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**(En)gendering barriers: a comparative discussion of the  
woman question in mid- to late-nineteenth-century English,  
German and Russian literatures**

by  
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## Abstract

### **(En)gendering barriers: a comparative discussion of the woman question in mid- to late-nineteenth-century English, German and Russian literatures**

Imagery of enclosure [...] constantly threatens to stifle the heroines of women's fiction.

This thesis seeks to develop recent research into Russian literature, which has applied semiotic theory to a feminist critique, to explore how spaces may be gendered as feminine or masculine. This thesis will adopt a similar feminist and semiotic approach, but will focus not upon gendered *spaces*, but *barriers*, the 'imagery of enclosure'. I will argue that barriers are both 'engendered', and 'gendered', in the sense that they often relate to female characters. These barriers are sub-divided into three distinct types, which will be termed 'textual', 'actual' and 'perceived' barriers. This revisionist semiotic approach will be used to explore the Woman Question within a comparative framework, in a discussion of mid- to late-nineteenth-century English, German and Russian literatures.

Drawing upon the work of literary theorists Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, alongside key concepts in feminist criticism (such as Simone de Beauvoir's notion of woman as 'other'), this thesis will consider textual, actual and perceived barriers in selected works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Theodor Storm, Theodor Fontane, Ivan Turgenev and Lev Tolstoy. In doing so, it will trace the development of the 'superfluous woman', a new character type, who is the superfluous man's counterpart.

The fundamental aim of this study is to make an original and innovative contribution to the field of comparative European literary studies. Furthermore, and what is perhaps most exciting about this research, is that it offers a new methodological framework within which any literary text may be considered.

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## A Note on Conventions

All titles and quotations from artistic texts are quoted in the original language. In the case of Russian, Cyrillic is used. Russian names are transliterated using the British Standard system; hence Elena, Mariya, Chernyshevsky. Where I refer to non-fiction texts that I have read in translation (for example, Bakhtin's essay on chronotopes or Tolstoy's diaries), I cite both title and quotations in English.

Full bibliographic details for all works are given in the footnotes at the point of the first reference. Subsequent references are abbreviated, to include author and page number. The year is included if I have consulted more than one work by the author in question.

Dates for works and authors of artistic texts will be given once, on the first mention.

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I am deeply indebted to the generous contribution of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, who have fully funded this project. I sincerely hope that their faith in me has been rewarded with an original and innovative contribution to the field of comparative literary studies.

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The foundations for my love of literature were laid in childhood, and the credit for this must go to my parents. My Mum and Dad have always supported me in whatever I have wanted to do, and my PhD was no exception. Thank you both.

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And finally, to the most important person in my life, John-Paul. It may be some years before you sit down to read this thesis (if ever!), but I want you to know that every word was written for you.



## Introduction

### Preamble

The semiotic function of space is increasingly being recognized as having considerable importance for our understanding of the 'meaning' of fiction.<sup>1</sup>

Imagery of enclosure [...] constantly threatens to stifle the heroines of women's fiction.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis arose from my passion for Russian literature, a field in which recent research has applied semiotic theory to a feminist literary critique, to explore how spaces may be gendered as either feminine or masculine.<sup>3</sup> In completing this project, I am seeking to develop this semiotic approach to feminist literary criticism (what will be termed 'feminist semiotics'), but I will look not at gendered spaces, but barriers, the 'imagery of enclosure' referred to in the second epigraph. As the thesis title suggests, it will argue that barriers are both 'engendered' (that is, brought about), and 'gendered', in the sense that many of them specifically relate to the situation of women. These barriers are sub-divided into three distinct types, which will be termed 'textual', 'actual' and 'perceived' barriers. This revisionist semiotic approach will be used to explore the Woman Question within a comparative framework, in a discussion of mid- to late-nineteenth-century English, German and Russian literatures.

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Andrew, 'Death and the Maiden: Narrative, Space, Gender and Identity in *Asia*', in Andrew, Joe, Offord, Derek, and Robert Reid, eds, *Turgenev and Russian Culture: Essays to Honour Richard Peace*, 2008, pp. 27-52 (27).

<sup>2</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, p. 468.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Joe Andrew, *Narrative, Space and Gender in Russian Fiction, 1846-1903*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2007.

## Aims of the Study and Choice of Writers

This thesis aims to develop work I began in my Masters dissertation, 'The Woman Question in Russian Literature, 1830-1900', by expanding the scope to look at German and English writers of a similar period alongside Russian authors. When considering what other countries to use in a comparative study, England was an obvious choice in terms of the historical role played by the Woman Question; issues of concern to women were debated just as fiercely as in Russia, on both the political and literary stages. Germany is included as a third, counterintuitive example. Although the Woman Question was not debated politically to the same extent as in England and Russia, I will argue that it is still manifested in literary texts. The consideration of the wider European context and the application of the conceptual framework of barrier semiotics both aim at enabling a new interpretation of the writers to be discussed in all three countries.

The potential scope of this project is huge, as it proposes to consider three distinct literary cultures. For this reason, and in order to manage the vast amount of material available, it has been necessary to sharpen the focus in other ways. The first way in which this has been achieved is in the use of the concept-based methodology of barrier semiotics, which is transferable across literary cultures. Furthermore, an assessment of the different types of barriers is a structure that will be replicated in each chapter.

The second strategy to keep the project focused is the careful selection of writers to be discussed. To this end, I have limited the writers I am looking at to those who are well

established in the literary canons of their respective countries. The aim of this study is not re-discovery of authors and texts, but rather, a re-vision. The selection of writers also aims at providing a balance of male and female authors, in order to explore whether, and indeed how, men and women viewed the Woman Question in different ways. Here is perhaps the best place to justify these choices.

As we have noted, the starting point was my previous work, which considered the literary exposition of the Woman Question in Russian literature in the nineteenth century. One of the key themes here was Ivan Turgenev's (1818-1883) and Lev Tolstoy's (1828-1910) opposing attitudes to the emancipation of women, one of the many 'accursed questions' about which they vehemently disagreed.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, Turgenev is most often viewed as open to discussions of the Woman Question, particularly in his depiction of positive heroines such as Elena Stakhova (*Накануне*, 1860), who 'became a symbol of women's emancipation in Russia'.<sup>5</sup> Tolstoy, in contrast, described the Woman Question as 'an irritant',<sup>6</sup> and his novels, such as *Анна Каренина* (1875-1877), largely show no alternative for women other than to be wives and mothers. In the light of this opposition, I started to think about other such literary pairings in English and German literature, identifying writers from both countries who are often contrasted in their attitudes to the Woman Question.

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<sup>4</sup> Their relationship was often stormy. Turgenev once commented that Tolstoy was a 'troglodyte' and Tolstoy accused Turgenev of 'wagging his democratic haunches' at Russian political concerns. See Joe Andrew, *Russian Writers and Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline de Maegd-Soëp, *The Emancipation of Women in Russian Literature and Society*, Ghent State University, Ghent, 1978, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> Tolstoy's diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1898, in *Tolstoy's Diaries*, Richard F. Christian, ed. and trans., Flamingo, London, 1994, p. 333.

To begin with nineteenth-century English literature, Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) is widely considered to have written one of the first truly 'feminist'<sup>7</sup> texts in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Her subsequent works, such as *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853) have at their heart the struggle of women to assert their independence within a restrictive patriarchal society. Emily Brontë's (1818-1848) only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is included by way of comparison and contrast; although this work is not considered to be 'feminist' in the same way as her elder sister's were, it is subversive in its treatment of gender relations to the extent that Nancy Jacobs has argued that it 'moves beyond gender'.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, George Eliot (1819-1880) is a controversial figure in feminist literary criticism, due to her perceived lack of engagement with the Woman Question. Pauline Nestor has summed up this 'feminist anger' with Eliot, which 'has often been based on the contention that her fiction is not autobiographical or empathetic enough'.<sup>9</sup> In a study with gender at its heart, it is interesting that the authors I chose as antagonistic examples of exponents of the Woman Question from England are both female, and this raises questions which will be addressed directly in the chapters on the Brontë sisters and on George Eliot; specifically, the notion of feminine/masculine identity and the 'anxiety of authorship' identified by Gilbert and Gubar.<sup>10</sup>

Within the context of nineteenth-century German literature, Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) is widely considered to be the writer most open to the Woman Question. His masterpiece *Effi*

<sup>7</sup> We should really consider this term to be anachronistic, because the word 'feminist' did not appear in English (from the French) until the 1890s. See Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 1. Nonetheless, it is the most accurate term to describe Brontë's work.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy M. Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', in Ingham, Patricia, ed., *The Brontës*, Longman, London, 2003, pp. 216-233 (217).

