly when she leads us through the details of events to doubt the narrator.

Or so, at least, it may appear to us. Several early reviewers were convinced that Gilbert did, in fact, speak for the author and they assumed that his shortcomings were shared were shared with or approved by her. Because Bronte never comments directly on the story, we can only intuit her voice from the details of events. Because the events so clearly contradict the interpretations that Gilbert, and sometimes Helen, make of them we assume that the author is deliberately distancing herself from the narrators. Other readers have assumed that the author looks upon Gilbert with approval, that she is as blind as he is to the defects of his character. Whipple, in the *North American Review* (09/1848), observes that “Gilbert, the hero, seems to be a favorite with the author, and to be intended

as a specimen of manly character; but he would serve as the ruffian of any other novelist. His nature is fierce, proud, moody, jealous, revengeful, and sometimes brutal. We can see nothing good in him except a certain rude honesty; and that quality is seen chiefly in his bursts of hatred and his insults to women” (Allott, 1974). The qualities that Whipple identifies make Gilbert unattractive as a protagonist but they do not make him unreliable as a narrator unless his perspective on himself and on the events of the story differs from that of the implied author. Seeking to define the concept of unreliable narrator, Booth singles out this relationship as the determining factor.

Our terminology for this kind of distance in narrators is almost hopelessly inadequate. For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the applied author’s norms) unreliable when he does not. (Booth, 1983, pp. 158-159)

Whether Gilbert is reliable or not, then depends principally or entirely on whether he reflects the implied author’s view of the narrative.

Booth describes several purposes of commentary by reliable narrators. These include providing facts, or a picture or summary of events (1983, p .69), molding beliefs (1983, p. 177), relating particulars to established norms (1983, p. 182), heightening the significance of events (1983, 196), generalizing the whole work (1983, p. 197), manipulating mood (1983, p. 200), and commenting directly on the work itself (1983, p. 205). In providing facts and picturing events, both Gilbert and Helen are fairly reliable. They are careful observers, noting key details and recording sufficient information to enable the reader to visualize the events. They are not, however, equally competent at

summarizing or interpreting the events they describe. We cannot usually take seriously the evaluations they make of the events they record. The opening scenes of the first chapter, during which Gilbert's family, one by one, undercut the inflated image that he had tried to present of himself in the opening sentences, or the first pages of the diary, in which Helen seeks to assume the pose of a mature and judicious recorder of events as she engages in adolescent rebelliousness and false reasoning are both examples of dramatic irony. For both Gilbert and Helen, the first interactions they describe already demonstrate their misinterpretation of events and false appraisal of their own characters. Though they record the communicative events, neither narrator seems to be aware of what they are disclosing about themselves. Helen will later realize that she was foolish or as she calls it 'willfully blind' in the early part of the diary but Gilbert never completely realizes how foolish he appears to others. Booth cautions that accuracy in stating details may not be enough by itself.

Whenever a fact, whenever a narrative summary, whenever a description must, or even might, serve as a clue to our interpretation of the character who provides it, it may very well lose some of its standing as fact, summary or description. . . . As unreliability increases, there obviously can come a point at which such transformed information ceases to be useful even in characterization of minds, unless the author retains some method of showing what the facts are from which the speaker's interpretations characteristically diverge. (Booth, 1983, p. 175)

In *Wildfell Hall*, our problem is that we obtain most of our information about the narrators and the other characters from the details of the communicative events. If facts that are clues to character lose some of their solidity as facts, we are left with little concrete information upon which to base our interpretations of the narrative. What seems

to resolve the dilemma is method that Bronte has chosen to support the realism of the novel. The precise, startling development of the speech events feels true to life. We trust the details of the events rather than the interpretations of the narrators because the events develop as we imagine they would have had to develop. The surprising gestures, mood shifts, and challenges, once they are reported, impress us as inevitable. Though there is dissonance between the events and the interpretations, there is no falseness of detail within the events. If the communicative events had seemed arranged or manipulated, the narrative itself would have become false or flat. But the characters and events live because of the striking rightness of the details. In speaking of Henry James, Booth touches upon two points that may help to explain why the details of *Wildfell Hall* feel so right. "Like Flaubert," he writes, "James was constantly concerned about achieving what is "natural," yet he was as much aware as Flaubert of the impossible complexity of reality" (Booth, 1983, p. 52) At an earlier point, he cited James on the organization of fiction, "In proportion as in fiction we see life without arrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention". As Helen and Gilbert write their texts, they tidy up the life they find around them, explaining and interpreting events for us, and characterizing the traits of their neighbors. But the events they record are always more complicated than their explanations. They are defeated by the 'impossible complexity' that Booth refers to. And as they try to arrange and order their universe, they find that their theories don't work out. Gilbert and Helen fail to interpret

correctly what they record because life can't be arranged logically. Their failure as narrators, to some extent, validates their accuracy as recorders.

Gilbert is dramatically unsuccessful convincing the reader to accept his perspective on the world. The events and other characters constantly undermine the image he wants to present of himself and of the world. These characters, Booth suggests, are in some sense narrators themselves. "The author," he argues, "is present in every speech given by any character who has conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability" (Booth, 1983, p. 18). Throughout *Wildfell Hall*, secondary characters help the reader to evaluate perspectives of the narrators by sharing their insights. When Gilbert's brother and sister complain about his difficult moods, when Mrs. Markham reprimands Gilbert for his conduct toward Eliza or rejects the line he tries to put forward in the first chapter, when Lawrence calls upon him to define his intentions toward Eliza and Helen, they are helping to define situations that Gilbert's narration has distorted. Similarly Aunt Maxwell's counsel to Helen about Huntingdon and Millicent Hargrave's reaction to Helen's infatuation with him, Huntingdon's objection to Helen's religiosity and Annabella Wilmot's observations to Helen about her failures as a wife all help to clarify situations that Helen either willfully blinds herself to or is able to see only partially. Booth would probably recognize each of these characters at certain moments as narrators. "We should remind ourselves," he suggests, "that many dramatized narrators are never specifically labeled as narrators at all. In a sense, every speech, every gesture, narrates; most works contain disguised narrators who are used to tell the audience what it needs to know, while seeming merely to act out their roles." Thus, the unreliability of

Gilbert and Helen opens the narration to additional voices. Because we do not know how to value much of what the central narrators say, we must pay closer attention to the insights of the characters that surround them. To say that Huntingdon or Annabella Wilmot, Mrs. Markham or Aunt Maxwell provides necessary information at certain moments is not to say that any of them consistently represents the views of the implied author. Each of them, however, is occasionally the voice of reality, resisting the constructs of the narrator and signaling to the reader that she needs to be aware of elements that the narrator is omitting.

Other voices enter with other pieces of narrative, subverting the principal voice, bringing into attention new fragments of meaning, and creating their own narratives. The shifting and unstable nominal or pronominal representations of identity disrupt the centering strategies of the narrative. These submerged voices not only undermine the stability of the “self” but also call into question the very notion of a unified coherent “self”. The narrative continuity has therefore been under threat of the competing, disrupting vocal challenges. (Lee, 1996, p. 1)

In another sense though, Gilbert and Helen are both involved in molding the beliefs of the readers. The central narrative of *Wildfell Hall* involves the protagonist in a series of actions that would not be generally condoned by the readers of the time. Helen’s attitudes as Mrs. Huntingdon often directly contradict what Victorian readers may have expected of a good wife. Although Helen sets out to be the angel of the house in her marriage to Huntingdon, she finds that she cannot embody that role in conventional ways. Huntingdon’s criticism early in the marriage of Helen’s insufficient devotion to him, though made partly in jest, would probably have appeared reasonable to many readers. Helen’s comic misunderstanding of Huntingdon’s tone certainly makes her, at this

moment, the equivocating participant in the interaction. As the marriage progresses, we see Helen behaving in an unangelic fashion. She tries to punish her husband for offenses, criticizes his actions, questions his character, discusses his defects with a male friend of his and accepts that friend's intercession to control his conduct. Later she abandons the marriage which would seem to make her a fallen woman and takes her son with her, which legally and morally could be considered kidnapping. While she is in hiding from her husband she supports herself by selling her paintings, thus lowering herself to commercial exchange, putting at risk the reputation of her husband if her actions should be discovered, engaging in activities traditionally limited to men. In addition the line between women artists and prostitutes being so narrow and ambiguous, her conduct might be considered doubly that of a fallen woman. In these circumstances, Helen's frequent moralizing is a key factor in the reader's ability to accept her conduct. For example, she leaves her husband and takes her son with her because she is afraid of the husband's negative influence on the development of the son, thus placing her angelic duty to protect her son over her duty to serve her husband. Helen's sermonizing is useful partially to reframe the reader's concept of wifely duties so that it might include such conduct as hers. Gilbert, too, despite his own frequently questionable behavior and his suppressed doubts about Helen's past, in his progressively more admiring references to her character, helps to establish an image of her for the reader that precludes believing the gossip that begins to circulate about her. When he reads the diary, his immediate shame at his own conduct and admiration for Helen's reinforces the validity of Helen's perspective on the events she records. In these ways both Helen and Gilbert do mold

beliefs creating the environment in which Helen's actions in the story can be accepted as morally motivated or a necessary fulfillment of her duty. To accept Helen as a model of virtuous conduct the Victorian reader would have needed to shift somewhat the parameters of virtue. Through their evaluations of the moral content of certain actions and situations, Helen and Gilbert help to guide the reader to view these actions, at least in the context of this narrative, to have been moral and, to a degree, acceptable.

Another form of reliability posited by Booth, relating particulars to established norms, appears to be generally beyond the abilities of these two narrators. Neither Gilbert nor Helen is particularly skilled at perceiving norms. Gilbert relates details that allow us to detect the norms that govern his household and, at times, as in his observations to Helen early in chapter 5, he is even able to call the attention of others to their failure to follow norms. His ineffectual attempts to behave properly in church in chapter 1 indicate that he knew what sort of conduct was expected. On the whole, however, Gilbert frequently acts outside of norms and shows little awareness of the extent of his trespass. For example, he manifests little remorse for his behavior toward Eliza or his brutal actions against Lawrence, though in both situations he was clearly acting outside the limits of decent behavior. Nor does he notice that his unpleasantness is disturbing his family. When they call his attention to his troublesome behavior in chapter 13, he comes close to ignoring them and responds with no regret for his attitude. Helen is perhaps less aware than Gilbert of her frequent failure to comply with social norms. Although she is willing to call the attention of others to their deviations from norms, she is often oblivious to the implications of her own actions. Most of the characters with whom she interacts

during the course of the novel sometimes feel impelled to indicate her trespasses to her. Her failure to conform to community norms is the focus of the gossip about her in chapter 1. Rose and Mrs. Markham each make pointed comments to her about her improper attitudes and behavior in chapter 3. Her unorthodox ideas form a topic for analysis at the party in chapter 4. Gilbert, as noted above, calls her lack of politeness toward guests to her attention in chapter 5. And so on, through Gilbert's narration, her social missteps accumulate. When Helen becomes the narrator, her ignorance of norms becomes even more notable. Though her conduct with Huntingdon causes her aunt to castigate her sharply several times, she refuses to accept her aunt's counsel. Her ability to define the norms of married life for Huntingdon and show him where he is failing is neutralized by her corresponding inability to see how she is also failing to accede to marital norms. The narrative of *Wildfell Hall* clearly defines the expectations of the communities it portrays, but it is not through the narrators that these norms are expressed or displayed. At this task, both Helen and Gilbert must be rated ineffective. In fact, their unreliability is exposed partly in their failure to perceive or follow the social norms.

Just as Helen and Gilbert fail to adequately relate events to norms, they struggle with another of the tasks that Booth gives reliable narrators. Rather than "heightening the significance of events," they often fail to perceive significance. One of the reasons that attention to the details of communicative events is so revealing in this novel is that the narrators who provide the details often seem, nonetheless, to overlook them. We become angry and frustrated with Helen during Huntingdon's courtship and early in her marriage because though we clearly perceive the significance of the details she narrates, she seems

to entirely miss it. Rather than simply failing to perceive, the narrators often misinterpret the significance of the events they narrate. Helen's tenderness toward Huntingdon when she overhears and misinterprets the conversation of his companions in chapter 33 and her subsequent misunderstanding of his embrace and solicitude for her in the garden are comic examples of her blindness to the significance of events but she fails consistently to interpret correctly in small as well as large matters. When she complains of the idle talk of the ladies of Lindenhope in chapter 9, she demonstrates how thoroughly she has misunderstood and continues to misunderstand the importance of the kind of talk they engage in for the construction of community and how, by insisting upon a different style of social discourse, she has alienated herself from them. In the diary, she records a similar error, demonstrating how she mistakes light remarks such as Huntingdon's teasing complaint about her piety as occasions for moral instruction. We feel that, in the beginning, some of Huntingdon's shocking conversation may have been meant to help her lighten up. Her tendency to quickly take offense certainly provoked him to challenge her. Like Helen, Gilbert misinterprets events regularly. We would hardly understand the narrative if we relied on his explanations. He is frustrated by the comments of his brother and mother in chapter 1 but doesn't realize what is happening. In chapter 2 he tells us everything about his excursion to Wildfell Hall except its real significance, his purpose for the trip. Later he attributes significance to his interaction with Eliza that, in fact, is nothing more than play-acting. In chapter 3, he does not divine the real purpose of Helen's visit to Linden Car. The reader identifies the significant events in the text through a variety of clues, but the narrator's interpretations seldom aid him directly.

Booth suggests that most of the tasks of the reliable narrator that we have considered can be performed in other ways without explicit commentary. He argues, however, that for “the task of generalizing the effect of the entire work, making it seem to have a universal or at least representative quality beyond the literal facts of the case,” a narrator may be necessary. He questions whether any other character can be sufficiently aware of the overall meaning of the whole narrative to supply generalizing commentary. In the case of *Wildfell Hall*, however, it is difficult to argue that either of the narrators is qualified to create this generalizing discourse. Helen’s narration, enclosed within Gilbert’s and concluding at the moment in 1827 when his begins, might be incapable due to these limitations of fully generalizing the effect of the entire work. But she is handicapped more by her misinterpretation of the event she narrates. Helen’s predicament illustrates many of the difficulties that Victorian wives might have to face but she herself may not entirely comprehend the implications of her situation. She is upset by Huntingdon’s defects but she may be only vaguely aware of the elements in her situation that are typical of her society. Gilbert tidies up the overall narrative at the end with a gossipy settling of accounts but he draws no general conclusions. Even so, his account is often disputed. Gilbert, so often confused in his perceptions and specious in his explanations, never develops credibility as a narrator and, as a consequence, readers are apt to question the rosy picture he draws at the end of his life as a substantial farmer happily married to Helen. Because neither narrator is really qualified to make generalizing statements, the novel ends without a clear statement of the representative value of the events. Readers do take universal lessons from *Wildfell Hall* but, because the

author forces each reader to look for the meaning himself among the situations and events of the narrative, they are varied and contradictory.