<sup>9</sup> Pauline Nestor, *George Eliot: Critical Issues*, Palgrave, London, 2002, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 45.

*Briest* (1895), which Thomas Mann considered to be among the six most significant novels ever written,<sup>11</sup> has been described as ‘the finest of Fontane’s portrayals of women living in a male-dominated society’.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it is a sympathetic, non-judgemental depiction of a young woman in an unhappy marriage who has an affair. In other works, such as *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1887) and *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1892), Fontane carefully deconstructs the roles available to women and suggests that society is to blame for their limitations.

Another writer well established in the German literary canon of this period, and one with whom Fontane was very familiar, is Theodor Storm (1817-1888). They are often mentioned together because of their mutual connection with the ‘Tunnel über der Spree’,<sup>13</sup> and contrasted in terms of their respective backgrounds; whereas Storm was from Husum, on the isolated North West coast of Schleswig Holstein, Fontane was from the vibrant capital, Berlin.<sup>14</sup> They have not, however, been compared in terms of their contribution to the Woman Question, quite probably because Storm’s works do not seem to engage with issues of concern to women. This thesis, therefore, will seek to establish whether Storm denies the Woman Question or whether it is present in the sub-text. Furthermore, a comparison with Storm will allow new light to be shed on Fontane’s exposition of the Woman Question in a wider German context.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Chambers, ‘Introduction’, in Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest*, Hugh Rorrison, trans., Helen Chambers, trans. and intro., Penguin, London, 2000, pp. vii-xix (vii).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>13</sup> A literary society founded in Berlin in the 1840s. Members included Fontane, Storm and Paul Heyse.

<sup>14</sup> From a political perspective, it was (rather ironically!) the Prussian, Fontane, who was much more liberal-minded than Storm. Rau has described how Fontane took an ‘ambivalent stance towards social transgression’. See Petra Rau, ‘Theodor Fontane’, *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2004, accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008, pp. 1-5 (1). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1577>.

Cross-cultural biographical connections also played a role in the choice of writers, and Turgenev was a central focus in this regard. He was disposed to be open to other cultures; he was well travelled throughout Europe and was an able linguist (he spoke French just as proficiently as his native Russian, and was also fluent in German and spoke reasonable English). He had many connections with other European writers; most importantly for this thesis, with Eliot and Storm. Although he was not personally acquainted with Fontane, their works have been compared for their Realist traits,<sup>15</sup> and Earle has noted Fontane's admiration of the 'technical skill [and] artistry in the sense of craftsmanship' in Turgenev's novellas.<sup>16</sup> Turgenev is also highly likely to have been familiar with the works of Charlotte Brontë (and possibly those of Emily too), as *Jane Eyre* was translated into Russian to great acclaim.<sup>17</sup>

All of these connections were forged not in Turgenev's native Russia, but in Germany, where the works of such thinkers as Feuerbach, Hegel and Schelling were particularly influential in the development of the young Russian intellectual elite in the 1830s and 40s.<sup>18</sup> It was during his time at Berlin University from 1838 to 1841 that Turgenev met many other young intellectual Russians, such as Stankevich, Bakunin and Granovsky.<sup>19</sup> Turgenev later settled in Germany (in Baden-Baden) from 1864-1871, and this country is the setting for several of his

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Alexander Stillmark, 'Fontane and Turgenev: Two Kinds of Realism', in Howe, Patricia and Helen Chambers, eds, *Theodor Fontane and the European Context. Literature, Culture and Society in Prussia and Europe*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2001, pp. 217-229.

<sup>16</sup> Bo Earle, 'Negotiating the "Weites Feld": Realism and Discursive Performance in Nietzsche and *Effi Briest*', *The Germanic Review*, 2002, pp. 233-253 (233). She notes here how Fontane writes that he 'bewundert' Turgenev's skill in writing novellas.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this, see Olga Demidova, 'The Reception of Charlotte Brontë's Work in Nineteenth-Century Russia', *The Modern Language Review*, 1994, 89, 3, pp. 689-696.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew, 1982, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Peace, 'Ivan Turgenev', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010, pp. 1-5 (2). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4475>.

works, most notably the short story *Ася* (1858). It was in Baden-Baden that he met Storm in 1865, and they exchanged a total of seven letters (that we know of) in subsequent years.<sup>20</sup>

George Eliot's connection with Germany began with her work on translations of David Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1846) and Feuerbach's *Das Wesen Christentums* (1854). She travelled there with her partner, George Henry Lewes (himself an authority on German culture, who is probably most famous in his own right for his *Life of Goethe* [1855]) in 1854-1855, and it was through Lewes that Eliot and Turgenev became acquainted. All of these biographical connections are echoed in the thematic affinities between Storm's, Eliot's and Turgenev's works in particular, where the theme of transience and the awareness of life's fragility are strongly evident. This is a connection that will be revisited throughout this dissertation.

England also plays a role as regards cross-cultural links. As Peace has noted, the idea for Turgenev's novel *Отцы и дети* (1862) was conceived during a visit to the Isle of Wight.<sup>21</sup> His trip to London in 1871 saw him meet George Eliot for the first time, and they went on to meet on several occasions until her death in 1880.<sup>22</sup> In 1879 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Oxford. Fontane's links with England are even more extensive. He first went to England in 1844, and the period 1855-1859 saw him live and work in London, as a propagandist for the Prussian Secretary of State.<sup>23</sup> Chambers has described him as 'steeped in English literature, in particular Shakespeare, Scottish and English ballads, Scott

<sup>20</sup> *Turgenev's Letters*, A.V. Knowles, ed. and trans., The Athlone Press, London, 1983, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> Peace, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> See Patrick Waddington, 'Turgenev and George Eliot: A Literary Friendship', *The Modern Language Review*, 1971, 66, 4, pp. 751-759.

<sup>23</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 2.

and Thackeray'.<sup>24</sup> The influence of the English social novel upon Tolstoy should not be underestimated either; he read and admired the works of Dickens and Eliot in particular, and parallels have been drawn between *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Анна Каренина*.<sup>25</sup>

In view of these numerous and varied connections, it is perhaps no accident that all of the writers selected have birthdates within a very small time-frame; with the exception of Tolstoy, who was born in 1828, all of the other writers were born within three years of each other (Charlotte Brontë in 1816, Theodor Storm in 1817, Emily Brontë and Ivan Turgenev in 1818, Theodor Fontane and George Eliot in 1819). This is significant because all of these writers would have lived through common experiences at similar ages, such as the literary movement from Romanticism to Realism and the 1848 revolutions throughout Europe. The literary time-frame, on the other hand, is relatively wide; the earliest work to be discussed is Storm's *Marthe und ihre Uhr* (1846) and the latest work is Fontane's *Mathilde Möhring* (published posthumously in 1906). For the most part though, the texts which this thesis considers are clustered around the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, the period in which discussion of the Woman Question first came to the fore.

### Other writers

Inevitably, there are some writers (both well-established within the literary canon and not) who made important contributions to the debate on the Woman Question in their respective countries that I am not able to include in more extended discussion (due to constraints of

<sup>24</sup> Chambers, 2000, p. vii.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, E.J. Blumberg, 'Tolstoy and the English Novel: A Note on *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina*', *The Slavic Review*, 1971, 30, 3, pp. 561-569.



space). From England, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) is one such example. Her works deal with various aspects of the Woman Question, from the depiction of working women in *Mary Barton* (1848) to the more controversial question of an unmarried mother in *Ruth* (1853). Her works are more centred upon socio-political concerns than Charlotte Brontë's; in this regard, they are more similar to Eliot's later works, particularly *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* (1876).<sup>26</sup> In contrast to both the Brontë sisters and Eliot, Gaskell was fully accepted as a woman writer, and did not feel that she had to hide behind a pseudonym. To a great extent, her status as a married woman protected her from the controversy that surrounded her contemporaries. As Showalter has observed, 'Mrs. Gaskell became the heroine of a new school of "motherly fiction," and even when she published the controversial *Ruth*, her own unassailable respectability and normality helped win over the readers'.<sup>27</sup> Reference will be made to Gaskell, particularly in the Brontës chapter, because of her biography on Charlotte Brontë.

We might also look to the works of male writers later in the century, such as George Gissing (1857-1903), whose novel *The Odd Women* (1893) has been described as a 'proto-feminist anatomy of the prospects available for unmarried women, including opportunities for employment and patriarchal marriage'.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1892) is notable for his sympathetic treatment of the 'fallen woman', which is a theme that will be revisited throughout this dissertation in discussion of *Effi Briest* and *Anna*

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<sup>26</sup> Gaskell's Margaret Hale (*North and South*, 1855) might be seen as a transitional figure between Brontë's Jane Eyre and Eliot's Dorothea Brooke.

<sup>27</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own. British Female Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, Princeton University Press, London, 1977, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> David Grylls, 'George Gissing', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2002, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010, pp. 1-5 (4). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5136>.

*Каренина* in particular. In this regard, one might also consider Gustave Flaubert's (1821-1880) novel of adultery, *Madame Bovary* (1856); although it is not within the remit of this project to consider French literature, this would be an area for potential future research.

In German literature, future research might be conducted into the role of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, (1797-1848), the only female writer still to have retained her place in the German literary canon of this period. In works such as *Die Judenbuche* (1842), 'quasi-feminist elements' have been identified.<sup>29</sup> Helfer also refers here to 'recent feminist readings' of earlier fragments such as the tragedy *Bertha* (1815) and the prose narrative *Ledwina* (1826), which have 'challenged traditional characterisations of Droste as a "masculine" author, maintaining that she establishes an independent, if problematic, woman's voice, articulated in images of imprisonment and confinement'.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, although this thesis will not include an extended discussion of their works, it will consider the contributions of Russian women writers (particularly Mariya Zhukova [1804-1855] and Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya [1824-1889]) to the debate on the Woman Question, by giving them due consideration in the chapters on Turgenev and Tolstoy.

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<sup>29</sup> Marthe Helfer, 'Annette von Droste-Hülshoff', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2006, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010, pp. 1-5 (2). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5444>.

<sup>30</sup> Loc. cit. For more detail on this, see Todd Curtis Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation, 1771-1871*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

## Literature Review

I turn now to a brief review of the literature in the two of the three areas that this thesis touches upon: comparative literary studies and the Woman Question.<sup>31</sup> Throughout this section, I will outline how my project is different and how it will make an original contribution to the field.

Two important novels that this thesis considers are Tolstoy's *Анна Каренина* and Fontane's *Effi Briest*. The affinities between these two novels are a good place to start when exploring the history of comparative literary criticism in my topic area, as they have been compared in three different contexts: as examples of miserable marriages,<sup>32</sup> as explorations of the role of the male educator figure,<sup>33</sup> but perhaps most importantly, as novels of adultery.<sup>34</sup> In this regard, and within this study, Tony Tanner's work, *Adultery in the Novel*<sup>35</sup> is of particular importance. Although his main discussions relate to earlier works of European literature (Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* [1809] and Rousseau's *Julie; ou la nouvelle Héloïse* [1761]), Tanner also includes Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* alongside three key novels that I will discuss (the aforementioned *Анна Каренина* and *Effi Briest*, along with Eliot's *The Mill on the*

<sup>31</sup> The third area, feminist semiotics, will be dealt with in more detail, beginning on Page 22, where I consider my key influences.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Hardy's article adds a further dimension to the affinities between *Anna Karenina* and *Effi Briest*, by including *Middlemarch* and Dorothea Brooke in its discussion. See 'The Miserable Marriages in *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina* and *Effi Briest*', in Rignall, John, ed., *George Eliot and Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1997, pp. 64-83.

<sup>33</sup> Gisela Zimmermann's article explores this theme, which will be important to this research. See 'The Civil Servant as Educator: *Effi Briest* and *Anna Karenina*', *The Modern Language Review*, 1995, 90, 4, pp. 817-829.

<sup>34</sup> J.P. Stern's seminal article of 1957 is one of the earliest examples of this. He examined *Anna Karenina* and *Effi Briest* alongside Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. See 'Effi Briest, *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*', *The Modern Language Review*, 1957, 52, pp. 363-375.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979.

*Floss* [1860]). Furthermore, Tanner's work is a fine example of a concept-based methodology, whose example I hope to follow.

The Woman Question is a huge field of research, and it would not be possible to mention all of the work done here. As already mentioned, there has been a significant amount of research into the position of the Brontë sisters and George Eliot vis-à-vis the Woman Question. Russian literature is also particularly well represented in this field; in the last fifteen years, scholars such as Catriona Kelly and Joe Andrew have been working to establish previously unknown women writers (such as Elena Gan and Mariya Zhukova) in the Russian literary canon.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, these writers have been the subject of a recent comparative study with English authors.<sup>37</sup> Jane Costlow and Rosalind Marsh have undertaken important research that re-evaluates the contribution of nineteenth-century Russian male writers (especially Tolstoy, and, to a lesser extent, Turgenev) to the debate on the Woman Question.<sup>38</sup>

German literature is less well represented in the area of gender. Diethe's study has traced the development of the literary context of the Woman Question from the perspective of women writers,<sup>39</sup> but there is little research into the area of male writers' contribution to the feminist movement, particularly Theodor Storm's. Furthermore, the Woman Question has not historically been afforded great significance in literary criticism of German texts. Quataert has

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<sup>36</sup> See Catriona Kelly, ed., *An Anthology of Russian Women's Writing 1777-1992*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994a, and Joe Andrew, trans. and intro., *Russian Women's Shorter Fiction. An Anthology, 1835-1860*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> See Rebecca Barrett, *The Woman Question in English and Russian Literature, 1848-1877*, PhD, Keele, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> See Jane Costlow, 'Speaking the Sorrow of Women: Turgenev's "Neschastnaia" and Evgeniia Tur's "Antonina"', *The Slavic Review*, 1991, 50, 2, pp. 328-335, and Rosalind Marsh, 'An Image of Their Own? Feminism, Revisionism and Russian Culture', in Marsh, Rosalind, ed., *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 1998, pp. 2-41.

<sup>39</sup> See Carol Diethe, *Towards Emancipation: German Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 1998.

identified that in German historical research, class has been the 'determining explanatory category', and sex/gender has been assigned a 'secondary status'. She quite rightly points out that gender analysis has great potential to 'challenge fundamental interpretative assumptions as well as broaden the basic components of class analysis'.<sup>40</sup> In the light of this, this work will seek to integrate class issues which are highlighted in the German works to be discussed, particularly 'misalliance' (the 'problem' posed by mixed-class marriages and relationships), but will have gender as its main focus.

### **The Woman Question in Historical and Literary Context<sup>41</sup>**

Due to the disparate socio-political backgrounds which prevailed in Russia, England and Germany, the Woman Question – in both a historical and literary context – was posed in very different ways. In Russia, for example, the very nature of its reactionary and polarised society meant that literary texts were often used as a forum for political debate, a phenomenon famously described by Solzhenitsyn as an 'alternative government'. The Woman Question was no exception to this, and its literary context predated historical discussions by some fifty years.<sup>42</sup> Let us now consider this context in all three countries, beginning with Russia.

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<sup>40</sup> Jean H. Quataert, 'Writing the History of Women and Gender in Imperial Germany', in Eley, Geoff, ed., *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870-1930*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1997, pp. 43-65 (45).

<sup>41</sup> In view of the fact that this thesis takes more of a literary critical approach based on semiotics, I do not feel that it is necessary to include a very detailed account of the historical context of the Woman Question here. This section will therefore consider historical context from a broader perspective; this will be supplemented by the first part of each chapter, which will include a consideration of the historical context of the Woman Question, as relevant to the writer in question.

<sup>42</sup> Marsh has noted that issues of concern to women were raised in literature as early as the end of the eighteenth century. Marsh, 1998, p. xv.

In reference to the Russian context, Jane Costlow has noted that the 'Woman Question' has come to refer to public discussion of social and economic changes in women's lives, and was first raised explicitly in the period immediately following the Crimean War and the death of Nicholas I in 1855.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Woman Question was one of the many 'accursed questions', such as the emancipation of the serfs, which arose in mid-nineteenth-century Russian society. Early Russian feminism had two major concerns: firstly, the inequality of women within the family, and secondly, women's inequality of opportunity within society, which encompassed both the assertion of their right to work and their right to an education.<sup>44</sup> Let us now briefly consider the historical context of these two areas.