A further task assigned to the commentary of reliable narrators by Booth is “manipulating mood.” This is something both Gilbert and Helen clearly attempt to do. They are not, however notably successful. *Wildfell Hall* begins with Gilbert’s attempt to describe his situation and establish a mood. By the sixth sentence, however, he has admitted that all the reflection on farming, ambition and service to mankind of the opening was only a failed attempt to console himself. The sixth and seventh sentences are directly concerned with establishing the mood of the scene. But the effect of Gilbert “plodding home . . . one cold, damp, cloudy evening” is to produce a comic reversal of the elevated abstractions of the previous sentences. And so it goes, through the rest of the novel. Gilbert is given to theatricality and he frequently provides information about his mood or about the general mood of the setting. But his descriptions do not produce like moods in the reader. Often his most abject depression becomes comic. He ends chapter 12 suffering through the longest, most miserable night of his life, filled with bitter torment, and he wakes to “a dull gloomy morning” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 93). Then chapter 13 begins with a family intervention as his mother and brother confront him with his difficult character. Though his mother’s remonstrance begins the interaction, it is one of his typical quarrels with Fergus. The interaction exposes the comic irritability he has been displaying to his family and quickly incites him to further bad behavior as he shocks his mother responding pugnaciously to Fergus’s teasing. Following directly upon his theatrical description of his desperate suffering from love, the encounter reminds us that,

despite his twenty four or possibly now twenty five years, he is still essentially a moody teenager bullying his younger brother.

Like Gilbert, Helen begins her diary (chapter 16) meditating on her melancholy life buried away in the country and wondering if she will ever escape. And like Gilbert she soon destroys her effects, disclosing that the real problem is that she is infatuated with a man she met in London a few weeks before. This scene is immediately followed by the report of a conversation with her aunt before the trip to London. As happened with Gilbert, Helen's description of the interaction with her aunt undercuts the tone she has tried to establish in the diary. We find that, rather than a sensitive and mature young woman, she is a cocky and irrational adolescent. The interviews with Aunt Maxwell throughout the courtship are comic. In this one, Helen is arrogantly assured of her own powers of judgment and flippantly dismissive of her aunt's warnings. She is "vexed" because her aunt will not accept her assessment of her own powers and concludes the encounter wondering "if she was ever in love." In short she shows herself to be a typical teenager. The courtship part of the diary (chapters 16-22) parallels, to some extent, Gilbert's narrative of his growing friendship with Helen in the first fifteen chapters of the book. Her descriptions of her tormented confusion are undercut by her comic misinterpretation of the events, her willful blindness to Huntingdon's character and her stubborn insistence on pursuing her folly. Helen's descriptions of mood in this part are consistently inappropriate. Even the scenes with Mr. Boarham, which she intends to be taken as comic, involve elements of comedy that she is unaware of. Although Boarham is preposterous as a suitor, he is not entirely deluded in his assessment of Helen. She

believes she is intelligent, mature and perceptive but the evidence of the communicative events suggests that she is mistaken. Helen is astounded by Boarham's foolish arguments in his petition, put off by his inflated opinion of himself, and irritated by his slowness in grasping her refusal, but she is also bothered by his mention of her youthful "faults and foibles". She recognizes his silliness but is unaware of her own.

Helen tries to portray the events leading to her marriage as a tempestuous romance, but Huntingdon never attempts to play the role of a romantic suitor. He perceives Helen's adolescent infatuation and plays with her. He is barely civil to her much of the time. He enjoys testing the limits of influence over her by ignoring her, paying excessive attention to Annabella Wilmot, and provoking her anger with his rudeness and impertinence. What is happening is clear to the other characters and to the reader but not to Helen. Near the end of chapter 18, after Huntingdon, to punish her for burning a drawing she had made of him, has sought to demonstrate his lack of interest in her and his preference for Annabella, she sums up the situation.

But it is not my loss or her triumph that I deplore so greatly as the wreck of my fond hopes for his advantage, and her unworthiness of his affection, and the injury he will do himself by trusting his happiness to her. (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 135)

Although, unlike Gilbert, Helen writes in the diary for herself alone, she obscures her true feelings nearly as completely as he does. Helen's adolescent crush on Huntingdon has nothing to do with her hopes for his advantage or her fear that he will injure himself. These are what she sees as acceptable emotions that she can speak of rather than referring directly to her rage and jealousy. Once Helen is married (chapters 23-43), the narrative

concerns itself with the gradual unfolding of the inevitable disaster. Although the details of the decline may maintain the reader's interest, the general direction of the process could be easily foreseen in the courtship chapters. Though Helen is sometimes surprised, the reader never is. Helen becomes increasingly depressed, desperate and melodramatic, but the comic element of her story never really disappears. She often misunderstands what is happening and sometimes makes her situation worse by her ready sermonizing and inept interaction with her husband and with his companions. We have seen this in the conversation as they walk home from church in chapter 23, and in the quarrel in chapter 24. Helen's suffering during her marriage to Huntingdon is more real than Gilbert's theatrical suffering in his narrative and, consequently, despite the frequent comic interludes, we are more likely to empathize with her situation and to accept her perceptions of mood.

The final purpose that Booth assigns to the narrator is to comment directly on the work itself, a function that he considers generally objectionable. Though, once the story begins, Gilbert rarely brings Halford back into the picture, he does, nonetheless, at times, discuss the narrative with him. Most notably, this happens at the end of chapter 1, when he refers to his story as a treasure and suggests that, if Halford chooses not to read the rest of it, he will display bad taste. This comment seems intended to display his arch tone rather than to be taken as serious commentary on the story. His further mentions of his letter as well as Helen's comments upon her diary are mostly mechanical.

As we can see, Gilbert and Helen are reliable in some ways as narrators. They are careful observers, capable of describing events clearly and including significant

detail. They are not, however, adept at interpreting the scenes they describe. To a limited degree, they are able to mold the beliefs of the reader and Helen is occasionally able to manipulate the mood somewhat. Nonetheless, their misinterpretation of events and lack of awareness of their own qualities make them faulty guides for the reader, who is likely to arrive at conclusions different than theirs. Because they are not reliable in their perceptions about the interactions in the book, they force the reader to look beyond their commentary for the meaning of the events. Booth notes that narrators who are unreliable “make stronger demands on the reader’s powers of inference than do reliable narrators” (Booth, 1983, p. 159). We might ask, though, whether they become better spokespersons for the author as the novel progresses. Kemp (2001) views *Wildfell Hall* as a history of the education of the protagonists. The diary, recording Helen’s education through the events of her marriage, later becomes the instrument for the education of Gilbert. *Wildfell Hall*, in turn, “is offered to us in the hope that it will produce in us a transformation comparable to the one Helen’s diary has produced in Gilbert” (Kemp, 2001, p. 208). Kemp suggests that Brontë, influenced by Methodism, believed “that character could be deliberately (re)formed, especially by means of writing and reading personal narratives—an enterprise that *Wildfell Hall* simultaneously demonstrates and hopes to effect” (Kemp, 2001, p. 195). Colon (2004, p. 405), too, argues that the moral education of the characters and through them of the readers is the principle focus of *Wildfell Hall*. Both Helen and Gilbert suffer from inadequate education at the beginning of their stories. The experiences that Helen records in her diary transform her, while reading the diary helps to educate Gilbert. Colon notes that Brontë, in her preface, calls

upon her readers to also learn from the errors of the characters. Scott (1983, p. 83), using a slightly different discourse, speaks of Wildfell Hall from a similar perspective. “This book showing us soul-growths, and the terrible prices they come at, as well as deteriorations, intimates that such choices—heroic, difficult redemptive—are open to us all.” Surridge (2005) argues that Gilbert realizes his blindness when he reads Helen’s diary but that it is the time that he spends with Lawrence that completes his education. For her, “The novel traces Gilbert Markham’s own progress from ‘coxcomb’ to mature husband.” (Surridge, 2005, p. 81). The months that Gilbert spent in frequent interaction with Lawrence after Helen departed for Grassdale permit him to learn to restrain his excesses. “Gilbert learns restraint with Frederick so that when he does hold Helen’s white hand, he has become a ‘man’ as defined by the ascendant bourgeois script that equated manliness with self-control over both sexual and aggressive urges” (Surridge, 2005, p. 82).

The first paragraphs of chapters 1 and 16, the beginnings of the two major sections of the novel, introduce the narrators. We are already familiar with Helen as a character in the first section but we do not see her as a narrator until the diary begins. The opening paragraphs of the two chapters present some parallels. Both narrators are at a transitional point in their lives; they are restless with country life but attempting to justify it. Both are uncertain about decisions already made, uncertain about what the future holds, and questioning the value of country pursuits. Both begin with inflated ideas about their abilities. Gilbert is ostensibly giving information to a friend and accordingly tends to posture. He has big plans for himself and claims to want to improve the situation of the

world. He displays his inability to be honest with himself when he tries to include world in his plans. Helen, though she also postures, is ostensibly writing for herself alone. She focuses upon what type of spouse she may have, daydreams about Huntingdon, and wants to show her art to him. She focuses on herself and displays her inability to see things from other's perspectives. Neither narrator has any reason to lie; both, however, view things from a limited perspective, distorting reality according to their own perceptions, prejudices and purposes. As the narratives progress, Gilbert's constant dissembling will make his distortions greater than those of Helen, but he is constructing face, presenting a mask, and a frame for his experience, to Halford. If it is true that Gilbert and Helen change during the course of the book, that they develop as characters, then perhaps they also become more competent as narrators. Booth notes that the possibility exists.

With the repudiation of omniscient narration, and in the face of inherent limitations in dramatized reliable narrators, it is hardly surprising that modern authors have experimented with unreliable narrators whose characteristics change in the course of the works they narrate. (Booth, 1983, p. 156).

Gilbert the middle-aged narrator obviously believes that he has grown during the course of the narration and he is quick to note differences between his present self and the younger Gilbert who is the protagonist of his narrative. Helen's diary also clearly shows her developing. She loses her cocksure confidence in her ability to change others. The fact that Gilbert and Helen both grow during the novel is a central thematic element. But whether they change enough to make them reliable in their final judgments is

questionable. We might find some evidence in Staningley where the novel concludes. Gilbert has traveled there in a desperate attempt to see Helen after Eliza shared with him the rumor that Helen was marrying. As he stands at the gates, Helen passes in a carriage and stops when she sees him. Helen is obviously excited to see Gilbert and asks, “Were you coming to see us or only passing by?” Gilbert answers, “I—I came to see the place” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 368). There it is, the old indirection that we saw on his first walk to Wildfell Hall three hundred and fifty pages before. Gilbert, in the climactic interview of the novel still can not declare his intentions. The following interaction struggles through eight pages as Helen insinuates her hopes and tries to pry some friendly word from a noncommittal Gilbert. At one point she reaches out the window, plucks a winter rose, and gives it to him, together with a speech that discloses her intent. Gilbert takes it but does not otherwise respond.

Misconstruing this hesitation into indifference—or reluctance even—to accept her gift, Helen suddenly snatched it from my hand, threw it out onto the snow, shut down the window with an emphasis, and withdrew to the fire.
 ‘Helen! What means this?’ I cried, electrified at this startling change in her demeanor.
 ‘You did not understand my gift,’ said she—‘or, what is worse, you despised it: I’m sorry I gave it you; but since I did make such a mistake, the only remedy I could think of was to take it away.’ (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 373)

Morse (2001, p. 120) argues, on slim evidence, that the winter rose is a symbol of Helen’s transformed vision and that Gilbert’s comment on his own actions, “Stupid blockhead that I was!” (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 374) demonstrates how greatly he has changed in the course of the novel. Yet Gilbert early in the novel had already employed the self-deprecating style that he uses here. It may be true that Helen has changed a little.

In the early chapters of the novel she would never have explained her actions. Yet we can see in this act the same quick anger and readiness to judge others that has interfered with her social interactions throughout the book. In this encounter, despite mutual recriminations, they stumble through to an understanding. Both obviously remain thin-skinned and in some ways the final interview is similar to the failed first encounter at Wildfell Hall in chapter 2. Although both Gilbert and Helen develop and change during the narrative, they remain imperfectly human at the close. Gilbert has not overcome the indirection that has troubled him throughout the narrative and Helen's quick temper is also displayed. The diary section traces Helen's development from a heedless and overconfident adolescent into a mature woman, much more aware of her own limitations and largely freed from the hubris that entrapped her in a disastrous marriage. But the opening chapters of the novel show that she retains many of the adolescent traits that originally led her into difficulty. She is still overly judgmental and easily offended. Her ability to listen to others has not improved markedly. She proves no more able to adapt to Lindenhope than she had been capable of adjusting to Grassdale. Though she has added greatly to her experience of the world by the end of the novel her social skills have not developed much. In the final interview at Staningley she seems to have unlearned some of the touchiness that she developed at Grassdale, but some of the damage appears to remain. Gilbert, at Staningley, is merely ridiculous. His tremulous pride leaves him appearing as foolish as he did in the first chapter when his mother questions Fergus and him about their activities during the day. Perhaps the awkwardness of this encounter between Helen and Gilbert reinforces the view of some critics that Helen's marriage to

Gilbert is likely to be as unhappy as her earlier marriage to Huntingdon was. Many readers doubt Gilbert's summary of his present life at the novel's close. His narration of this scene displays his customary thoroughness of observation combined with his familiar inability to interpret accurately. Bronte, like Helen, kept a diary. In 1841 she wrote, "I have the same faults I had then [in 1837], only I have more wisdom and experience, and a little more self-possession than I then enjoyed" (Kemp, 2001, p. 197). Gilbert, too, near the beginning of chapter 1, comments to Halford, "I was young then, remember - only four and twenty - and had not acquired half the rule over my own spirit, that I now possess - trifling as that may be" (Bronte, 1966/1848, p. 17). Bronte may believe that it is possible ameliorate one's character a little, but she does not appear to believe that large changes come easily. Gilbert and Helen have learned some things from their experiences during the novel and we can presume that they have gained some maturity but they are clearly recognizable as the old Gilbert and Helen. Helen has not narrated since chapter 49 but Gilbert's narration of the final pages differs little from the rest of the book. It appears that whatever improvements their characters may have undergone, the narrators have not become more reliable during the course of the book.

CHAPTER 17. APPROACHING WILDFELL HALL

Wildfell Hall is an easy book to teach because students become passionately involved with it. It was condemned upon first publication for coarseness and brutality and praised for vivid description, realistic detail and fidelity to the truth. Readers today are unlikely to notice either coarseness or brutality but they continue to be impressed by the realism and truthfulness of the book. In classrooms, students often compare *Wildfell Hall* to a soap opera because of the complications that Helen and Gilbert have in their love lives, but nearly all students acknowledge the reality of the characters and remark that the narrative is about their own lives. Because students usually connect with the characters and enter readily into the experience of the story, it is a text that provokes heated discussion and fosters aesthetic reading. Some of the intuitions of early reviewers are confirmed by the reactions of students. They become angry at both Gilbert and Helen for their social ineptness and frequent blindness. Gilbert has been characterized as deceitful, a ‘mama’s boy,’ and a ‘player’. Many students dislike Mrs. Markham and consider her remarks about childrearing in chapter 3 especially ironic because they believe she has spoiled her own son so badly. But, on the other hand, both male and female students identify with Gilbert, even as they criticize him. “I’m Gilbert,” is a frequent refrain in class discussion. Though students generally recognize Helen’s difficulty with social communication and her tendency to judge others, they usually admire her. As an indication of changing social values, though, she is often criticized for staying so long with Huntingdon and lying to herself about her marriage. The final marriage to Gilbert is a satisfying conclusion for most students but one student came to class angry after

finishing the book. She insisted that Helen would never have married Gilbert and that, even recognizing the circumstances that might have made the marriage a good choice for her, the conclusion was depressing. Another student, noting Gilbert's excessive flattery of Halford his need to be liked and to make a good impression, and his frequent failure to interpret the reactions of others correctly, stated that *Wildfell Hall* is the book that *Pride and Prejudice* would have been if it had been narrated by Mr. Collins. Some students argue that, because it was necessary for Helen to train Gilbert, he could never be her equal. Many of these positions echo comments made in the first reviews of *Wildfell Hall* and indicate that those reviewers, though they may have been writing from within critical traditions dissimilar to ours were reporting on emotional responses not so unlike those of the modern reader. Another parallel might be seen in the effect of the diary. Although most students find *Wildfell Hall* easier to read than other Victorian novels, the central section comprising Helen's diary usually slows them down. Despite all the recent critical justifications for Bronte's use of the diary format, the responses of readers suggest that the nineteenth century view that the diary was a mistake may have been based at least partially upon its real effect upon readers.

Feagin (1996) suggests that readers respond to surprise provoked by an elicitor, which she defines as a linguistic unit (word, phrase, part of a sentence or a whole sentence or paragraph). But though a written text has to develop through linguistic units, it might be as likely that the surprise comes from the communication act, not the linguistic unit in itself but the unit of interaction. Experience is continuous but formed of discrete units and it may be that the surprise derives from the unit of experience,

comprised of linguistic and social detail. “Having emotional and other affective responses to a work of fictional literature is a very important part of appreciating it” she writes (Feagin, 1996, p. 1) “and the capacity of a work to provide such responses is part of what is valuable about it.” She postulates sympathy and empathy as two emotions in the reader that lead to affective responses to the story. Empathy, she argues, does not have to do with being sympathetic or in agreement with the character but rather it refers to similarity of experience; to empathize is know what an experience is like for a character whereas for a character to be sympathetic we must attribute some desire to him and to desire that these desires be satisfied. Currie (2004) looks at various processes including sympathy and empathy in a philosophical discussion of aesthetics. His chapter on empathy, *Anne Bronte and the Uses of Imagination*, is a discussion of *Wildfell Hall*. Currie argues that “empathy involves sharing another’s mental state” (2004, p. 180). When we share a character’s desires but do not share the mental state, he claims, we are not feeling empathy. For example, he says that both Gilbert and the reader may feel relief when Helen proposes to Gilbert “but if my relief is about Gilbert’s state of mind, while his is about Helen’s decision, my relief is not emphatic” (Currie, 2004, p. 185). He also says that if the reader’s emotions are not shared by the character, they are not emphatic. “Anxiety at Helen prior to what will obviously be a disastrous marriage, exasperation at her initial blindness to Arthur’s wicked nature, hope that Arthur will die (apparently not shared by Helen): these are all cases of reader emotions that are not emphatic” (Currie, 2004, pp. 184-185). Faegin (1996), however, clarifies that we needn’t sympathize with the character to feel empathy. We can, for example, empathize with the suffering of a

disagreeable character. Currie argues that “the book’s success depends upon establishing, with the reader, a number of conflicting emotions concerning Helen” (2004, p. 185).

Many of Helen’s attributes are irritating or frustrating but the diary allows us to see how she came to develop these characteristics. For this reason Currie feels that the diary is necessary because a retrospective account would not have permitted empathy.

The novel’s three part structure with alternating narrators, has been variously interpreted as reflecting Gilbert’s acceptance of Helen as an equal and his attempt to control her. In my view the structure is best understood . . . as part of the work’s strategy for encouraging empathy. (Currie, 2004, p. 185)

Similarly, he feels that allowing us to see the attack on Frederick Lawrence from Gilbert’s perspective permits us to understand the frustrations that provoked Gilbert. When Lawrence innocently rebukes Gilbert for his bad moods, Gilbert takes it as the taunting of a successful rival. Currie concludes that, although *Wildfell Hall* involves the reader’s emotions in a variety of ways, it is especially notable for its use of empathy. “*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,” he says, “is unusual in many ways, certainly in its literary quality, and perhaps also in the extent of its dependence upon emphatic effects” (Currie, 2004, p. 188). The discussion of empathy and sympathy is relevant to *Wildfell Hall* because it might explain why so many readers can be angered or frustrated by Gilbert and at the same time identify with him. Both Gilbert and Helen are capable of very foolish acts but we can imagine ourselves in their places and perceive how they must feel. Despite their irritating qualities, both are also essentially sympathetic characters capable procuring the reader’s emotional involvement in their fates. Currie argues, “For all its

relentlessly argumentative dialogue and clear didactic purpose, the Tenant of Wildfell Hall holds its reader through a variety of emotions” (Currie, 2004, p. 184). Students talking about Wildfell Hall in class respond aesthetically to the events; the more discussion focuses upon minute details of specific speech acts the more it diverges into the lives of the students. It may be difficult for anyone to talk about a work of literature without talking about himself. Holland argues that “interpretation is a function of identity (Freund, 1987, p. 124). This corresponds to the experience of the students. A student once commented that she found *Wildfell Hall* both both truer to life and easier to understand than other nineteenth century novels. Another student answered that this is because the book is really about us. Franklin, seems to use the term ‘sympathy’ to mean something very similar to Currie’s definition of ‘empathy’. But he argues that we can never feel sympathy for the suffering of another. We can only sympathize by placing ourselves in the situation of the other and imagining ourselves suffering. He observes that, “Sympathy is identification not with a real object or referent external to the self, but with a representation within the self of that object that is generated by the imagination” (1999, p. 123). He argues that the ‘sympathetic reader’ imagines himself acting out the events of the narrative. For Franklin, “Nineteenth century realist novels position their implied readers to identify with those characters whom the text intends to be moral heroes” (1999, p. 124). In *Wildfell Hall*, nonetheless, it may be precisely when they fail to be exemplars that the characters provoke the most sympathy. It is when Gilbert’s pretensions to adult authority are dismissed by Mrs. Markham in chapter 1 that we begin to feel empathy for him. Likewise, Helen’s social blundering and misreading of her

audience's responses in chapter 3 are more likely to provoke our sympathy than her moral certainty.

Davis (2008, p. 14), discussing ways of reading Victorian literature, distinguishes reading from criticism by distance from the text. "Critics . . . are those who seek distance from the text, theoretical and historical, making it an object; but readers go to a book to internalize it, personally, emotionally, as if they might just find revealed there a version of the secrets of their lives." In a complementary discussion, Voloshinov (1973/1930) ties involvement with the text to its relevance to the sociological atmosphere of the time, what he calls 'behavioral ideology'. He defines behavioral ideology as "the whole aggregate of life experiences and the outward expressions directly connected with it," giving meaning to "every instance of behavior and action and our every "conscious" state." He argues that "established ideological systems of social ethics, science, art, and religion are crystallizations of behavioral ideology". These crystallizations only survive in contact with the behavioral ideology that illuminates them.

Behavioral ideology draws the work into some particular social situation. The work combines with the whole consciousness of those who perceive it and derives its apperceptive values only in the context of that consciousness. It is interpreted in the spirit of the particular content of consciousness (the consciousness of the perceiver) and is illuminated by it anew. This is what constitutes the vitality of an ideological production. In each period of its historical existence a work must enter into close association with the changing behavioral ideology, become permeated with it, and draw new sustenance from it. Only to the degree that a work can enter into that kind of integral, organic association with the behavioral ideology of a given period is it viable for that period (and of course for a given social group). Outside its connection with behavioral ideology it ceases to exist, since it ceases to be experienced as something ideologically meaningful. (Voloshinov, 1973, 1930, p. 91)

For Voloshinov, a classic that no longer connects with the behavioral ideology of the reader may still be read as an assignment but that it will have no real significance for him. Voloshinov's concept of behavioral ideology, which might be taken as roughly equivalent to Bordieu's habitus or Barlett's schemata, would seem to indicate that the purpose of teaching literature must be to make the students into readers who as Davis says internalize the text personally and emotionally. Feagin (1996) suggests a similar idea when she argues that appreciating a work is not to recognize its qualities but to be affected by them.

Ethnography of communication is an analytic technique that may help to focus the reader's attention on elements of the text that do lead to personal and emotional involvement. "The point of having stories" writes Hymes (2003, p. 6), "was for those who encounter them to make them their own." Ethnography of communication, as we have seen, is an anthropological approach well suited to the analysis of literature. It shares with the New Criticism a focus on the close reading of texts and with stylistics a concern with the role language plays in determining the nuances of the event. Like historical criticism and sociological criticism, ethnography of communication calls for going beyond the text to use all the resources available to the analyst. In several ways, however, the transactional approach to literary criticism is one that is especially suited to complement ethnography of communication.

The transactional approach to literature deriving originally from Rosenblatt's (1938) *Approaches to Literature* (Rosenblatt, 1995; Cox, 1992; Probst) has grown over the past five decades into the form of reading and teaching literature that most of us

would consider typical. At the same time, however, the concept of reader response as proposed by Rosenblatt has become a spectrum of related theories (Rosenblatt, 1991, Desai, 1997) stressing, at least superficially, different aspects of the reading experience. Rosenblatt groups these theories as reader-oriented, text-oriented or reader-plus-text oriented. Cai (1997) classifies response theories as uniactional, interactional, or transactional. That the theories themselves may not fit easily into categories is indicated by the placement of Fish who Rosenblatt describes as text-oriented while Cai labels his theories uniactional because he “claims that all meaning is supplied by the reader.”

The concept of the transactional approach to reading has been described by Rosenblatt (1994), who introduced the concept, as a view of the reading process as a series of transactions in which the text and the reader combine to create an event (what she calls the poem), which changes both participants. (Harker (1992), though he accepts the term for others, argues that Rosenblatt’s theories are not transactive but interactive.) Rosenblatt suggests that three elements: author, text and reader have been at different times the center of critical attention though attention to the reader has only occurred in the past century. In fact, criticizing the dominance of the New Critics, she writes, “In the universities, recognition of the reader did not begin until the late sixties and early seventies” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 290). Thompkins (1980), on the other hand, traces the history of literary criticism from the classical Greek period to the present, arguing that until the late eighteenth century, the focus was always upon reader response. Nonetheless she finds that twentieth century reader response theory has little in common with pre-eighteenth century theory because modern criticism focuses upon interpretation of

meaning whereas earlier critics focusing upon political and social effects had little interest in meaning. Critical writing either sought to determine what kinds of effects should be sought or to demonstrate how such effects could be produced. The text was of interest only as a model for discussing techniques and effects. Thompkins argues that, with the rise of Romanticism in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the meaning of the text rather than the results became for the first time a topic of interest. Tompkins' alternate view of the history of focus on the reader also leads her to place reader response in a slightly different relation to the New Criticism and its focus upon the text. Whereas Rosenblatt sees her theories as a reaction against the New Criticism, Tompkins sees both as part of the focus upon meaning (though Iser (1978) claims that the search for the true meaning belongs to the past). Tompkins characterizes reader response theory as a corrective that rescued literary criticism from exhaustion and academic isolation, permitting it to retain a place in the curriculum by giving it new relevance. Harkin and Sosnoski (2003), however, writing two decades later, suggest that reader response has itself disappeared from criticism though the ideas of Fish, Iser, Holland and Bleich have been absorbed into several new, more general theories.

Iser (1974) also situates a shift in sensibility in the eighteenth century but, for him, the decline of moral preoccupation in literature led to a greater focus upon the response of the reader. From another perspective, Jajdelska (2007) speculates that the critical mass of silent readers reached by 1700 produced a shift in the nature of the novel, altered the reader from speaker to hearer, permitted the author to address an implied reader and led to the creation of the narrator. The depth, multiplicity and relevance to reader response

approaches of eighteenth century reading theory becomes apparent in Bartine's (1989) overview of the various theoretical trends of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, involving philology vs. criticism, written vs. spoken language, Classicism vs. Romanticism, uniformity vs. multiplicity of methods, separability vs. inseparability of thought and language, referential vs. ideational theories of words, grammar vs. discourse, spiritual vs. grammatical sense, and multidisciplinary vs. specialized approaches to reading. Dennis's distinction between higher and lower critical reading is parallel to modern concepts of aesthetic and efferent reading and, like them, requires the reader to assume a stance when he begins to read. The century also witnessed debate over the importance of distinguishing the author's intention vs. close reading of the text itself, and, among theorists who argued that the written text was incapable of marking emphasis, over whether meaning is created by the reader alone or in combination with the text. A modern restatement of eighteenth century views on emphasis can be found in Mendoza's (1993, p. 2) discussion of ethnopoetics.

As we approach literary works, we often come to them with the assumption that words and speeches are contained within the piece. In a culture whose art reduces verbal thoughts into typographical renderings, the spoken word is shrouded within the artifact, which alters the dynamic between performer and artists and audience. The quality of the participative act between artist and reader requires an anticipative gesture by the reader who can never be quite sure of the artist's expressive tenor even when read aloud. In these situations, the reader becomes the artist, providing vocal utterances, and second guessing the artist's actual intended voice.

Mendoza is suggesting that the words and speeches of a narrative are provided by the reader who must intuit or create the 'expressive tone' because the writing system is not exact enough to provide it. The meaning of the words resides in this 'expressive tone'.

From within a slightly different tradition, Barthes (1974) proclaimed 1850 and Gustave Flaubert as the beginning of the writerly text, his approximate equivalent to Iser's reader-oriented text. These examples suggest that even the history of the transactional approach and focus upon the reader is open to substantial variation of perspectives. *Wildfell Hall*, published in 1848, nonetheless falls within the transitional period during which authors sought to interact with the reader, critics explored the role of the reader in the text, and the meaning of the text began to be seen as a question of concern for literary criticism. The reactions of some early reviewers indicate that older concerns with moral instruction were still paramount for many readers and may have influenced the reception of the novel.

Rosenblatt (1995) credits her combined background in anthropology (she studied with Franz Boas first as an undergraduate and later as a young professor) and literature as an impetus that contributed to her formulation of the transactional view of the reading process. Nevertheless, she (Rosenblatt, 1994) cites several intellectual strands that played a part in her thinking. She derives her view of language from the philosophies of Peirce and Dewey. Her principle insight is that while reading literature is an aesthetic experience many literature teachers have been involved in teaching about literature without ever providing an incentive to experience it. Important to her approach are the concepts of stance, efferent and aesthetic reading, and the poem as event. She uses the term 'poem' as a label for the literary creation (poem, story, novel, etc.) that the student experiences, in contrast to 'text', which is the arrangement of markings on the printed page (Cox, 1992; & Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995, 2005). The text is a physical object (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995,

2005 & Karolides, 2000) while the poem is an event that is evoked by the reader reading the text. Each reading of the text, even if it is a rereading by the same reader evokes a different poem. In the reading process, there can be no generic reader but only an individual reader in a particular place at a particular time reading a specific text. The evocation of the poem depends partly upon the stance that the reader takes while reading. Rosenblatt derives the concept of stance from William James' idea of selective attention. She affirms that because there are different ways to read a text, reading involves a choosing activity. If the reader only seeks to extract information for other uses, she calls the process 'efferent reading'; if, as in the case of reading literature, the reader seeks to experience the text rather than to simply gather information from it, she identifies the process as 'aesthetic reading'. One of the decisions a reader is called upon to make, therefore, when he begins to read, is the stance that he will take in regard to the text. If he is looking for information, he will adopt a stance that permits him to gather information. If he sees the text as a story, he will be more likely to attempt to experience it. An error that Rosenblatt identified in much literature teaching was the orientation of questions toward extracting information from the text, thereby depriving the students of the aesthetic experience of literature.