Since at least the days of the *Домострой* (c.1550), which Orlando Figes has described as 'the sixteenth-century manual that instructed Russians how to discipline their households with the Bible and the birch',<sup>45</sup> Russian women had not been given equal rights within the family. The 1836 Code of Russian Laws stated that 'the woman must obey her husband, reside with him in love, respect, and unlimited obedience, and offer him every pleasantness and affection as the ruler of the household'.<sup>46</sup> These laws therefore provided legal justification for the subjugation of women. Stites notes that the only 'escape' from marriage (aside from death or arrest!) was divorce, but due to the influence of the church and the difficulty of divorce proceedings, it was

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<sup>43</sup> Jane Costlow, 'Love, Work and the Woman Question in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing', in Clyman, Toby W. and Diana Greene, eds, *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1994, pp. 61-75 (61).

<sup>44</sup> Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994b, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance. A Cultural History of Russia*, Penguin, London, 2002, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia. Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978, pp. 6-7.

'virtually impossible'.<sup>47</sup> Russian women, therefore, were condemned to an unhappy life within a patriarchal family.

Situations such as these were dramatised in works of literature, with the most important early examples coming in the works of two female writers in the 1830s and 1840s, Elena Gan and Mariya Zhukova. Their works, such as Gan's *Суд света* (1840) and Zhukova's *Самопожертвование* (1840) explored the theme of what roles were available for women in Russian society of the time, whilst appearing to highlight the hopelessness of women's position. Zhukova's *Барон Рейхман* (taken from the framed narrative cycle of tales, *Вечера на Карповке*, 1837-1838) elucidates another key theme, and one that will be important to this project as a whole, the marriage of convenience.

Early Russian feminists viewed marriage as a symbol of women's financial dependence on men; in childhood, women were dependent on their fathers and then had to rely on their husbands once they were married.<sup>48</sup> Before the 1850s, very few 'careers' for women other than marriage and motherhood were conceived of. However, things began to change, particularly under the influence of the celebrated economist Mariya Vernadskaya, who stressed the liberating possibilities of women's work.<sup>49</sup> By the 1860s, more women undertook paid employment (for example, in factories), which was a vital component of their emancipation from the yoke of the family. This was played out in literary texts, particularly Khvoshchinskaya's *Пансионерка* (1861), in which the heroine, Lolenka, escapes her stifling family life in the provinces to become an independent woman, working as an artist in St.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Kelly, 1994b, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> Stites, pp. 35-37.

Petersburg. This text also presents (and subverts) another theme that will be highlighted in this dissertation, in its depiction of a weak male educator figure, Veretitsyn.

The radical critic Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was another key figure in discussions of the Woman Question in the 1860s, particularly with regard to the issue of women's work. Although its merits as a work of literature have been called into question,<sup>50</sup> his 1863 novel *Что делать?* is widely considered to be the most 'feminist' text by any writer, male or female, of this period. Stites has described it as 'a Bible for all advanced Russian women with aspirations towards independence'.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the novel should be seen as Chernyshevsky's emphatically positive response to the question famously posed by Turgenev's Elena at the end of *Накануне*, 'Что делать в России?', as it depicts the life of a young woman, Vera Pavlovna, who first becomes the manager of her own business (an all-female sewing co-operative), and then trains to become a doctor. The novel also explores the possibility of sexual freedom for women, as the plot centres on Vera Pavlovna's love triangle with Lopukhov and Kirsanov.

The mid- to late-nineteenth century also saw an upsurge in the demand for Russian women's right to an education beyond that of the traditional 'accomplishments' of young ladies of the nobility, and women were now becoming more involved in practical work. Female nurses were sent to the front for the first time in the Crimean War, a situation which was referred to, if not directly dramatised, by Turgenev in *Накануне*. By the late 1860s, the focus on

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<sup>50</sup> Freeborn, for example, notes: 'Characterisation is stilted, incident contrived, style ponderous.' (Cited in Joe Andrew, *Women in Russian Literature, 1780-1863*, Macmillan, London, 1988, p. 177). One might argue that Chernyshevsky deliberately wrote the novel in this way, as a veiled attack on the true 'Russian Realists' such as Turgenev. For a further discussion of this, see Andrew, 1988, pp. 155-180.

<sup>51</sup> Stites, p. 89.



education had shifted from the purely vocational domain, with the foundation of movements such as the Chaikovsky circle, which sought to provide women with books.<sup>52</sup> More women were starting to enrol in university courses, although the reactions of the professors were somewhat diverse.<sup>53</sup> Despite some opposition, women persisted in their efforts, as the general feeling was that it was only through education that women could gain true economic independence and therefore liberate themselves from their dependence on the institution of the traditional family. In some circles, however, the prospect of women being educated to take on roles other than those within the family was seen as a threat. As Chapter Six will explore, Tolstoy took up this theme in *Анна Каренина*, as he suggests that Anna's desire to educate herself by way of reading is in conflict with her fulfilment of her maternal role.

In England, the roots of feminism may be traced back as far as the late-seventeenth century. Mary Astell (1666-1731) has been described as 'one of the earliest true feminists',<sup>54</sup> and her most important work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1694) urges women to think for themselves, stressing the need for them to be educated. However, there was virtually no education available for girls in the eighteenth century; most of them were taught at home, either by their mothers or 'poorly trained governesses', and the private schools which began to open for middle-class girls by the end of the century were focused on etiquette, with the aim of preparing their pupils for 'good' marriages.<sup>55</sup> It was not until 1848 that women were first given limited access to university education in England (as auditors), at Queen's College in London. George Eliot was among

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1983, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Stites, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Walters, p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

the benefactors of Girton College, the first Cambridge college for women, which opened in 1873.

By the end of the eighteenth century, and following Astell's example, many other women were beginning to speak out 'more clearly and forcefully';<sup>56</sup> the most notable of these was arguably Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) has been viewed as the 'theoretical origin[s] [...] of the women's suffrage movement',<sup>57</sup> and remains a key text in feminist thought for its fundamental demand for women to have equal rights to those of men. She writes: 'If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of women, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test'.<sup>58</sup> Wollstonecraft's works of fiction, such as *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) and the unfinished *Maria; Or the Wrongs of Women* (1798) are largely autobiographical accounts, in which she 'attempt[s] to explore some of the dilemmas with which she herself was confronted' as a woman.<sup>59</sup>

As the nineteenth century dawned, issues of concern to women were increasingly being raised in literary texts. Although Jane Austen (1775-1817) has been the subject of unflattering criticism by feminist critics (Showalter, for example, views her as 'an early favourite of male critics, recommended, like a priggish elder sister, to unruly siblings and apprentices'<sup>60</sup>), her works should be regarded as important early contributions to the debate on the Woman

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 216.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1796, p. viii, accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=qhcFAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=vindication&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>.

<sup>59</sup> Walters, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 102.

Question. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), especially the presentation of Elizabeth Bennett, is a particularly good example of how Austen seeks to question marriages of convenience and the need for women to be 'accomplished'.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the movement for women's emancipation in England gathered rapid momentum as women began to demand more equal rights, both within the family and more generally. In 1856, Barbara Bodichon, a feminist activist with whom George Eliot was good friends, circulated a petition which urged enactment of a law to permit married women to own property.<sup>61</sup> In 1865, the women's suffrage movement was formally organised in Manchester, and had as its main aim the extension of the enfranchisement of the vote to women. In this regard, John Stuart Mill was a key figure, and it was on his recommendation that the Second Reform Bill was passed in 1867, with the amendment of the word 'man' to 'person'. This was designed to open up the way for women to vote in the future,<sup>62</sup> although it was over fifty years before this aim was achieved.

The German context forms a marked contrast to the situations in England and Russia; here, the Woman Question did not form such an essential part of the social and political fabric. The main factor contributing to this was the political environment in post-1848 Germany, which was extremely oppressive and reactionary, as Prussia wrestled with its adversaries, especially Austria, for control of a unified German state. Following the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) and subsequent German unification, the first Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, sought to suppress any group which he believed to be a threat to Prussian domination. This included

<sup>61</sup> Gordon Haight, *George Eliot*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, p. 204. Eliot did sign this petition.