Since the later sixties (Rosenblatt, 1995), reader response theory, developed from within different perspectives, has proliferated. During the same period, Stanley Fish has occupied several positions. The essays collected in *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Fish, 1980), written over several years, document the evolution of his ideas. His first insight, based in large part on readings of the poetry of Milton, is that the reader adapts his

understanding of the poem regularly as he reads and that the discarded interpretations are as significant as the final interpretation in experiencing the poem. Fish's argument coincides with the temporal nature of the reading process (Rosenblatt, 1995 & Iser, 1974); the reader experiences the story evoked from the text sequentially. At the same time reading is also a recursive process as the reader moves back and forth reflecting, reconsidering and anticipating and adjusting (Karolides, 2000). Fish was bothered as he reworked his theories by the differences in quality of interpretation from one reader to another. If we can discriminate between different interpretations, we must be judging them according to their closeness to the text, in which case, we are still using the text as the standard. Fish first resolved this problem by positing that it is not the text but the reading community to which the reader belongs that sets the parameters of interpretation. The concept of reading community has in its turn provoked a variety of interpretations and a series of attacks (Bagwell, 1983, for example, argues that Fish assumes but has not proven an opposition between the interpretive community and objectivity), but in its final form it provides a compelling perspective for considering Fish's question: "Is there a text in this class?" If we take Rosenblatt's concept of stance a little further, we realize that what we find in a text is determined by what we are looking for. The critical techniques that we employ create the text by focusing our attention on certain aspects of it.

In contrast to Rosenblatt's transactional concept of reading, Fish has remained a uniactional theorist, in that he has ultimately tended to place meaning either in the text, in the reader, or in the reading community. Iser (1974, 1978), on the other hand, shares with Rosenblatt a view of fiction as co-constructed in the process of reading by the effects of

the reader and the text on each other. Iser (1974) tended to describe the reading process more from the view of the writer than the reader, demonstrating how authors, beginning in the eighteenth century, used silence, gaps, multiple voices, contradictions, and other devices calculated to force the reader to complete the text himself. Such authors as Fielding, Sterne and Smollett frequently interrupt their stories to explain their omissions and to remind the reader that they expect him to do part of the work of creating the story. Later (1993) Iser developed a dichotomy between the fictive and the imaginary, designating the fictive as a transaction between the text and the context (the world it represents), while the imaginary is a transaction between the text and the reader. Franklin (1999, p. 31) notes that, for Iser, both the fictive and the imaginative are vacant spaces that can only be “activated” by the reader interacting with the text. Bronte does not address the reader directly although she does procure to separate herself from her narrators. However she does use silence extensively as a narrative element. At times she describes it overtly as in the church scene in chapter 1, the quarrel between Helen and Huntingdon in chapter 24, and the mutual use of silence by Helen and Gilbert as a weapon each uses against the other: for example Helen’s dismissals of Gilbert in chapters 1 and 2 and Gilbert’s silence toward Helen in chapters 3, 5, and 15. Throughout the narrative, however, Bronte reports but does not explain so much gesture and body language that the reader is frequently left to fill in blanks. Her perspective outside the minds of the characters combined with her undercutting of the authority of the narrators similarly leaves the work of interpretation to the reader. Iser states that in ceding part of the creative process to the reader, the author also cedes control of the story because each

reader will bring different experiences to the novel and arrive at a somewhat different story, none of which will ever realize the full potential of the text. This indeterminacy is, for Iser, the quality that makes literature. In 1978, now focused on the perspective of the reader, Iser claimed that if it were true that a text could have an established meaning, the reader would not be able to experience it. He recommended that rather than seeking to explain a text the critic should attempt to clarify its potential. Meaning exists only as a dynamic happening not as a part of the text. Such a critical agenda works particularly well with a narrative like *Wildfell Hall* with its multitude of voices, each possessing elements of the truth.

We can see how Bronte creates space for the reader to participate in the construction of the narrative by focusing on the communicative events that open the two principal sections of the novel. When students look closely at the interactions between Gilbert his mother and his siblings early in chapter 1, they will usually relate it to their own siblings, their own family relationships. The nature of the interactions in chapter 1 are clear to the reader though they seem not to be clear to Gilbert. Most students have direct or indirect experience with sibling quarrelling and they similarly recognize Mrs. Markham's failure to listen to her children's comments though she uses questions to exert her authority over them. When we look at Goffman's interaction ritual and then again at the interactions, Gilbert's comic misinterpretation, his inability to understand why he reacts angrily when he does, and his lack of awareness of the impression he makes, become more apparent. The extent of his error in reporting his relations with his family, calls into question his introduction in the first six sentences of the book. This establishes

Gilbert as untrustworthy and opens the text to the students. They, rather than Gilbert, become the knowers and their interpretations of the import of the narrative are validated from this point on.

In the second section the process is repeated. In the diary it is Helen's adolescent reactions in conversation with her Aunt Maxwell that disclose her untrustworthiness as a narrator. As Helen begins her journal she temporarily surprises us because she is so unlike the intimidating figure that Gilbert has depicted for us. Yet we soon see that, despite her silliness, she makes the same judgmental responses and shows the same unwillingness to listen that Gilbert has previously described. Helen, as several critics have noted, tends to sermonize and this early undercutting of her narrative authority, as she petulantly challenges her aunt's sound advice, makes childish claims about her own judgment, and willfully misrepresents her position, once again frees the reader to judge for herself, thereby making each member of the class as legitimate an interpreter of events as Helen. Group activities and discussions that open up new perspectives on the text or uncover overlooked details are part of the aesthetic experience. Aukerman (2007) notes that in group discussions the absence of an established meaning for the text helps the learner to see herself as a possible knower. As a knower, she struggles to make cases that others would find plausible, becomes more flexible in using the text for her own purposes and more ready to change her thinking with new evidence, begins to recognize the alternate ways of reading of her peers, and relies increasingly on the text to resolve disagreements.

Both Iser and Fish seem to center their discussions on the interpretation of texts, while Rosenblatt is more centered on pedagogical questions. Fish (1981) (who has been attacked by many critics) notes that Iser has not been attacked by advocates of either party in the reader/text conflicts and explains that this is because Iser has been able to place himself on both sides of the argument by viewing the text sometimes as indeterminate and sometimes as determinate and by distinguishing between “meaning,” which derives from the text, and “significance,” which is supplied by the reader. He also faults him for viewing the text as a script for the reader’s performance, though this metaphor is very close to the eighteenth century argument that the words of the text had no meaning until they were read because the emphasis is provided by the reader. He concludes that Iser’s theory is “not a theory at all, but a piece of literature . . . full of gaps [that] the reader is invited to fill . . .” Pratt uses essentially the same arguments, accusing Fish of using terms like interpretive community differently at different times and thus obscuring contradictory beliefs. She also notes that his critical practice is radically different from his critical theories. Rosenblatt (1994, p.1385) also seems to dismiss Fish’s reading community but when she cites Dewey and discusses “the shared cultural milieu and shared criteria of validity” that permit us to agree on which interpretations are sound, she seems to be describing the reading community. Fish, incidentally, explains the convergence of ideas among the pragmatists that were among Rosenblatt’s influences by calling it “a sociohistorical fact about a bunch of white guys, mostly eastern, who went to the same schools, were published in the same magazines, read the same books, [and] taught at the same universities,” (1999, p. 304); in other words, they were an interpretive

community. Hymes (2003, p. 7) mentions the interpretative community composed of the audience of oral story which seems to be parallel to Fish's reading community. He observes that the narrative can never be recounted the same way for a different community because the level of familiarity with the elements of the story determines the degree of explicitness that the narrator must use. A community other than the one for which the story is familiar obviously requires more enrichment and explicitness in setting out the story elements or describing the scenes. It is for this reason that students experiencing a piece of literature from another time or culture often require background material to aid them to experience the story fully. In *Wildfell Hall*, for example, Huntingdon's use of the word 'enthusiast', the decision to walk to church, Helen's secretiveness about her past, or Rev. Millward's insistent criticism of tea drinking may have been clear indicators for Victorian readers. Though Bronte seldom explains, she may have expected her readers to grasp the implications of these cultural details without further elaboration. A modern reader may not be fully capable of experiencing the story without some additional background information.

The concept of stance as we have noted seems to differ somewhat in the theories of Fish and Rosenblatt. Whereas Rosenblatt argues that reading for information is a different process than reading for experience and that our decision as to what type of text we are reading determines how we will read it, Fish claims that our various life experiences and critical assumptions are all involved in constructing the framework we apply to the text. For Rosenblatt, stance, although always mixed, might be identified with reading purpose whereas for Fish it seems to imply much more and to involve the entire

experience and schemata of the reader. Beach and Freedman (1992) analyzing the gendered responses of adolescents to stereotyped narratives, identify stance with activation of the cultural codes that individuals interiorize as members of groups. Stance is not monolithic. For Rosenblatt it varies along a continuum with reading generally involving some combination of information and experience and for Fish it is dynamic, changing constantly as the reading progresses (Fish, 1980; Enciso, 1992 & Cox, 1992). One of the elements in *Wildfell Hall* that confused or offended early critics is the shift in genre that occurs in the diary section. The early section, focusing upon the growing attraction between Gilbert and Helen, appears to be a traditional domestic comedy, centered upon a developing romance. The clarification of Helen's previous history, disclosing that she is still married to Huntingdon, would have forced the mid-Victorian reader to re-evaluate the action of the opening section. As the reviewer of the Rambler (Sept. 1848) complains, "our sympathies are unwittingly engaged for an attachment formed by a married person before death had dissolved the first contracted bond" (Allott 1974, p. 268). The change in focus in the diary section does not constitute a change in stance of the type Rosenblatt describes when she contrasts efferent and aesthetic reading but it does involve a shift in reader expectations and a re-evaluation of the context. The reader must adapt his understanding of the early segments, as Fish would argue, to accommodate the new information. The serious social problems illustrated in the diary section –alcoholism and the oppression of women in marriage- encourage the reader to reconsider elements treated more humorously in the opening section. The frequent discussions of marital expectations reported by Gilbert and Rev. Millward's discourses

on ale take on new meaning as we observe Helen's marriage and her husband's drunkenness. The new stance that we must assume in the diary section effectively changes the story that we read in the first part. When we return to the original narrative context set in Lindenhope, it is with a new awareness of the implications of the events that began the novel.

Rosenblatt would argue that the text is an unchanging object but that the 'poem' (for Iser, the virtual text) is an event occurring differently with each individual reading by each individual reader. Fish, on the other hand begins with the assumption that there is no text except during the reading event. The reader must bring a framework and assumptions to the reading and the text becomes coherent only when it is interpreted from within a particular framework. Experiments conducted by Bartlett (1932), asking British readers to read and then recall a text collected by Boas seem to support this position. Bartlett used the term "schemata" to include all the reader's past experiences, adaptations and acquired habits. Although stance and schemata are different concepts both are fluid in that they are acted upon as they act upon the text. Neither should be thought of as a static framework. A fixed stance might cause the reader to fail to fully experience the text.

Although reader response theory involves a great many more variations than can be included here, there are a few central concepts that usually come up. Reading literature is an aesthetic experience, not a quest for information. The "poem" or "virtual text" is an event evoked by the reading not an object. The meaning in a text, to one degree or another is supplied by the reader. Though neither the text nor the interpretive community is accepted by all reader-response theorists, in most models the reader is constrained in

making meaning by one or the other. The stance of the reader is crucial in determining the nature of the text. Rosenblatt felt that the initial experience of the text is enhanced by enrichment activities including background information. Hymes insists that his principal guideline is to “use all there is to use.” Like many reader response theorists, he uses the concept of the interpretive community. He believes that to understand a story we must know the context in which it was told. But, it is the focus on the aesthetic experience that most clearly links reader response to ethnography of communication. The aesthetic experience begins with reading but is not necessarily limited to the reading. Feagin (1996, p. 3) notes, “One cannot appreciate without interpreting”. She defines appreciation as getting the value out of something. She argues that appreciation involves interpreting and reflecting as well as affective elements. The first two are necessary to insure that one is responding rather than simply reacting. She also notes that though reader response theories value affective responses, they have given little attention to what justifies particular responses. These concerns seem to indicate that careful reading is a significant factor in response to the text. Ethnography of communication is a useful way of reading realistic fiction for university students, because it focuses them upon a text for close reading but through a model that stresses the story. Although objective analysis may be an illusion, the goal of reader-centered teaching should be to draw the reader’s attention to details that deepen the experience of the text. The concept of the communication event provides a format for detailed observation that does not lead away from the emotional focus of the story, rather it offers the possibility of discovering intensifying detail. In the visit to Wildfell Hall that Rose, Eliza, Fergus, and Gilbert make in chapter 7, for

example, Helen's displeasure at the presence of Eliza is barely implied but if it goes unnoticed, some of the drama of the visit is lost and Helen's dismay at Rose's suggestion of a group excursion to the ocean becomes not quite explicable. It is not, perhaps, crucial that every speech event be exhaustively analyzed. The themes recur in so many guises that no individual communication event is really necessary to understanding. Though specific details may not be repeated the book provides multiple clues to mental processes of the narrators. There is so much to discover and so little time that gathering all the clues would eventually become counter-productive, getting in the way of the experience. Looking at the early communicative events, to some extent, provides a model for reading for the later chapters, alerting the student to the undercurrents present in the interactions. As Feagin says, "one doesn't interpret and then respond but rather one reads with feeling" (1996, p. 25).

The central focus of ethnography of communication is viewing language as it is used in communication events. Hymes described his aim as, "to help create a study of language that is rooted in the study of social life and that contributes to the transformation of social life" (1979, p. 316). We can see a relation between Hymes concern with the dynamic event over the static structure in ethnography and Rosenblatt's description of the poem as an event, occurring between a specific reader and a specific text at a specific moment. Steinbeck's (Scholes, 1985, p. 130) comparison of the living fish with the laboratory specimen is an image that serves to distinguish ethnographers of communication observing the dynamic interplay of social interaction from linguists or anthropologists making static structural descriptions of culture and also to distinguish the

experience of the story from the minute analyses made by the new critics. Hymes (1964, p. xxii) distinguishes between the purposes of formal description in anthropology and linguistics. “In present-day linguistics the methods and forms of descriptive statement loom large as ends in themselves. In anthropology they must always have the status of means.” Similarly, ethnography of communication implies exhaustive analysis of the event but for the purpose of bringing it to life rather than identifying its parts.

Nonetheless, ethnography of communication is concerned with patterned uses of language. In analyzing *Wildfell Hall*, we find that the communication acts, events and situations, always leave us with clues to larger patterns. The characters’ comments on each other’s discourse help us to establish the contours of normal discourse. Mrs. Markham’s observation in chapter 1 that Mrs. Graham “said little to any purpose” alerts us to the conventions of talk in neighborly visits. In chapter 23, when Helen responds to Huntingdon’s complaint that he is not satisfied with her, he cuts her off with, “Ah! There it is, you see,” thereby alerting us to the permissible limits of piety. When Gilbert regrets intruding on Helen’s work in chapter 5, we recognize that her reception of her visitors did not conform to conventions of courtesy. It is not only in explicit observations by the characters that patterns of social interaction are indicated, however. Repeated communication events permit us to profile patterns of conduct of individual characters—Gilbert’s indirection, Helen’s difficulty in accepting new ideas—as well as conventions of social interaction of the community as a whole—for example, the rules for interaction that determine who may and who may not participate in particular varieties of gossip and what discourse styles are permitted to gossipers.

Because each event in *Wildfell Hall* is geared to developing our understanding of the narrators, disclosing some defining detail, there is more than can be discussed in class. After close reading of the beginning chapters it is often helpful to ask students to find and analyze the communication events in later chapters that they want to discuss. This provides students with experience in recognizing the boundaries of communication events and finding significant moments. It also brings a wider variety of events into the discussion, thereby insuring a greater range of insights. Feagin (1996, p. 33) notes, “Appreciating certain aspects may even preclude appreciating others.” Thus, a class discussion that ranges among events discovered by the students will be more likely to bring out additional aspects and reveal the complexities of the novel. Hymes (2003, p. 73), discussing the re-analysis of individual stories by different ethnographers, argues,

The critical point, however, is that for a given starting point, what proves relevant but comes into view may not have been brought together by anyone else. What one can discover regarding informing context and intertextuality will depend on one’s own reading and recollection—and chance.

Hymes’ point, though aimed at research, is a critical one for teaching. Each student comes to the work with experiences different from anyone else’s and, therefore, each student’s understanding and experience of the work will be different, and thus important in discovering the range of implications in a work. Feagin (1996, p. 33) stresses the need for recognizing the experiences of every reader. “We lose a sense of the importance of reading and of appreciating what we read if the only experiences we are willing to

validate are the experiences of those who have repeatedly read and studied a work.” Her observation parallels another principle enunciated by Hymes (1981, p. 59)

There is no law that the first to examine a text exhausts it. Indeed, as can be argued in principle and supported from experience, a literary text is an open document, susceptible of different interpretation as the audience of interpreters differs, a document not necessarily exhausted by any one interpretation, but quite possibly enriched by many or all. Validity and interpretation have two aspects, the source and the receiver, and the exigencies of translation are such that any one translation is like a spotlight from one angle, highlighting some features, but shadowing others. A plurality of responsible translations can illuminate more and in greater depth.

Once again, Hymes is here discussing the need for multiple translations of Chinook texts, but his insight applies equally to the process of reading. *Wildfell Hall*, presenting as it does a complex world of reality, requires a multitude of readers to experience it. Reading as experience probably requires discussion with others as much as it does response to the text. Hymes (1981, p. 9), discussing Cassier, notes, “In speech and art . . . individuals do not simply share what they already possess; it is only by virtue of the sharing process that they attain what they possess”. In other words, talking about the book completes the process of experiencing it. Class discussion also reproduces an important motif of the novel because it is basically a form of gossip. Like the neighbors in *Lindenhope*, we cannot resist the impulse to pry into the lives of Gilbert and Helen and try to make some kind of sense of the events that they move through.

CHAPTER 18. YOU MUST GO BACK WITH ME: INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES TO WILDFELL HALL

There have always been exotics, aliens, and outsiders among us. The foundations of racism, sexism, classism, ageism, sizeism, nationalism, and homophobia are built upon a common xenophobic disregard for people who are different. Perhaps the subtleties are easier to grasp by way of literature, especially literature produced by the British, a culture away, a century away in some cases. (Reed, 1999, p. 184)

Keyes (1919, pp. 81-89), discussing the reading program for the students in the commercial course at Girls High School, Brooklyn, notes that the program is one year shorter than the academic program, the students are less intellectual, and the focus is on English skills for the business office. She describes the principle language aims of the program as “accuracy and intelligence in the writing of business letters” and “general intelligence and ability to grasp ideas from the printed page” (Keyes, 1919, p. 81). To promote “ability to read independently and to judge the relative value of books” (Keyes, 1919, p. 83) the program uses reading lists rather than classroom texts, with students responsible for oral reports, either singly or in groups, class discussion, and reading aloud. Most selections on the reading lists are ‘classics’ and students are not introduced to non-literary texts such as essays and newspaper articles until their final year. Keyes notes “a striking interest in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and an appreciation of the humor to be found in classical writers” (1919, p. 85). *Wildfell Hall* is one of the books on the reading lists. While the general context and the characteristics of the learners are different, the business English course shares with ESL courses an orientation in which learning about literature for itself is not a primary aim. The

Macmillan Educational publishers seem to agree that *Wildfell Hall* is an appropriate text for L2 learners; in 2007 they issued an edition of *Wildfell Hall* abridged by Elizabeth Walker called *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Pre-intermediate. Keyes' article raises a number of questions that have also been of interest for researchers into TESL. What is the place of literature in language teaching? What kind of literature is appropriate for learners studying English in non-English speaking contexts? How should literary texts be used in class?

These questions have been especially interesting to me, as I teach in a major taught in English at a Mexican university, a context in which the official language is Spanish and the students are neither native speakers of English nor literature majors. Within this context, literature may need to be used differently than it is in literature majors in American universities. Although the program requires several period courses in English and American literature, as well as other courses that use literature as basic content, graduates probably do not need detailed knowledge of the entire history of English or American literature nor do they need to develop an arsenal of critical terms appropriate for students of literary theory or extensive familiarity with different schools of critical theory. Nonetheless most of the theoretical underpinnings generally used to justify the use of literature in L2 courses figure in the development of the literature courses in our curriculum. We use literature as a shortcut to culture. Reading the texts that would probably be read by students in the target culture provides the L2 learner with some of the same cultural referents. We sometimes use literary texts for linguistic analysis, thereby amplifying the learner's cultural literacy in the process of linguistic

development. Literature courses demand response and provide entertainment, thus offering motivation for reading. And we hope we are encouraging students to value the experience of reading and interpreting literature. Literary texts, however, also contribute to the hidden agenda of the major. All but six of the sixty five courses that students complete in nine semesters are taught in English, using materials written in English for native speakers of English. Although not all students entering the program are already proficient in English, there are no language courses in the curriculum. After four and a half years of reading, writing, listening and speaking almost entirely in English, however, our graduates are generally more capable of academic discourse in English than they are in Spanish. We feel that reading and discussing literary works accelerates the process of interiorizing the thought processes and reading strategies characteristic of native English speakers' responses to texts. We do not aim to change the learner's vision of the world so much as to make it possible for her to intuit author's intentions when reading texts in English. Incoming students, for example, often struggle to understand essays and stories, even though they understand most of the words used in the text, because writing in English tends to depend extensively on understatement. Writing in Spanish is more often characterized by hyperbole, a device that requires a different interpretive process. Students therefore need to read texts in English from a perspective different from the one they use when reading texts in Spanish. Hymes (2003, p. 42) notes that written language "is phonological or phonemic, in the sense that it abstracts from spoken qualities and represents words as part of grammar. One who knows the grammar, one who knows the language, may be able to infer spoken qualities from the abstract representation. Many

may not be able to do so, and any reader who is not a user of the language may forget the spoken qualities". It is often especially true in literary texts that the reader may need to be able to 'hear' the words accurately before he can make sense of them. This takes us back to the eighteenth century concept of emphasis. Bartlett's (1961/1932) experiments with Boas's text demonstrate that readers do not necessarily pick up on elements that are not familiar within their culture or that are not part of their normal experience. Characteristic tones, postures, and stylistic devices associated with texts in a specific language may be as easily misinterpreted as the cultural schemata that Bartlett noted. Literary texts, when combined with texts from the academic disciplines included in the curriculum may help to expose readers to a wider range of English discourse styles as well as familiarizing them with texts and writers that most educated native English speakers would be familiar with. At the university, I have twice used *Wildfell Hall* as the principal text in a course titled *Ethnographic Analysis of Literary Texts*. It can serve to illustrate some of the ways a nineteenth English century novel can be used with twenty-first-century university students in a Spanish-speaking country.

When interest in ESL teaching began to move toward the use of literature in language teaching (Brumfit, 1983, 1985; Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Collie & Slater, 1987); it was in general a reaction against two positions, first a dismissal of literature as peripheral to language learning and secondly an insistence upon formal reading of literature (Thiong'o, 1986; Bassnet, 1997, MLA, 2007) comparable to what might be expected in English or classics degree programs in England or the United States. The use of literature for L2 learners represented a middle course between elimination of literature

from the language curriculum and exhaustive study of the literary classics of an alien culture. Advocates of the former (Bennett, Bennett & Allen 2003) sought to replace literature with ‘small c’ cultural studies. The latter course was linked to an obsession with the traditional English literary canon as the ultimate goal of language teaching for all students regardless of individual purposes for language learning. Much of the early writing on literature in the L2 curriculum, coinciding with the rise of the communicative approach, focused the purpose of literature in SLA (Moody, 1983; Jones, 1983; McKay, 1986; Littlewood, 1986; Brumfit, 1986a, 1986b & Pettit, 1986), the selection of appropriate texts (Short & Candlin, 1986; Kachru, 1986; Littlewood, 1986; Vincent, 1986; Vincent & Carter 1986, Marckwardt, 1978), and the methods of presentation (Rodger, 1983; Moody, 1983; Short, 1983; Ramsaran, 1983; Tengrove, 1983, 1986; Jones, 1983; Carter, 1986; Widdowson, 1986; Brumfit, 1986a, 1986b; Burke & Brumfit, 1986, Boyle, 1986). Because discussion often centered on entry-level courses or learners with limited backgrounds in the target language, the arguments and conclusions sometimes do not relate to the needs of proficient L2 users in university programs such as that at the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua aimed at developing professional teachers and translators.

As justifications for the use of literature in language classes, advocates have suggested several benefits that can be grouped roughly into four areas: language (Crystal & Davie, 1969; Carter, 1986; Littlewood, 1986, Picken, 2007), culture (Littlewood, 1986, Picken, 2007), motivation (Garvie, 1990; Short & Candlin, 1986, Picken, 2007), and experience (Brumfit, 1985, Picken, 2007). Literature was first of all seen to illustrate the

best use of language and therefore to be a logical source of texts for language learners. Critics argued among other things that literary language was unique and therefore of little help to language learners (Cook, 1986) or conversely that it was not unique and therefore not preferable to any other text. Literature was also seen as a manifestation of the target culture and therefore useful to language learners. Critics (Brumfit, 1985) argued the literature does not necessarily offer a faithful picture of the target culture and that, at any rate, it may not provide practical or useful cultural knowledge (Pettit, 1986). Literature, too, rarely offers cultural insights that can not be gained from non-fictional texts. Because of its entertainment value, literature can also serve as a motivating element in language learning. Critics suggested that reading literature is not a cultural practice developed equally in all societies and that for some learners it might constitute an obstacle rather than an aid to language learning. Finally some of the theorists who discuss literature in the L2 classroom (Brumfit, 1985) speak of the positive role of literature in their own lives and their desire to pass something of this experience on to their students. Critics might argue that this goal is not directly relevant to language learning

Some of the issues raised by the discussion of literature in L2 language classrooms appear in a wonderfully conflicted form in Moody's argument for using literature.

It is certainly desirable that every course should include a proportion of texts which tend toward the status of being 'notable', otherwise the student will lose the opportunity of experiencing the aspects of greatness in linguistic form which any course should provide. The basic condition is that each text is there (on the page) available for interpretation, analysis, classification and evaluation with as much rigor and accountability as a sample

of white powder by a chemist, or a stained micro-organism on a glass slide by a pathologist. (Moody, 1983, p. 20)

Although he mentions the experience of literature and the superior use of language as justifications, he assumes that the literary text is all on the page, thereby excluding the reader. He appears to favor both linguistic and literary analysis but describes the ideal interpretive process in terms that recall Steinbeck's dead laboratory fish (Scholes, 1985, p. 130). The article continues by dividing literature into extrinsic (biographical, historical, aesthetic, and philosophical) and intrinsic (grammatical, lexical, structural and cultural) components and providing a series of sample double-columned analyses with intrinsic components identified on the left and extrinsic ones on the right. He concludes that he has provided a justification for continued inclusion of literature in language classes, but left us only with a pointless double-columned list of discrete elements.

The movement for the teaching of literature in the L2 curriculum over the past four decades first tended to develop in two separate directions stylistics and cultural studies. Stylistics has aimed at the analysis of literary texts as examples of language in use while cultural studies has taken these texts as background sources or illustrations of patterns in the L2 culture. A third approach, reader response, developing somewhat after the other two, has utilized literature as a point of departure for student reflections on themselves and their worlds.

Stylistics has great potential as a method of literary analysis in L2 classrooms. Because the learners may be less able than native speakers to grasp all the implications of a literary text, close analysis of the language from a linguistic perspective can aid in

textual understanding (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Widdowson, 1983; Moody, 1983; Ramsaran, 1983; Trengove, 1983; Rodger 1983). To some extent, stylistic analysis as a form of interpretation may be parallel to the close analysis of the text itself suggested by the New Critics in the first half of the twentieth century. Often, however, in L2 classrooms the texts tended to disappear. They might be mined for interesting syntactic patterns, language forms, or idiomatic expressions, but lessons were geared toward insights about language rather than analysis of the texts. The stylistic information extracted from the text might not be reintegrated for the purpose of augmenting the learner's understanding or amplifying her experience of the text. Because the focus is upon learning language items rather than using them to interpret the texts, any sort of text would be usable. Though literary texts may be the basis for class activities, their existence as literature is often peripheral to the purposes of the class.

A parallel problem exists with the cultural or sociological analysis of literature. Exploring the cultural patterns that inform the texts may be helpful for L2 learners, who sometimes may lack the cultural background necessary to grasp the implications that underlie the text. Biographical information about the author as well as sociological, political, historical or anthropological background may make the text more accessible to L2 readers. However, teachers may use texts solely to provide insights into the cultural patterns of the target culture, rather than offering cultural background to help enrich the experience of the texts. In some cases (Bennett, Bennett & Allen 2003), cultural-oriented theorists may be hostile to literature, viewing it as a competitor for space in the

curriculum. As with stylistic analysis, cultural approaches can be used for themselves, while the text again becomes peripheral to the class.