<sup>62</sup> Brenda Maddox, *George Eliot: Novelist, Lover, Wife*, Harper, London, 2009, p. 147.

Poles, Jews and Socialists, but it was the Catholic Church that came under particular attack, in the so-called *Kulturkampf*.<sup>63</sup> Bismarck had essentially founded an authoritarian state, where any movement for change was regarded with suspicion.<sup>64</sup>

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that women's movements were not as well-established as in the rest of Europe, although they did still play a part in German society. Until the 1860s, 'feminist' activity was largely confined to the achievements of individuals; Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895), for example, founded the *Frauenzeitung* in 1848 and is often associated with the origins of German feminism.<sup>65</sup> Her work *Frauenleben im Deutschen Reich* (1876) addresses the Woman Question directly, and argues that it should be placed 'close beside the social question'.<sup>66</sup> Otto-Peters was also responsible for founding the *Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein*, and was influential in raising general awareness of women's potential role in education.<sup>67</sup> However, it was not until 1900 that women were permitted to take examinations in German universities; until this time, they had to study outside Germany, usually in Switzerland (Zürich and Bern).<sup>68</sup>

In her discussion of German national identity in the nineteenth century, Küster notes that this was 'bound to the experience of war and thus to a specific image of belligerent masculinity

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<sup>63</sup> Alison Kitson, *Germany 1858-1990: Hope, Terror, and Revival*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Theodor Storm was particularly critical of Prussian rule, and was dismayed when the duchy of Schleswig fell under Prussian control in 1866. Petra Rau, 'Theodor Storm', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2003, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006, pp. 1-5 (2). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5461>

<sup>65</sup> Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe*, Longman, London, 2001, p. 69.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Diethe, p. 147.

<sup>67</sup> Hahn, p. 69.

<sup>68</sup> Diethe, p. 2.

and a complementary, self-sacrificing ideal of femininity'.<sup>69</sup> It thus came about that the nineteenth-century German woman was identified as man's helper in his struggle to defend the nation; unlike the radical female activists in Russia who were directly involved in political plots,<sup>70</sup> German women were restricted to activities behind the scenes. For example, middle-class women were involved in newspapers and debates, and lower class women were involved in the construction of barricades and in the provision of ammunition.<sup>71</sup>

In their family life, German women had few (if any) rights. The daughters of aristocrats and the bourgeoisie were often trapped in unhappy marriages of convenience, not least because they had no recourse to an independent living. Once they were married, their husbands took control of all of their assets (if they had any).<sup>72</sup> As Diethe has observed, 'the demand for the chance to pursue a career went hand-in-hand with a woman's refusal to enter, or desire to escape from, the married state'.<sup>73</sup> Some women sought this escape in extra-marital affairs, and this situation received literary treatment not only in the German context, in Fontane's *Effi Briest*, but throughout European literature of the period. This is a theme that will be dealt with at various points in this thesis.

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<sup>69</sup> Sybille Küster, 'Nationbuilding and Gender in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany', in *Political Systems and Definitions of Gender Roles*, Ann Katherine Isaacs, ed., Edizioni Plus, Pisa, 2001, pp. 31-42 (33).

<sup>70</sup> For example, Sofya Perovskaya, founder of the terrorist group *The People's Will*, who was executed for her role in the assassination of Alexander II in 1881.

<sup>71</sup> Hahn, p. 70.

<sup>72</sup> David Jackson, *The Life and Works of a Democratic Humanitarian*, Berg, Oxford, 1992, p. 41.

<sup>73</sup> Diethe, p. 10.

## Theoretical frameworks: Feminism and Semiotics

### Feminist theory

Having established the choice of writers and considered literary and historical context, I turn now to look at the background to the methodology utilised in this thesis. I begin with the concept of 'feminism', a term with which we should exercise great care. First of all, and as we have already noted, we should consider the term to be anachronistic to many of the texts being discussed. Secondly, one can no longer speak of 'feminism', but rather 'feminisms', as there are many types of feminist theory, incorporating areas as diverse as sociology, anthropology and philosophy. I do not, therefore, propose that my analysis is a fully 'feminist' critique; rather, that I am using certain concepts in feminist criticism to explore themes.

The first example of such a concept is the idea of Woman as Other. Initially coined by the 'Second Wave' feminist Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949), this refers to her argument that whilst man 'shapes the future', woman is 'always and archetypally Other. She is seen by and for men, always the object and never the subject'.<sup>74</sup> Woman has, according to de Beauvoir, come to stand for 'Nature, Mystery, the non-human'.<sup>75</sup> The concept of Woman as Other has subsequently been assimilated into literary theory, and has been utilised by several literary critics, including Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, whose works are an integral part of the methodological framework adopted by this thesis.

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<sup>74</sup> Cited in Walters, p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> Loc. cit.

Showalter's seminal work, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), looks to establish a female literary tradition by tracing the development of women writers from the 1800s to the 1970s (at that time the present day). It is a socio-historical study, in which she considers how the conditions in women writers' lives, particularly with regards to vocation and their will to write, influenced the development of 'a literature of their own'. Furthermore, Showalter's theories regarding the significance of the pseudonym, which she refers to as 'Eve's fig leaf', a signal of the 'loss of innocence'<sup>76</sup> will be critical to this discussion, particularly in the first two chapters, on Charlotte and Emily Brontë and George Eliot respectively.

As well as being a socio-historical study, Showalter's work adopts a literary critical approach. She presents the idea of 'doubles', which is central to the notion of female identity that this thesis will explore. In her discussion of *Jane Eyre*, Showalter argues that Jane's personality is fissured and has as its two opposing representatives the two characters of Helen Burns and Bertha Mason. Helen, Jane's school friend at Lowood, is Jane's 'angel' double, the 'perfect victim and the representation of the feminine spirit in its most disembodied form'.<sup>77</sup> Bertha represents Jane's darker, unacceptable side; she is the 'incarnation of the flesh, of female sexuality in its most irredeemably bestial and terrifying form'.<sup>78</sup> Bertha's behaviour, and everything that it stands for, cannot find expression in social norms but must be hidden away, thus she is the 'madwoman in the attic'. Furthermore, it is only once both Bertha and Helen are dead that Jane can become her true self; they are both 'sacrificed to make way for Jane's fuller freedom'.<sup>79</sup> We may also expand the idea of doubles to include what Nestor has

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<sup>76</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *Loc. cit.*

described as ‘structural doubling’;<sup>80</sup> that is, the pairing of opposite ‘types’ of female characters in texts (most often expressed in a Madonna/Whore dichotomy), and the implications that this has for a reading of female characters and their identities not as individuals, but as types.

Sandra Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s 1979 work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, adopts a literary critical framework based upon Bloom’s literary taxonomy and Freudian analysis, and aims to trace the development of the ‘feminist poetics’ to which they refer in the title of Part One of their study. Their form of psychoanalytical feminist criticism has been the foundation of two key concepts that are utilised in this thesis. The first one of these concepts is their assertion that the female literary tradition is distinct for its use of ‘images of enclosure and escape’.<sup>81</sup> Taking the work of Charlotte Brontë (which they regard as providing a ‘paradigm of many distinctively female anxieties and abilities’<sup>82</sup>) as a starting point, they trace the development of ‘images of enclosure’, such as the iconic Red Room in *Jane Eyre*. This project develops this idea by looking at it in the inverse, exploring not so much the *space* that encloses women, but rather, the *barrier* that impedes them.

The second key concept, which is again linked to Showalter’s idea of the ‘double’ and the notion of female identity, is exemplified in Gilbert’s and Gubar’s interpretation of the mirror motif in *Snow White*. Using this fairy-tale as the basis for a detailed textual analysis, they observe in more general terms that a woman looking in a mirror is ‘trapped’, commenting that ‘to be caught and trapped in a mirror rather than a window, however, is to be driven inward,

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<sup>80</sup> Nestor, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. xi.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.



obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self'.<sup>83</sup> The *Snow White* tale, they argue, concentrates on an inherently female 'conflict in the mirror between mother and daughter, woman and woman, self and self'.<sup>84</sup> My work will consider the significance of the mirror motif to female characters' identity, and will also present portraits and paintings of women as a similar type of identity-defining barrier. On a final note on the mirror motif, Gilbert and Gubar observe that it is the male presence that is the 'voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgement that rules the Queen's – and every woman's – self-evaluation', for it is he who determines who is 'the fairest of all'.<sup>85</sup> This 'patriarchal voice', then, has implications for this project and the way it interprets male writers and narrators who tell women's stories as agents of textual barriers.