Related to the discussion of literature in the L2 context was the research coming out of literacy studies during the past twenty years. The concepts of literacies and multiliteracies were used more typically to discuss literature teaching in elementary and secondary school contexts but were sometimes applied to L2 classrooms as well. Discussion focused both on presenting non-traditional literary texts to mainstream students and using literary texts with minority and non-native learners. One of the concerns within the context of literacies was providing learners with a more compelling experience of the text. Thus reader-response activities were often an integral part of instruction. For both L1 and L2 learners, reader response approaches offered several advantages (Brumfit 1985 & Picken 2007), some of which are discussed in the previous section. Reader response also complements the communicative and student-centered approaches that were ascendant in L2 instruction (Short & Candlin, 1986), although sometimes (Long, 1986) L2 learner response activities had little in common with the concepts of reader response. Short and Candlin (1986, p. 90) declare, "If literature is worth teaching qua literature, then it seems axiomatic that it is response to literature itself which is important." They argue that the focus must be on the text and suggest that many language teachers teach about literature because they are uncomfortable dealing with the texts themselves. They also contend that background information about the author or cultural context is often unnecessary for understanding the text and general statements about culture tend to "trite judgments and sweeping remarks" (Short & Candlin, 1986, p.

90). In contrast, they recommend focus on “the particular social situation and the particular participants involved”. Long stresses the relation of reader response to instruction in both literature and language.

it is, however, the creative response channel which seems to be the strongest justification for the teaching of literature. It is here that opportunities for language use occur most naturally and in the most varied form. . . . and the results effectively combine the behavioral goals of both literature teaching and language teaching. Moreover, it is here that the language of literature, adapted for group and interaction activities, overcomes the restrictive element . . . of language teaching, and encourages the learner to test the dimensions of words.” (Long, 1986, p. 59)

Long is suggesting that in the creative response to literature, the learner comes closest to making language his own.

However reader response does not automatically bring the learner closer to the experience of literature than do other approaches. Response teaching tends to fail in two ways. First the teacher may be so concerned with validating the learner’s response that she refuses to ask questions that might direct attention to the silences in the text. Secondly, she might avoid bringing up contextualizing information that could help the learner engage further with the text because she feels that context is interpretation rather than experience. In texts devoted to practical activities to promote reader response, we can often find a trivialization of the interpretative practice. Rather than looking closely at the text, students are asked to look closely at their own responses or those of their classmates. Partly, this obsession with intermediate responses may derive from Fish’s insights into the progression of tentative responses the reader makes as he reads. Reader response approaches sometimes include discussion of ways to obtain preliminary rather

than crafted responses from learners (Furniss, 2000). But Fish centered his attention on how our understanding of specific words or phrases changed in response to subsequent words while the pedagogically oriented reader response texts generally focus on casual reactions to the text as a whole or its application to the student's experiences. Poorly developed reader response activities are often an excuse for avoiding difficult problems with the text. Rather than being asked to explore the implications of a phrase, the students might be asked what they liked about the book (Probst, 2004) or told to write anything you want about the book (Cox & Many, 1992) and then set to interpret their responses rather than the literary text. Reader response used in this way ceases to be a transactional approach to literature and becomes simply one more path away from the text. The literary experience derives from engaging with the text by filling in its silences. If students are permitted to read superficially and then respond with "I liked it" or "Not interesting" rather than confronting the difficulties and contradictions in the story, then they will have missed the aesthetic experience.

Although reader response activities for the literature class can sometimes move the reader further from the text rather than providing techniques for enriching it, many reader response strategies seem geared to deepening the student experience of the text. Karolides (2000) refers to the reading experience as the initial part of the experience of the text. This description helps to place reader-response in perspective. The reader needs to experience the text first without distractions, but having engaged with the text she wants to continue experiencing it, just as moviegoers rehash the events of a movie after watching it. Because students reading *Wildfell Hall* typically become emotionally

involved with the characters, they are anxious to talk about them. They easily become angry with the narrators, expressing the desire to shake, slap or shout at them to wake them up, because they identify with them. Helen's headstrong movement toward her first marriage, her clumsy attempts to negotiate her role with Huntingdon after the wedding, and her conflicted responses to Gilbert provoke spirited discussion. Gilbert's rivalry with Fergus, his tactics with Arthur, his indirection in his relationships with Helen and Eliza and especially his shifting treatment of her Eliza as the narrative progresses evoke passionate criticism from many students. The subplot concerning Eliza is much more significant than it appears on superficial reading. Gilbert's reactions to her demonstrate many of his defects. The condescending tone that he uses when he mentions her early in the book calls his character into question. The scene at the parsonage in chapter 2 emphasizes his vanity and superficiality. His actions at the end of the first party in chapter 4 show his willingness to trifle with her and his lack of concern for possible consequences to her; they identify him as what the students call "a player". His attempt to attribute his change of sentiments toward her to his mother's opposition to her exposes his readiness to shift responsibility to others. His neglect of her on the trip to the ocean displays his failure to honestly state his intentions or fulfill his commitments. His rudeness at the second party (chapter 9) shows his willingness to wound others and his unreliability as a friend. The process of disengagement over the course of several chapters makes clear his indirection and his reluctance to face situations head on. His overdone anger and dislike for her later in the book testify to his feeling of guilt for his conduct toward her and his desire to blame others. His anger when she repeats rumors

underlines his insecurity, his distrust of Helen and his implicit acceptance of the truth of the gossip he has sought to deny. Finally, his continuing anger twenty years later is inexplicable except as an indication that he resents knowing that she is aware of how badly he behaved in their relationship. The degree to which Eliza continues to enter into class discussions throughout the semester despite the relatively small space devoted to her in the narrative demonstrates that Gilbert's treatment of her signals a major defect for many students. Most students, in fact, claim to have known someone like Gilbert, and many comment that he shares defects or conduct with ex-boyfriends. Because students both identify with Gilbert and compare him to people in their lives, they tend to experience his narrative as something they are part of. This is a response that Rosenblatt (1978, 2005) suggests was not always seen as desirable in literature classes.

Rosenblatt reports that at the time she wrote *Approaches to Literature*, students were sometimes advised not to read literary texts until after the course was over because reading could interfere with their critical interpretations. Her distinction between aesthetic and efferent reading was intended to remind teachers and critics that the experience of the story remains the principle point of literature. The efferent/aesthetic contrast however may have encouraged superficial and often dull treatments of literature. While Rosenblatt seems to have believed that background information was useful as a supplement, even necessary to the initial aesthetic experience, many reader-response oriented classroom teachers seem to dispense with the kinds of reinforcement that can enrich the aesthetic experience. It might be more useful to bend Rosenblatt's continuum in a couple of places to form a triangle. One point would be experiencing the story, a

second would be carrying information away from the text, and the third point would be bringing information back into the text. We could call the three processes aesthetic, efferent, and enriched reading. In the actual reading experience, the reader is constantly doing all three things.

If reading initiates the experience of the text as Karolides suggests, then the experience must go beyond the reading but, even if it did not, the experience must be composed of constant and simultaneous bringing to and carrying away. Even in that isolated moment of shutting out the world by reading, the reader is bringing to bear his whole history upon the text but later in talking about and reflecting on the story he is creating a more intense interaction between text and world. Hade (1992) makes the participants “text, reader, and context” rather than “text reader and poem” as Rosenblatt does in the title of her book. The combination that includes context focuses attention on the bringing to aspect of the reading experience. Context includes enrichment. Rosenblatt’s theory is not so much incomplete as understated. The process of taking information must go both ways in all reading. And even the most aesthetic reading becomes part of the life experience of the reader and therefore allows him to carry away information of some kind. Just as Barthes (1974) calls reading play, interpretation and criticism are play. We can’t deny the students the opportunity for the gossip and interpretation that allow the digestion of the aesthetic experience without removing part of that aesthetic experience. Typically, in reading *Wildfell Hall* the process of reading involves three stages: the initial reading experience followed by discussion and interchange of interpretations leading back to more nuanced reading.

Each of the prevalent approaches that have been used for the treatment of literature in the L2 class offers benefits to the learners. Both stylistic and cultural analyses in addition to helping learners develop their awareness of target language and culture can offer contextual insights that enrich the text. Reader response approaches can help learners to participate more fully in the aesthetic experience and thus interiorize awareness of the target language and culture. Each approach may also tempt the teacher to forget the text and thereby sacrifice part of the benefit of using literature in the classroom. The ethnography of communication provides a unifying framework for using any or all of these approaches while keeping the literary experience at the center of the discussion while utilizing and further refining skills that are already more developed in L2 students. Our experience of *Wildfell Hall*, especially, can be greatly enhanced by using the techniques of ethnography of communication as a basis for analysis in the classroom. As we consider specific chapters, focus on communicative events as units of analysis keeps student attention upon the details of what is happening at the moment. It is focus upon communicative events and use of Goffman's model of interaction ritual to analyze the interactions that begin chapter 1 that alerts us to the unreliability of Gilbert as a narrator and enables us to look for the truth of what is happening in places other than in his interpretations. The application of Hymes' speaking grid or Goffman's two to four step process for repairing challenges to face can help students to perceive many details that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Gilbert's comments when he first enters his house at the beginning of chapter 1 disclose many of the norms of social interaction within the Markham family and suggest conventions that might guide communication

within the community of Lindenhope. Each of the subsequent speech events in chapter 1 contributes developing further the nature of the norms that govern communication within the community.

The ethnography of communication places great emphasis on the careful analysis of language although language needs to be considered within the context of the concrete communicative event. Hymes sometimes reinterprets an entire story by explaining a variation in the order of a single particle. He explains that the philological work that he does is necessary to establish a text but not to enjoy it once it is established. For the L2 learner, however, the initial experience of reading the text often discloses a similar need to establish it. Because a L2 learner, like an ethnographer reading a Chinook text, may not have an intuitive understanding of all the implications of the words, close consideration of the words may be an essential step in experiencing the text amply. Detailed analysis of the way words are used may help the student develop his awareness of or competence in the second language but the analysis should not stray from its purpose of opening up the text. Because Hymes deals with texts that were originally spoken, he also notes (2003, p. 4) that readers less grounded in the language may have difficulty grasping the spoken qualities concealed in the text without close attention. From within the context of ethnography of communication, the language teachers who approached literature from a linguistic or stylistic perspective were performing useful activities, provided they geared those activities toward a fuller experience of the text. (Hymes characterizes this work as helping falcons learn to soar.) But the linguistic work is always subservient to the experience of the text. Chapter 2 of Wildfell Hall offers an

example of how close attention to the words in a text can help us to interpret the story. As the chapter opens Gilbert describes his walk to Wildfell Hall using verbs that reduce volition. On the surface, he seems to be merely describing a hunting excursion but we see that he consistently chooses verbs that seem to indicate that things simply happened (e.g. 'I was out', 'I came upon') rather than affirming the actions that he was taking. By the end of the sequence, we have a clear impression of Gilbert's unwillingness to admit his intentions even to himself. As we continue reading the novel we find that this is a defining trait, one that interferes with his desires at several critical points in the narrative and nearly defeats him in the final chapter. The information that we need in this sequence is not immediately apparent and without a linguistic analysis we may easily have passed over it. The point of the linguistic analysis of these sentences, however, is to shed light upon the event that is being described not merely to analyze degrees of volition in verbs.

Another example of how close attention to language can increase our understanding of the text occurs in Gilbert's interactions with Helen and then with Eliza that comprise the remainder of chapter 2. These encounters contrast unsuccessful and successful communication. Gilbert leaves his first encounter with Helen angry and frustrated and then consoles himself with a visit to Eliza that leaves him thinking that he is in love. In the first encounter both Gilbert and Helen are awkward in their responses to each other. Although they try to communicate within the conventions of small talk, they are meeting for the first time, unsure of what to expect, touchy about the implications of each other's speech, and inclined to overreaction when they feel they are being misinterpreted or slighted or judged. The interaction is broken off with both participants

angry and feeling mistreated. One problem seems to be that they are unsure of the norms and maybe even the genre of their interaction and each accordingly feels threatened by the other. The situation changes when Gilbert leaves Helen and goes to see Eliza. Though the relation between Gilbert and Eliza is also ambiguous and undefined, they have known each other all their lives and interacted with each other enough to know what to expect. Both Eliza and Gilbert know they are playing and they turn their conversation into an improvised duet in which each picks up on clues the other drops to construct a response. In the process, though both distort their true identities and feelings, each is able to confirm the other's line and flatter the other's vanity. Despite the obvious falsity of the interaction, both participants leave feeling good about themselves and in sympathy with the other. Neither of the two interactions in chapter 2 is profound or even serious. Both include banter, accommodation and trivial pleasantries but familiarity permits Eliza and Gilbert to comfortably trade inanities while lack of familiarity prevents Helen and Gilbert from exchanging even the most commonplace badinage inoffensively. Both interactions illuminate the role of paralinguistic features in structuring conversation and together they demonstrate the importance of expectations in determining the success of communicative encounters. It is not the use of specific language items that provides significance to these two encounters but rather the variation in fluency of the two interchanges.

The second pillar of ethnography of communication is exhaustive study of the context of the communication event. In the case of the literary text this would include whatever biographical, intertextual, sociological, cultural, economic, political or other details that might help to explain the text. Hymes (2003, p. 36) wrote, "Use all there is to

use. If there is a motto that sums up and informs my work, it is this.” This is his response to questions of disciplinary boundaries and theoretical approaches. Rosenblatt, too, believed that input in these areas was a beneficial supplement to the initial aesthetic experience of reading the text. Because an L2 learner may lack much of the cultural background that the original audience possessed, a cultural studies approach may at times be necessary to teaching literature if the learner is to enjoy the experience of the text. Even L1 students of literature may need contextualization for texts that were written in other centuries or regions. Language teachers who approach literature from within a cultural perspective, provided that they subordinate the cultural context to the demands of the text and readers, can make a significant contribution to the total aesthetic experience. Much of the context of communication events can be found in the text. In chapter 2, for example, Gilbert is disoriented when Helen reacts so strongly against his smile. He speculates that “there was something in that smile or the recollections that it awakened that was particularly displeasing to her” Bronte (1966/1848, p. 28). In chapter 18, we learn the cause of Helen’s displeasure when we find that Gilbert’s reaction was very like Huntingdon’s in similar circumstances. Beneath the text of *Wildfell Hall*, however, there are many cultural issues that may be unfamiliar to the modern reader and may not be thoroughly comprehensible without some outside information. The whole book is a discussion of the position of women in society but only occasionally are these issues stated explicitly. Returning to chapter 2, Helen’s extreme reaction to finding Gilbert with Arthur derives from her fear of being discovered by her husband. The marriage laws of the time and the lack of legal standing or rights for married women would have made her

situation much more precarious than modern readers unfamiliar with Victorian culture might assume. Even the concept of useful talk becomes clearer when we know more of what the expectations were for Victorian wives. Questions of religious expectations and controversies also play a large part in the novel, though once again they are largely implicit. Some familiarity with varieties of Victorian belief might clarify many of the speech events. We can better understand Helen's quarrels with Huntingdon, with her Aunt Maxwell, and with Mrs. Markham when we gain some insight into the religious context of the novel. For most of us the significance of the name Huntingdon in guiding us to understand the reasoning that underlies Huntingdon's views would be lost without the hint that the Countess of Huntingdon's circle was the Calvinist wing of Methodism. This link to Calvinism helps us to perceive a particular perspective in Huntingdon's comments on the subject. The vastly different educational opportunities and processes that separated men and women in Victorian society also influence the context of some of the interactions. However, as with language, cultural background is useful to enrich the interactions of the narrative. A cultural studies perspective, on the contrary, might invert the process, utilizing the narrative to extract insights about Victorian culture.