## **Semiotics Part One**

### **Bakhtin and Lotman: Thresholds, Space and the 'Extra-Text'**

The second strand of critical theory adopted in this thesis is Post-structuralism. I am particularly influenced by the work of the literary theorists Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman. I shall now briefly explore how these ideas have influenced my work, and how they are incorporated in my research.

The key Bakhtinian theory that I draw upon is that of the chronotope, which he defines as 'the essential conjunction of temporal and spatial relationships artistically assimilated into

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

literature'.<sup>86</sup> The chronotope is, Bakhtin argues, 'of material significance for *genre*';<sup>87</sup> that is to say, the prevailing chronotope in any given text locates it within a specific genre. The examples that Bakhtin cites by way of illustration are, among others, the castle of the English Gothic novel and the 'small provincial town' of the nineteenth-century Realist novel.<sup>88</sup> The most important chronotope for this project, however, is that of the threshold. Bakhtin observes how the threshold 'may combine with the motif of meeting, but its most substantial fulfilment is the chronotopos of *crisis* and of *a turning point in life*'.<sup>89</sup> This thesis identifies what will be termed 'threshold barriers', such as doors and windows, which are influential not only in terms of both plot and character but are also highly evocative symbols of female curtailment. This is particularly the case for the motif of the window. The semiotics of established literary 'window scenes' are considered, such as those in *Wuthering Heights*, alongside those hitherto unexplored, such as those in Storm's works.

Lotman's work on binary oppositions, first introduced in his 'Lectures' (1964)<sup>90</sup> is another concept with which this research will engage, specifically, the mobile/immobile and inside/outside.<sup>91</sup> Lotman developed the first point in his *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1970), noting that 'characters are either mobile or immobile, only the former have the right to cross frontiers'.<sup>92</sup> This premise, which links back to Bakhtin and thresholds, will be explored in relation to the travel imagery that so often occurs in the novel of adultery, for example, the

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<sup>86</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel: From the Greek Novel to Modern Fiction', *Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1978, 3, pp. 493-528 (493).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 494, his italics.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 518-519.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520, his italics.

<sup>90</sup> Ann Shukman, *Literature and Semiotics: A Study of the writings of Yu. M. Lotman*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1977, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> We might also view the 'structural doubling' of women as either Other or Angel as a binary opposition of this type.

<sup>92</sup> Cited in Shukman, p. 143.

train and sleigh motifs in *Анна Каренина* and *Effi Briest* respectively, as well as Maggie's boat trip in *The Mill on the Floss*.

The inside/outside dichotomy is most relevant for this research in the way that certain characters are excluded from the 'inside', being forced to remain on the 'outside'. This is often as a consequence of lowly social status, and can be literal (Heathcliff peering in through the window in *Wuthering Heights*) or metaphorical (the social exclusion of the 'ward figures' [воспитаница]<sup>93</sup> in Russian literature, such as Tolstoy's Sonya in *Война и мир* [1866-1869]). In *Анна Каренина*, Tolstoy uses the inside/outside dichotomy to signal Anna's exclusion from essentially 'feminine' spaces once she has commenced her affair with Vronsky.

In her work 'Desire and Narrative' (taken from *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*), Teresa de Lauretis reworks Lotman's 'The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology' (1979) to fit with her feminist critique. She argues that 'the hero [of a narrative] must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female'.<sup>94</sup> This thesis, on the other hand, views obstacles (that is, barriers) not as intrinsically female, but rather, as symbols of women's curtailment.

The final Lotmanian theory that this project will re-work is his concept of the 'extra-text'. Taken from his 'Lectures in Structural Poetics' (1964), Lotman uses this term to refer to context. For Lotman, text is 'considered as an opposition to extra-text, reader's code to

<sup>93</sup> For a detailed discussion of this type, see Svetlana Slavskaya Grenier, *Representing the Marginal Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Personalism, Feminism and Polyphony*, Greenwood Press, London, 2001.

<sup>94</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, 'Desire in Narrative', in *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Macmillan, London, 1984, pp. 103-157 (118).

author's code'.<sup>95</sup> This is of particular importance to this research, because it highlights the conflict between writers' lives and the material in their texts. As we will see, George Eliot enjoyed a highly successful career as a writer but did not portray similarly independent women in her fiction. Turgenev was friends with many emancipated women in his own life, but did not always depict them favourably in his literature. On a final note, Lotman argues that texts need to be compared with works by the same author and other works of their period, in order to define their place as an intersection of the various structures of the 'extra-text'.<sup>96</sup> This, essentially, is what this study aims to achieve.

### **Semiotics Part Two: Vestimentary Markers**

The other type of semiotic theory which has been applied to literary texts and has influenced this project is exemplified in the work of Boris Christa. In his work on nineteenth-century Russian literature, Christa explored the significance of clothing for an assessment of character type, arguing that what he termed 'vestimentary markers' have importance for how a character is viewed. In his discussion of *Рудин* (1856) for example, he concludes that 'the vestimentary markers which Turgenev uses to portray Rudin at various stages of his development communicate to the reader most convincingly the nature of this flawed and tragic hero'.<sup>97</sup> This thesis will argue that these 'vestimentary markers' can be gendered. It views clothing and associated accessories, such as jewellery, as barriers for female characters, because these things have the effect of determining how a woman is viewed in a particular way.

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<sup>95</sup> Cited in Shukman, p. 39.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>97</sup> Boris Christa, 'A 'Buttoned-up' Hero of His Time: Turgenev's Use of the Language of Vestimentary Markers in *Rudin*', in Andrew, Offord and Reid, eds, pp. 127-134 (133).

On an important final note, my approach to all of the literary theory here relies upon its transferability; in other words, I take a concept that has been applied to one literary culture and apply it to another. Christa's work on 'vestimentary markers', for example, is based in Russian literary criticism, but the concept can be successfully reapplied to English and German literature. Feminist literary theories, such as Gilbert's and Gubar's 'mirroring', which are applied in their work to female writers alone, will be reconsidered in a reading of works by male writers. This approach not only shows how literary theory is transferable, it is also innovative and encourages the reader to think about texts in new ways.

### **Towards a Definition of Barriers**

As I have already argued, barriers are divided into three types: textual, actual and perceived. Each type has sub-types, some of which are peculiar to individual writers. This section will now define the types and sub-types of these barriers, referring to specific texts by way of example.

Textual barriers are defined as narrative or textual devices that have the effect of limiting female characters, and they can be sub-divided into two types, technical and linguistic. The first type most often takes the forms of narrative frames and narrative voice, but are also to be found in the use of epigraphs (in *Анна Каренина* and *Middlemarch*). Narrative frames are of particular importance to my discussion of the novellas of Storm and Turgenev, where a first-person narrator, always male, recounts the story of a woman he once knew. The reader's perception of heroines such as Anne Lene (*Auf dem Staatshof*, 1859) and Asya is thus guided

by the narrator's interpretation, whose feelings are, to a great extent, more important than those of the heroine. Other authors, particularly the Brontë sisters, subvert this technique to question narrator identity as being inherently 'masculine', as I will illustrate by way of examples such as Charlotte Brontë's male first-person narrator in *The Professor* (published posthumously in 1857) and Emily Brontë's depiction of the bumbling Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*. George Eliot's third person 'masculine' identity also has this effect, as the chapter on her works will explore.

The second type of textual barrier is the language that authors use to describe women. Drawing upon the feminist theoretical concept of woman as Other, the techniques of 'structural doubling' (Madonna/Whore dichotomy) and the presentation of women (particularly by male authors) through predetermined images and stereotypes are discussed. The Fontane chapter, for example, explores his use of fairy-tale language and structures in relation to female characters. Again, the women writers seem to subvert these techniques; as the chapters on the Brontë sisters and Eliot will argue, these predetermined images and stereotypes are presented as parodies, in the depiction of 'demonic' female characters in particular.