The central focus of ethnography of communication is always upon the situated communicative event. Hymes (2003, p. 383) writes, "The life of a literary text begets imaginative life. . . Contemporary audiences . . . like traditional audiences, will individually visualize settings, identify with actors, interpret moral weight." Despite his concern with establishing the authentic text, Hymes views texts as open. He calls for a plurality of readings because no individual reader can exhaust the possibilities (2003, p.

59). He also stresses the importance of discussion, basing his arguments on Cassier from whom Hymes takes the idea that the text includes text, narrative, and self; without all three, the reading is superficial. The ultimate goal of much of Hymes' philological and contextualization work is to find the self, the voice of the individual storyteller. On the other hand, he would like to present stories with little explanation (2003, p. 46) because other readers will find other relations that he missed. Hymes centers attention on the voice of the original storyteller but at the same time says the story belongs to the reader. Clearly, reader response activities that encourage students to experience the text can be of value as approaches to teaching literature from within the context of ethnography of communication, but only when these activities are designed to enhance the experience of the text rather than to substitute attention to the reader's responses for attention to the experience. Like Brumfit (1985, p. 123), Rosenblatt (1995, 1978) and the reader response theorists, Hymes principal concern with the text is the aesthetic experience.

Ethnography of communication, as a framework for reading a literary text, can combine the three principal approaches to L2 literature teaching and focus them upon the experience of literature. Additionally, this framework, perhaps more than any other enables the learner to use and further develop her considerable skills of cultural analysis. L2 learners, with the experience of entering and adapting to another culture and language have already assumed some of the attributes of ethnographers. On a regular basis, they practice the art of using all there is to use as they apply their linguistic and cultural insights to the management of the communicative events in which they interact. By asking them to apply these same skills to the reading of the L2 literature, we make the

study of literature an integral part of their development as transcultural individuals. A novel such as *Wildfell Hall* is ideal for students working in areas such as second language acquisition and intercultural studies. Helen's problems involve many issues related to intercultural competence and students can relate her interactions to their own experiences. Using ethnography of communication as an analytic technique helps to focus upon problems that are typical of intercultural communication. In discussing Helen's experiences, students may become more aware of their own techniques of intercultural communication. Throughout the narrative Helen must confront expectations that she does not clearly perceive and she often fails to respond adequately. In chapter 3, for example, we see how she attempts to discourse upon her ideas about education within a context in which she fails to recognize clear social expectations. She appears not to perceive how her conduct is interpreted by others and she finally concludes her visit with a mistaken impression of what has taken place. In chapter 5, though she makes greater effort to meet the expectations her neighbors have for a hostess, we see how her body language and other paralinguistic signals undermine her message and leave visitors feeling unwelcome. In the diary section, Huntingdon's conduct toward Aunt Maxwell and his actions in general at Staningley are complicated by false assumptions about what is appropriate behavior there, while Helen's later problems at Grassdale derive in part from assuming that the expectations of Staningley can be transferred without modification. Because *Wildfell Hall* deals with speech communities that are fairly similar and which apparently use the same language, it throws into relief issues of cross-cultural communication that

might be obscured in contexts where languages are different enough to make it plausible to assign misunderstandings to linguistic differences.

Students are asked to do several things with the text of *Wildfell Hall* in the course called Ethnographic Analysis of Literary Texts. First, they read it during the first two to three weeks of the semester, before much is done with the novel in class. The course utilizes an electronic forum on Nicenet, in which students are asked to record perceptions and comments on each chapter as they read. Students are encouraged to comment on their classmates responses as well. I also respond to each student's remarks but only with requests for clarification or further elaboration, with questions that might lead to the expansion of observations or with statements of agreement. I find that much of what I would like students to notice about the characters –Gilbert, Eliza, Helen--is already introduced in these comments, making it possible to later bring these themes into classroom discussion as further consideration of points made by specific students rather than as teacher formulated themes. Class discussion can then focus on discussing the points and on considering events in the text that led students to these observations or that may either reinforce or modify the points. During the first two weeks of class, nearly all classroom activity and homework focuses on theoretical material unrelated to the narrative. Jakobson's six functions of language, Hymes's SPEAKING grid and Goffman's process of interaction ritual are introduced and applied to the analysis of sample written, spoken, or video texts taken from other sources. Practice with these models leads to exercises using *Wildfell Hall*. The speech event extending through paragraphs 6-14 of chapter 1, for example, has been analyzed in successive classroom or

homework exercises using each of the three models. Jakobson's language functions draw attention to Mrs. Markham's characteristic device of disguising conative utterances directed toward one of her children as referential or phatic remarks addressed to another. Hymes' SPEAKING grid can focus attention on her strategies for enforcing social norms. Goffman's interaction ritual discloses Gilbert's inability to gain acceptance of his line from other members of his family. During this first phase of the course students also read several short excerpts from texts dealing with concepts such as speech community, speech situation, speech event, speech act, and communicative competence.

Because so many implications can be drawn from each speech event, discussion of individual speech events can occupy excessive time, especially with larger groups. After the first three chapters, homework exercises often require students to identify the speech events that appear significant to them in later chapters. Sometimes it is necessary to focus upon specific events because they do not immediately appear to be of importance. An example would be the walk to Wildfell Hall that begins chapter 2. This sequence of nine sentences might seem to be mere description on first reading, but a close analysis of the lexical choices made by the author demonstrates that it serves to identify Gilbert's major flaw, to provide a summary of the plot line that will be central to Gilbert's pursuit of Helen, and to clarify a view of nature that underlies the views of human development of both narrators. After the first events of the novel have been discussed, however, it is practical to let the students' perceptions guide the development of the course. Identifying the limits of the speech event before describing what is happening in it requires the student to focus on the structure of events. Describing the

interactions they identify requires them to look more closely at the details of the interaction. Leading discussions on the events they have chosen validates their interpretations as readers. For the teacher, building discussions around events selected by the students makes it more likely that the questions that interest them will be central to the course. This strategy is also likely to make discussions more interesting for the teacher. Hymes (2003, p. 46) has observed, “I myself have often wanted to present a story with little or no apparatus, so that the reader can experience for its own sake and can perhaps detect relations independently of what I had found, relations perhaps that I had missed”.

It is difficult to approach the chapters in *Wildfell Hall* sequentially, because the early chapters require a lot of time but students also need to comment upon the chapter that they are reading and writing comments about at the moment. Interpretation like gossip is more exciting when it is fresh and if students are reading in chapter 5, they have things they want to say about it even if we haven't finished considering chapter 2. Also, some discussions can't wait. As the first section narrated by Gilbert advances, many students become interested in the relation between Lawrence and Gilbert, especially Gilbert's suspicion that Lawrence is a rival for Helen's affection. The speech events that involve confrontations between Lawrence and Gilbert are often a focus of student attention. But if these discussions are postponed, some students will reach the diary section and learn that Lawrence is Helen's brother, thereby completely altering the responses that they make to those events. Similarly, the diary alters the interpretation of much of Helen's behavior in the early chapters so it is useful to have students discuss

their initial reactions to these chapters before they start reading the diary. Because the book was published more than 160 years ago and describes English culture of the time, there are background elements influencing the plot that are not readily recognizable by Mexican students in the twenty-first century. But in *Wildfell Hall*, these elements are generally not so unusual that they require extensive discussion of the cultural milieu. Some details can be brought out as they come up in discussion. Some can be indicated by a few short quotes in the class material. The position of women in society, the rise of the middle class, the religious debates of the 1840s may need to be mentioned briefly as considerations to explain some reactions by the characters in the novel but they don't require extensive research or discussion. Short and Candlin (1986, p. 90), in fact, suggest that cultural background should generally be presented as "Small-scale social facts," which they describe as "specific background as it was prompted by the texts themselves." Hymes (2003, p. 46) warns, "Providing the information is, of course, not the same as experiencing the unfolding of the story in terms of it." Cultural background may only be useful as it heightens the experience of the text, and conversely, may interfere with the experience if it distracts the reader from the story. Nonetheless, some cultural background, judiciously introduced, can augment the aesthetic experience of the text. Burke and Brumfit (1986, p. 175) argue that "reading of a work of literature can be enriched by skillful use of background material, that it cannot be read in a vacuum".

More commonly, the teacher may want to bring attention to events in the text that students seem to have passed over. Usually, communicative events that students haven't focused upon but that may be significant can easily be brought into discussions through

their relation to events that are being discussed. Littlewood (1986, p. 178) argues that “In the case of literature, language creates its own context.” He suggests that literature used in L2 classes outside the L2 community is a way to break down the isolation of the language learner from the context of the language he is learning. He speaks of “events created by language” that “create, in their turn, a context of situation”. Thus, a literary text will often provide enough contextual information to make the learner’s distance from the culture in which the text was produced largely irrelevant. Students reading chapter 2, for example, may not be aware of the legal disadvantages of Victorian women that made Helen Graham’s position at Wildfell especially precarious. The scene when she comes upon Gilbert with her son after hearing him cry, nonetheless, clearly shows her anxiety and alerts the reader to her sense of danger. While all the cultural details that lead to Helen’s caution and secretiveness may not be known to the reader, her psychological state is clearly revealed in the interaction with Gilbert. Brumfit (1986, p. 187) notes that native speakers are not necessarily familiar with the context of classic works either and that they may not even understand much of the language of texts from other centuries. Vincent (1986: 209) goes further, suggesting that “some works may be culturally more accessible than they are to students in modern urban Britain” It is probably true that many of the gender issues motivating Wildfell Hall would be more recognizable to students in Mexico than they would be to equivalent students in the United States. Restriction of educational and employment opportunities for women, as well as limited rights within marriage, have been situations that have begun to evolve in Mexico only in recent decades.

The classroom and homework activities focusing on individual speech events can achieve great variety with this approach. First, Hymes tells us to use all there is to use so we can vary the focus with each assignment. The SPEAKING grid, for example, suggests several elements of the communicative event but there is no need to consider all of them in each analysis. In one event what is not said may be the most significant information. In others, we may want to look at norms, at gestures, at the key, at aspects of the setting, at lexical choices, at language functions, at specific speech acts, at rituals of interaction, at points of failed communication, or any number of other elements. Often events are most useful as means of evaluating previous remarks by the narrators. The events in the early part of Helen's diary frequently parallel events in the early chapters of Gilbert's narration and are most revealing when considered in pairs. Some events disclose who may or may not speak in certain circumstances or about certain topics. Always, we want to understand how the participants perceive what is taking place.

The analysis of a text in a language class is always related to the individual class that reads the text. Because the text always includes many departure points and no group follows all of them, the nature of the discussion and the elements that are brought out depends upon the situation and interests of the groups that are looking at the book. *Wildfell Hall*, nonetheless, is a novel that offers many directions that are closely related to the circumstances of students working in languages other than their own. Nineteenth century realist fiction, a genre deriving from an ethnographic imagination and closely related, according to Buzard (2005), to twentieth century ethnography, lends itself especially to analysis using the techniques of ethnography of communication. Reed

(1999), in the epigraph to this chapter, suggests that the subtleties of disregard for those who are different are more easily grasped through reading British literature of the nineteenth century. We might equally say that the complexities of interaction between people with different cultural expectations are more clearly visible in this novel where people of different communities believe they are speaking the same language. Wildfell Hall, constructed as a series of communication events and reflecting precise ethnographic observation, is an ideal narrative for advanced L2 readers.

CONCLUSION

what good philological practice always entails: close reading of the verbal action as it develops sentence by sentence in the original text, and interpretation based on using cumulatively all there is to use, as to the significance of details, and as to the situation which implicitly poses the question to which the text is to be regarded as a strategic or stylized answer. (Hymes, 1981, p. 275)

Fish (1980, p. 244) justifies his use of speech act theory to analyze the action of *Coriolanus* by telling us that *Coriolanus* is a play about speech acts. Although all plays are made of speech acts, *Coriolanus* is a study of how speech acts function and, thus, can be interpreted legitimately through an analysis of the consequences of those speech acts. He argues that, though any drama can be analyzed using speech act theory, in most cases such a model would be trivial, because though the works include speech acts, they are not about speech acts. It is tempting to make the same claim about *Wildfell Hall*. We can learn much about the novel by looking at it through the lens of ethnography of communication because the narrative is to some degree about communicative events. It is constructed of communicative events and close attention to the interaction in these events is necessary for the reader who wishes to understand what is happening in the story. The narrators both provide us with their interpretations of the action but the details of the communicative events are meant to alert the reader to what is really happening and to allow him to evaluate both the situations and the narrators. The complexity of the events allows us to go beyond what any single narrator could perceive. We might argue that, when Bronte told us she wished to tell the truth, she was speaking of her desire to describe the complexity of interaction in communicative events. The novel provides overwhelming evidence that this could be the case.

But when he collected his essays on the nature of interpretation into the 1980 volume, Fish commented upon his earlier claim that *Coriolanus* is a speech act play. He accused himself of “arguing for a special relationship between an interpretive system (speech-act theory) and a play as it ‘really is’” (Fish, 1980, p. 200). Fish has frequently argued that the text does not exist outside of the interpretive perspective from which it is read and that the reader will always find within the text whatever he is looking for. In other words, the perspective of the reader causes him to interpret the text based upon assumptions that make the final conclusions predicted by that interpretive system seem inescapable. There is no text as it “really is”. So, though it may be tempting to view *Wildfell Hall* as a narrative of communicative events most readily approached through a perspective focusing upon communicative events, such a conclusion would be overly strong. It may be more legitimate to argue that the focus upon communicative events characteristic of ethnography of communication enables the reader to discover in *Wildfell Hall* a complex but coherent universe of interaction.

From his re-analysis of the Clackamas myth ‘Seal and her younger brother dwelt here,’ Hymes (1981, p. 299) concludes, “Despite the richness a sociopsychological perspective provides, prior reliance upon its insights can override and even conceal the import of a myth.” Hymes’ point is that it is necessary to begin with the elements in the text rather than from the premises of a universal theory. Although he calls his interpretation structural and that of Jacobs sociopsychological, he cautions against the a priori use of any theory as a shortcut to interpretation. “One assumes,” he writes, “that there is a native system to be discovered”. Discovering this native system implies

identifying patterns of social interaction and relating them to the language resources that may be used to enact them. Saville-Troike (2003, 1982, p. 88) notes, “It is crucial that the ethnographic description of other groups be approached not in terms of preconceived categories and processes, but with openness to discovery of the way native speakers perceive and structure their communicative experiences”. Although she is speaking of the ethnographer entering a particular community, the counsel is equally useful for the reader entering a new text.