The second category of barrier, actual barriers, can again be sub-divided into two types: physical barriers that limit movement, and barriers of external adornment (clothing and accessories). The first type, physical barriers, can take many forms, including walls, doors, curtains, hedges and fences. Threshold barriers, such as windows and doors, are a sub-type of actual barrier which are given due consideration on their own, applying the Bakhtinian

premise of thresholds as representative of turning points or crisis. Some chapters (for example, on Turgenev) draw the distinction between constructed (walls, buildings) and natural (hedges, trees) barriers and suggest that these are used for different effects. Water is a particularly important example of a natural barrier which forms a thematic link between the works of Eliot, Storm and Turgenev.

The second broad type of actual barrier is what I will term the barrier of external adornment. As I have argued, this is a variation on Boris Christa's 'vestimentary marker', because it considers clothing and accessories to be gendered markers of female curtailment. The image of the veil, which most often represents female submission and self-sacrifice within the context of this research, is an important symbol in this respect. As well as the veil, this thesis will establish other types of external adornments, such as clothing and jewellery, as examples of how women are defined and often restricted by what they wear.

The final type of barrier is what I describe as perceived; that is, the perception of women both about themselves and by others. This is a very broad-ranging category of barriers, but the most important aspect of this is female identity. As we have already established, mirrors and portraits are a key part of this. One way in which female identity is shaped or controlled is the emphasis on female vulnerability. In the German authors, this even extends to women being viewed as children (in Storm) or as medically unwell (Fontane). In other authors, such as Turgenev, female vulnerability is emphasised in order to justify their subjugation (for example, in *Ася*).

The second broader concern which relates to female identity is the question of what role women should play. The Tolstoy chapter, for example, will argue that the main barrier for women in his fiction is the expectation for them to conform to the identity of wife and mother. In other works, such as *Middlemarch*, there is a heightened sense of disappointment that Dorothea is not going to achieve anything outside of marriage and motherhood. Broadly speaking, female authors are more concerned with women's role, and often voice their frustration at the limited options available, partly because they experienced this directly themselves.

The final type of perceived barrier is classified as societal; that is, how social expectations become barriers to happiness. This type is the most complex and challenging to an analysis along feminist lines, because it can relate to men just as much as women; however, I will argue that women are more affected by this type of barrier. The foremost example of social perceived barrier is the marriage of convenience, which can be seen in most of the texts discussed, with probably the most significant examples to be found in *Анна Каренина* and *Effi Briest*. Class barriers should also be viewed as having a limiting effect upon both male and female happiness, but again, I will argue that women are more adversely affected than men. To this end, societal perceived barriers are exemplified in the figure of the 'marginal woman', who is to be found in all three literary cultures under different names. In Russian literature, we see the development of the воспитаница, in English literature, the spinster or 'odd woman' figure, and in the German chapters (particularly on Storm), I will trace the development of a new figure of this type, whom I shall term the 'marginal female performer'.



All of these character types, may, in their own ways, be viewed as 'superfluous women'. This character type is not what Gheith has described as the superfluous man's 'foil';<sup>98</sup> rather, she is his counterpart. The superfluous man first appeared in Russian literature in the 1820s, in the works of such writers as Pushkin, Lermontov, Herzen, Goncharov and Turgenev,<sup>99</sup> and has been defined as someone who despite (or perhaps because of) his excellent education, is unable to deal with the realities of everyday life.<sup>100</sup> He is a dreamer, a 'Hamlet', who is destined never to find true satisfaction with his life. It strikes me that a similar definition can be applied to the 'superfluous woman'; she is the type of female character who shows great promise and aspires to great things, but is unable to achieve her goals, whatever they might be. She is forced to fall back upon the traditional route of marriage and motherhood, or dies, thereby becoming superfluous to the society in which she lives. Yet, unlike the superfluous man, the source of the female counterpart's frustration is to be found externally and is something that is out of her control (such as the pressure to conform to the norms of a patriarchal society). Characters that would immediately spring to mind (again, this was part of the reasoning behind including these specific authors and texts) are Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, Elena in *Накануне*, and the eponymous heroines Anna Karenina and Effi Briest. Looking at these characters in this way challenges previous assumptions made in literary criticism, by comparing *femme fatale* types such as Anna with the more innocent 'New Women' such as Elena. Another exciting prospect is that the establishment of the superfluous woman type will have implications for a re-reading of the superfluous man. It is also possible

<sup>98</sup> Jehanne Gheith, 'The Superfluous Man and the Necessary Woman: A "Re-vision"', *The Russian Review*, 1996, 55, pp. 226-244.

<sup>99</sup> Turgenev is perhaps the most significant exponent of this type, in works such as *Дневник лишнего человека* (1850) and *Рудин*.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew, 1982, p. 12.

that new superfluous men will come to light in English and German literatures, which in itself demonstrates transferability of literary concepts across not only gender but also cultures.

### **(En)gendering Barriers in Literary Texts: Chapter Outline**

The thesis chapters are ordered chronologically as far as possible,<sup>101</sup> and grouped by country. As well as highlighting the affinities and links between texts, authors and countries, each chapter will consider the writer concerned as part of a wider European context. Each chapter will follow roughly the same structure; they all begin with a brief biographical consideration of the relationships the particular writer had with women (and/or men in the case of female writers). This is followed by an exploration of the Woman Question as relevant to that writer, and finally, an analysis of textual, actual and perceived barriers.

Chapter One, 'Brontë or Bell? Identity as Barrier in the Works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë' explores how barriers are used as a means of protest against the restrictions facing women in the novels of Charlotte Brontë and in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. It establishes the key theme of female identity, and how this can be viewed as an extra-textual barrier, particularly in relation to Charlotte Brontë's use of her pseudonym, Currer Bell. It argues that Brontë's two distinct identities as woman and writer constituted a major barrier in her own life, a situation that was (and still is) influenced by the Elizabeth Gaskell biography, in its creation of the so-called 'Brontë Myth'. A comparison between Charlotte's novels and *Wuthering Heights* serves to highlight this identity conflict, and also reveals how Emily, by contrast, was less

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<sup>101</sup> I begin with the chapter on the Brontë sisters, as their works are limited to a small period of time (1847-1855) early on in the time-frame considered.

restricted by extra-textual barriers. Furthermore, I argue that Emily Brontë's confidence in her one assigned role – of writer – is one of the reasons behind *Wuthering Heights* being such a difficult text to 'place' within any given genre. The section on textual barriers examines the implications of female narrative voice for an interpretation of female identity in Charlotte Brontë, and deconstructs the complex narrative frames in *Wuthering Heights*. The section on actual barriers notes the fundamental importance of the imagery of walls, rooms and windows to the notion of protest in the Brontës' fictional worlds, and argues that much of the action (and tragedy) in *Wuthering Heights* stems from the crossing of thresholds. It also explores how clothing defines female identity; specifically, from a class perspective. The final part of the chapter, on perceived barriers, revisits the theme of female self-identity, which is expressed through the use of mirror and portrait imagery.

Chapter Two, 'George Eliot and the "Superfluous Woman": A Subtle Means of Protest?' offers an alternative reading to the conventional view of Eliot as 'anti-feminist'. Against the backdrop of Eliot's own life, and her use of the masculine pseudonym, I trace the development of the 'superfluous woman' type in three key Eliot novels (*The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*), and suggest that this figure represents Eliot's own frustrations at being a talented woman in a man's world. I explore Eliot's problematic relationship with the Woman Question, and suggest that the depiction of women's education in her novels shows her at her most 'feminist'. The section on textual barriers looks firstly at authorial voice and Eliot's use of a 'masculine' narrator persona. It then considers how Eliot uses language to subvert the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, particularly in her presentation of 'hybrid' types (that is, women who are simultaneously Other and Angel, such as Maggie

Tulliver). In my analysis of actual barriers, I aim to illustrate how Eliot's use of more 'fluid' barriers, such as clothing and water, represents a more subtle means of protest than the Brontës' locked doors and attics. The final part argues that Eliot's use of perceived barriers (particularly social expectations, the impact of gossip and the question of female role and vocation) foregrounds the 'superfluous woman' character type most of all, with Dorothea Brooke being the clearest example.