On the other hand, Hymes supports some of his insights into the structure of “Seal and her younger brother dwelt there” by demonstrating how the story relates to parallel myths from the Clackamas and related cultures. He calls this, “defining a genre in terms of features and relationships valid for the individual culture.” He argues that “the meanings and uses of individual texts are to be interpreted in the light of the formal features and relations found for the native genre” (Hymes, 1981, p. 276). Such comparisons do not imply subjugation of the text to a universal theory but rather they involve exploring how the text fits into the range of texts that comprise, in the culture that produced it, the particular genre it participates in. Although *Wildfell Hall*, in the complexity of its events and the innovative nature of elements of its content and themes is, in some aspects, *sui generis*, recent criticism has shown that it can be illuminated by comparison with a wide range of contemporary or later Victorian novels that either followed its lead or developed parallel treatments of its central themes.

Perhaps because it touches on so many themes of interest to our time, *Wildfell Hall* lends itself to ideological treatments that begin from theoretical perspectives rather

than by focusing first on the events of the narrative. Much of the eccentricity of Eagleton's (1988/1975) study, for example, derives from his attempt to make the novel fit a theoretical system largely irrelevant to its context. Although, he is able to provide several insights into Gilbert's character, Eagleton objects that the narrator is presented "as psychologically interesting individual rather than as social symbol" (Eagleton, 1988/1975, p. 134). He complains, in fact, that neither Helen nor Gilbert serves as a class representative (Eagleton 1988/ 1975, p. 134). Though Huntingdon and his circle illustrate the relation "between class and moral character," Eagleton argues that the correlation is "too direct, too undialectical" (Eagleton, 1988/1975, p. 133). He criticizes the use of the enveloping narrative because it distracts from the social themes:

By enfolding the Grassdale events within a traditional love-story the novel once more dissolves the social to the individual, diverting a confrontation of class-values to an exploration of personal suffering and self-fulfillment. (Eagleton, 1988/1975, p. 136).

Eagleton finally concludes that *Wildfell Hall* is slighter than the books of Charlotte and Emily because it separates the personal and the social and because it is too morally simple, suppressing the simultaneous attraction and repulsion toward aristocratic values. Though both of his conclusions seem doubtful, the central problem with his analysis is that he finds that Bronte failed in her novel to do what she appears to have had no intention of doing. His desire for narrow Marxist orthodoxy, despite his occasionally striking observations, seems to have prevented him from perceiving the richness and complexity of the novel Bronte actually wrote. This is not to say that Eagleton's critical framework is inadequate but rather that, in beginning from a theoretical perspective

without first engaging in a close reading of the book, he may have failed to observe important elements of the novel. On the other hand, he does note Gilbert's over-refinement, egocentrism and complacency of tone and Helen's reduction of social conflict to moral issues. To claim that Eagleton ignored elements of the novel Bronte actually wrote is to assume again that there is a text as it 'really is'. Fish would argue that we must read from a perspective and that our reading is always determined by the expectations of our interpretive community but Hymes suggests that it is possible to discover much about the interpretive context in which the narrative was produced and that greater awareness of this interpretive structure can help us to experience some of the richness of the story.

It may not be possible to step back from theory to observe the events of the text from a perspective of neutrality. Olson (1994) argues that observation is theory-driven. Fish might say that Hymes' insistence that we first analyze the discourse and events before we move to theoretical constructs is still to assume that there is something the story really is. Of course, Fish's own interpretations of Milton or Coriolanus suggest that he also is leading us to what those texts really are. Hymes' studies show us that the small details of discourse and interaction can open up a text for us. He suggests, in the lines that serve as epigraph to this chapter, that whatever the theory we may use to interpret a text, we must first read the words, note the details, and gather all the resources available to us to reconstruct the significance for the participants of the situation and actions. Davis (2008, p. 8) makes a similar claim in his study of the Victorian novel. "Everything important," he argues, "is lodged in the literary detail, the in-depth literary thinking, in

tiny movements that are the necessary guise or disguise for big things passing too quickly under the pressure of time and the limits of human realization.” Although he speaks of ‘literary detail’ and ‘literary thinking’, these details, in context, do not appear to be unlike the details of the communicative event. Because the nineteenth century novel presents both detail and pattern, it is not enough to note the details; the reader must also discover the pattern that the details illustrate. Hymes (2003, p. 37) tells us, “The point of method is not to look for any single feature, but to look for what counts in the text and tradition”. We must build the theory from the evidence of the details. We cannot impose the pattern on the text but must find it in the discourse and events of the narrative.

This study of Wildfell Hall has been brief and fragmentary. The purpose has not been to make a complete analysis of the book but only to demonstrate how we can gain insights into it by using the methods of ethnography of communication. From the previous chapters we can, however, draw a number of conclusions. First we can say that the observation of speech events can provide a revealing entry into the novel. In the case of Wildfell Hall, analysis of speech events and interaction ritual are especially fruitful because they correspond to the techniques Bronte used to write the novel. She clearly portrays the difference between Gilbert’s self-description and the views of others toward him through subtle interactions, as in the first chapter when she undercuts his self-image by showing his interaction with his family. She undercuts Helen in similar ways, contrasting the image of reflective maturity she tries to maintain in her diary with the irrational adolescent rebellion she manifests in her conversations with her aunt. Bronte shows precise understanding of how communicative events function in her society,

letting the reader see the effects of frequent subtle misinterpretations that pass practically unmentioned in the narrative. She remains outside the minds of all the characters except the narrators, and she provides narrators who tell neither the readers nor themselves the whole truth about what they think and feel. Yet we glimpse what the characters are thinking from a multitude of small details, glances, expressions, gestures and silences. She shows us how interactions break down through slight misunderstandings and inadvertent challenges. Because language occurs in situated discourse, the speech event is the ideal unit of analysis for considering a novel, especially a realistic novel, which attempts to portray the reality as it is.

The study raises many further questions about Wildfell Hall that a longer analysis might have been able to explore. I have come to feel that Gilbert's interactions with Lawrence are key factors in coming to understand Gilbert as a narrator. A longer study would have included some analysis of the speech events where the two interact, perhaps comparable to the analysis of the scenes Helen and Eliza in chapter 2 of the novel. Lawrence's role is significant for several reasons. First because, although Gilbert makes a special point of criticizing his character, comparing him unfavorably to Halford and finding ways to disparage him when reporting on his participation in the communicative events, Lawrence is always patient and forgiving toward Gilbert. Gilbert seems unwilling to acknowledge Lawrence's generosity toward him. The only easy explanation for Gilbert's irritation with Lawrence is that it derives from his sense of guilt or rather his embarrassment that Lawrence has been witness to some of Gilbert's worst moments. Lawrence is also significant as a model for male behavior. He is practically the only male

in Wildfell Hall to befriend Helen from disinterested motives and, though he shares many of Helen's viewpoints, he is more gentlemanly than either she or Gilbert in his expression of his ideas. Closer analysis of the communicative events between them leading up to Gilbert's attack would provide insights into the novel. The sequence of events as they mend their relationship after Gilbert reads the diary are also important in illuminating Gilbert's character and judging the degree to which he might justifiably be said to have developed during the novel.

The early pages of Helen's diary also required more space. The communicative events in these chapters often parallel those in the early chapters of Gilbert's narrative. Just as the events of the first chapter call into question Gilbert's interpretation of events, the early diary alerts the reader to Helen's unreliability, a more significant insight as the novel has often been read as though Helen were an accurate interpreter of events. Close attention to the interactions with Aunt Maxwell especially demonstrate how irrational, stubborn and rebellious Helen was at the beginning of her narrative. The later diary events, generally assumed to be the thematic core of the novel, would require much more extensive treatment in a work focused on exhaustive analysis of Wildfell Hall. These scenes would have enabled us to trace Helen's development as well as to explore the social themes that Bronte examined in the novel. The set of characters, the social context, the norms of interaction and the customary themes of this section are quite different from those of the rest of the novel, yet Bronte's technique of constructing character and context through careful description of interaction is equally effective. Extensive discussion of this section would have required greater attention to background

development, however, because this part of the narrative is essentially a complete break from Gilbert's narration.

Finally more attention to the final scenes of the novel would have helped us determine the degree to which Gilbert and Helen do develop in the course of the narrative and to consider in more depth the questions many critics have raised about the suitability of Helen's second marriage. From the few scenes we have considered, however, we have gained insights into the characters of both Gilbert and Helen. We have discovered some of the norms of interaction in their society and we have learned to perceive differences in convention within a fairly homogenous social context. Close attention to the communicative events has brought the characters and story of Wildfell Hall to life, has shown us in remarkably realistic detail the nature of interaction among members of the communities portrayed in the narrative, and, in disclosing how far the intentions of the narrators diverge from those of the author, has helped reveal the superficially reticent implied author of the novel.

We have also seen that the interpretation of Wildfell Hall through attention to communicative events enables us to make literary statements. Careful observation of the communicative events involving the narrators, for example, discloses that they are frequently unable to perceive or unwilling to report accurately what has happened. The demonstration that Gilbert and Helen are both unreliable narrators holds large implications for the themes of the book. Since we cannot rely on what the narrators have to say and we do not have any direct interventions by the author, we must search in other places for the truths we take from the narrative. This gives narrative authority to the

minor characters and forces us to pay attention to all the voices in the novel. It also forces us to go beyond the voices of the characters and look closely at each piece of action to interpret events for ourselves.

The communicative event is the ideal unit, not only for reading and interpreting Wildfell Hall, but also for classroom instruction. The communicative event is the unit that brings together the significant elements of the novel, permitting the situated study of language, culture, such literary elements as setting characters, plot, theme, mood, tone, and cultural elements such as norms of interaction. Considering these elements of the text as they are situated within the communicative event, leads the reader or the student further into the story rather than away from it as some forms of textual analysis are apt to do. In the classroom, focus on the events or upon the situated use of language in the events also centers the discussion on what is happening in the narrative. Because learners can quickly grasp the basic elements of ethnographic observation as summarized in Hymes' SPEAKING grid, they can become knowers whose identification and selection of communicative events determine the direction of the exploration of the fictional world of the novel. In any reading, the particular combination of background and reading of each learner may not have been seen before because each person brings different experiences to the text, but ethnography of communication, in addition, makes each learner an authoritative voice in establishing the orientation of inquiry.

For the L2 reader, ethnography of communication is an especially relevant approach to the study of literature because it exploits experiences and skills that the learner has already developed as a user of other languages. We can expect L2 learners to

be more aware of the implications of speech community and the problems of identifying discourse practices of dissimilar groups. The use of ethnography of communication as an approach to *Wildfell Hall* emphasizes those aspects of the book that are closest to the reader's experience as a language learner or perhaps as a participant in a different speech community. *Wildfell Hall* is a book likely to appeal to most college-age students because of the focus on problems of interest to young adults and the authentic development of social interaction. L2 learners, however, can connect with the book in additional ways because they are more attuned to the difficulties that language can provoke in social interaction and to the complexities of interacting with individuals of different cultural backgrounds.

Some of the insights that we gained from applying the techniques of ethnography of communication to the reading of *Wildfell Hall*, may have been available through other analytical approaches. Some of the early reviewers of the novel, though unfamiliar with ethnography, reached conclusions about Gilbert much like those of the students who read the book at the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua. It is, nonetheless, clear that, in viewing the novel as a series of speech events and in analyzing it through the methods of ethnography of communication and interaction ritual, we have been able to clarify much of the action of the narrative. And, perhaps of greater significance, we have seen that, unlike many other approaches to literature, ethnography of communication encourages the reader to become more involved with the story. In a comment cited earlier Davis (2008, p. 17) suggested that while readers seek to internalize a narrative, "personally, emotionally, as if they might just find revealed there a version of the secrets of their

lives,” critics distance themselves from the text and objectify it. The virtue of ethnography of communication is that it may permit us to blur the lines between critic and reader. The ethnographer struggles to move closer to the characters, to understand what the interactions mean to them, to see the events through their eyes. In doing so, he brings them to life and experiences what they do.

We might ask whether Hymes’ exhortation to use all there is to use helps the reader to enrich his experience of the story or interferes with his ability to immerse himself in it. Davis cautions that contextual background can take the place of the story. “So, do not even try to think historically as soon as you open a Victorian novel,” he warns: “it will become an all-too-knowing substitute for the experience of actual reading” (Davis, 2008, p.1). But Hymes argues that sometimes we need to know something of the norms and conventions of the culture that produced the text. “Being unfamiliar with the conventions of another tradition or unconscious of effects deployed in our own language, we may need to have what goes on called to our attention, pointed out, in order to see it” (Hymes, 2003, p. 321). Hymes observation speaks directly to the issues involved in using literature in the L2 classroom or using literature with any students living in a time or place different from the one that produced the text.

This does not mean that Hymes believes that there is a canonical interpretation that readers must arrive at. He insists, in fact, that there should be many differing interpretations for each text. In his re-interpretation of “Seal and her younger brother dwelt there,” Hymes introduces another element in the reading of classic texts. He borrows the term ‘dynamic analogy’, taken from James Sanders’ discussion of Biblical

interpretation, and used by Sanders to indicate the act of re-interpreting a tradition through conscious identification “with the character or characters in the tradition most representative of the new hearers or readers” (Hymes, 2003, p. 10). Hymes uses this concept to discuss how Victoria Howard, the author of “Seal and her younger brother dwelt there,” took a traditional Clackamas myth and re-imagined it from the viewpoint of the daughter who warns her mother of danger. The older myth, Hymes argues, was traditionally told by men and focused upon the uncle and his murderer. Howard shifted the main action to the conflict between the mother and daughter and focused on the feelings of the daughter. In adapting the myth for a different audience and a later time, Howard seems to have done what Voloshinov (1973/1930, p. 91) suggested was necessary to give an inherited text vitality for a new generation. In re-interpreting Howard’s text to bring attention to the elements that he believed were central to the emotional core of her version, Hymes was perhaps also performing the same act of accommodation to the present. We might assume that Fish in his interpretation of *Coriolanus* and Eagleton in his discussion of *Wildfell Hall* were doing the same thing.

What Hymes was probably insisting upon, however, was that each new analysis of the story should derive from close attention to the details of the text. He writes:

Each fresh venture will require fresh reading, because what is relevant now may not have been relevant when the story was originally documented. Much will have been forgotten and is not to be recovered from secondary guides. Only by fresh reading can we reconstruct the imaginative narrative resources and surroundings of the stories we give attention (Hymes, 2003, p. 78).

This is an argument, above all, for reading the text. In the case of *Wildfell Hall*, it calls upon us to read the text closely, observing the details of the communicative events: the implications of the language, but also the significance of the silence and the connotations of gesture. It tells us how to use a little known Victorian novel in a Mexican university program. Hymes also favors using all there is to use and for providing background for students whose cultural background may be different from those of the writer because of separation either in time or in space. There are times when the introduction of historical, sociological or even biographical material can be helpful for the reader. But no amount of historical scholarship will really take us back to 1827. Hymes has said that after doing the philological work that allows him to establish the text, he would like to simply present it with no scaffolding to the student. Perhaps reading *Wildfell Hall* is something like doing ethnography the way Saville-Troike (2003, 1982, p. 103) describes it in an anecdote she takes from Stoller (1986). The anthropologist was told he could not learn about the community by asking people questions. “‘You must learn to sit with people,’ he told me. ‘You must learn to sit and listen’” With novels, we need to do the same thing. The background information and critical interpretation won’t take us very far. We need to sit with the novel and listen to what it has to say. That may lead us to insights we can come by in no other way, and it may be as close as we ever get to 1827.

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