The subject of Chapter Three is 'Women in Theodor Storm: The Opposition of Conformity and Otherness'. This chapter deals with a wide range of Storm's *Novellen*, from the 1846 work *Marthe und ihre Uhr* to his last work, *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888), and seeks to offer a new interpretation of these works from a gender perspective. It will argue that although Storm's works are not usually considered to engage with the Woman Question, issues of concern to women become apparent by analysing the semiotics of barriers. It traces the development of two female character types: women who conform to social expectations, and those who do not, and considers the extent to which both types are 'superfluous'. The latter type is sub-divided into two sub-types; the first is the 'marginal female performer' (as mentioned previously), and the second is the 'demonic woman'. I examine the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers for each of these types in turn. In my discussion of textual barriers, I consider the effect of narrative frames and multiple narrators, as well as exploring the notion of male appropriation of female texts (which applies to both his narrators and Storm himself). In the case of the women who conform, actual barriers, such as buildings, curtains and closed windows, are constructed to emphasise their curtailment, whereas the 'demonic women' are able to transcend these barriers, but are subsequently 'punished' by becoming victims of social

exclusion. Finally, I explore the role of perceived barriers, the first of which is the fact that many women are seen as children in Storm's works (this links to the 'extra-text' of the incest/paedophile theme which was prevalent in Storm's own life). I also consider Storm's presentation of class conflict, in the theme of misalliance, and the way in which he challenges the superstitions of the inward-looking communities where most of his works are set. Furthermore, I contend that Storm's works are at their most 'feminist' when they question the poor treatment of women on the basis of superstition or social position.

Chapter Four, 'From Sleeping Beauty to Career Woman: The Development of Women's Roles in Theodor Fontane' discusses some lesser known works alongside novels such as *Effi Briest*, and traces the positive development of Fontane's engagement with the Woman Question from his earlier 'balladesque' works, such as *Ellernklipp* (1881) to the later social novels (for example, *Frau Jenny Treibel*). To achieve this aim, the chapter examines how barriers are applied to three female character types: the 'fairy-tale heroine', the 'innocent adulteress' and the 'social climber'. Noting the contrast between Storm's textual barriers of narrative structure and Fontane's use of language to emphasise women's subjugation, I explore the use of fairy-tale imagery, the sense of woman as Other and the 'female malady' motif, particularly in relation to the 'fairy-tale heroines' and the 'innocent adulteress' types. I note how actual barriers, particularly rooms, curtains and walls, are constructed to 'imprison' these heroines within a certain way of life; *Effi*, for example, is trapped in her marriage of convenience to Innstetten. I also discuss how Fontane uses threshold-crossing imagery (of travel) to indicate the threat of transgression, but at the same time, challenges the Prussian code of honour, which was the prevailing social norm. In the final section of the chapter on the 'social climbers', the

eponymous heroines Jenny Treibel and Mathilde Möhring, I argue that these women are presented with barriers that they are able to overcome, and are therefore Fontane's most positive engagement with the Woman Question.

Chapter Five sees the focus shift to Russia, with 'Turgenev and the Woman Question: Layering Barriers'. This chapter seeks to provide a re-vision of key works, such as *Ася*, *Накануне* and *Отцы и дети*, in light of the recent shift in opinion regarding Turgenev and the Woman Question.<sup>102</sup> Using Lotmanian theory, I explore how the 'extra-text' of Turgenev's relationships with women in his own life is in conflict with his depiction of female characters, and I illustrate this through highlighting Turgenev's use of multi-layered barriers. In the first section on textual barriers, I consider the effect of several narrative devices, including narrative frames, first-person male narrators who tell women's stories (like those in the Storm chapter), digressions and Turgenev's use of letters and diaries. I also explore how Turgenev depicts 'otherness' in his works, through both the predetermined images and stereotypes that he uses in relation to women, and also through the foreign settings that he so often draws upon. In a detailed analysis of *Отцы и дети*, I illustrate how actual barriers are sub-divided into two categories, natural and constructed, which Turgenev contrasts for effect. I also analyse the importance of threshold barriers, particularly doors and windows, for Turgenev's heroines. The final section on perceived barriers considers class, social mobility and the sense of female vulnerability.

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<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Arja Rosenholm, *Gendering Awakening. Femininity and the Russian Woman Question of the 1860s*, Kikumora Publications, Helsinki, 1999.

Chapter Six, 'Tolstoy, Women and Barriers: Inflexible Closedness?' explores Tolstoy's complicated attitudes towards women in both his fiction (especially *Анна Каренина*) and his life, and seeks to link him with Turgenev in terms of the significance of their 'extra-texts' to the Woman Question. Using Helena Goscilo's idea of 'inflexible closedness',<sup>103</sup> I argue that Tolstoy subverts the use of all three types of barriers – textual, actual and perceived – to argue against female vocation in any area apart from his ideal – marriage and motherhood. After a detailed analysis of Tolstoy's many views on women and the context of the Woman Question in his fiction, I analyse textual barriers, which include narrative voice, epigraphs and Tolstoy's use of multiple genres. In this section, I also explore the implications of the ending of *Анна Каренина*. In terms of language, Tolstoy's use of French to signify 'otherness' is considered to be a further textual barrier. In my discussion of actual barriers, I argue that women are simultaneously protected by and excluded from domestic space, and that this depends on their willingness to commit to marriage and motherhood (or not). I also examine how Anna is depicted as a character on the threshold, particularly in Tolstoy's use of travel imagery in relation to her. The final section on perceived barriers discusses the marriage of convenience, the sexual double standard, and Anna's identity conflict, which is emphasised by way of mirrors and portraits. Following this chapter, the conclusion will summarise the main arguments of the thesis and will suggest future areas for research.

In conclusion, the fundamental aim of this study is to provide a re-vision of some authors who are well represented in feminist literary criticism, such as Eliot, Tolstoy and Turgenev, and to consider other canonical authors, such as Storm, from a gender perspective. In doing so, it

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<sup>103</sup> Helena Goscilo, 'Motif-Mesh as Matrix: Body, Sexuality, Adultery and the Woman Question', in Knapp, Liza and Amy Mandelker, eds, *Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy's Anna Karenina*, Modern Language Association, New York, 2003, pp. 83-89 (89).

aims to make an original and innovative contribution to the field of comparative European literary studies and beyond. It is also intended to lay the foundations for future work in this area; what is perhaps most exciting about this research is that it offers a new framework within which any literary text may be considered.



## Chapter One

### Brontë or Bell? Identity as Barrier in the Works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë

#### Introduction

Charlotte Brontë is widely acknowledged as a champion of women's rights within the patriarchal structures of early Victorian Britain.<sup>1</sup> Her novels have at their heart the struggle of the single middle-class woman to assert her independence, exploring the limitations of the 'feminine' professions of governess or teacher. A discussion of the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers will enable in-depth analysis of these limitations. Furthermore, the Lotmanian theory of the extra-text will be applied to Brontë's use of her pseudonym, Currer Bell, by exploring how Brontë's two distinct identities as woman and writer can be viewed as her own extra-textual barrier. To this end, it will be contended that this is manifested in the dichotomy of 'Reason' versus 'Feeling' which Lucy Snowe struggles with in *Villette*. For the purposes of this chapter, 'Reason' – the expected social norm – is a role as wife and mother ('Charlotte Brontë'), and 'Feeling' – the unconventional – is a role as an author ('Currer Bell').<sup>2</sup> The discussion of Brontë's works will relate mainly to *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, but examples from *Shirley* and *The Professor* will also be included.

<sup>1</sup> Giles, for example, has noted that Brontë's 'depiction of the social and psychological constraints affecting women's lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has led to considerable attention from feminist critics'. Judy Giles, 'Charlotte Brontë', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2001a, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008, pp. 1-5 (4). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=582>

<sup>2</sup> Of course, these concepts may, in the more conventional sense, be applied the other way round; 'Reason' would be identified with a career-focused woman writer, and 'Feeling' would be concerned with the traditionally 'feminine' domain of motherhood.

In contrast, it might be argued that Emily Brontë is less restricted by this extra-textual barrier. As she never married, Emily did not have the same issues with identity conflict as Charlotte; she had only to be Ellis Bell the writer. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to consider how this is revealed in her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, by again exploring the semiotics of barriers. It will also be argued that one of the main reasons that the novel seems to defy convention and is notoriously difficult to 'place' lies within Emily's confidence in her one assigned role as writer.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, I will consider the context within which the Brontës were writing, and how aspects of the Woman Question are discernible in their works. The impact of their troubled family life upon their writing, particularly Charlotte's, will then be explored. The Elizabeth Gaskell biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), will also be deemed to be an extra-textual barrier, in the sense that it is said to have 'single-handedly contributed to the "Brontë Myth"',<sup>4</sup> a term widely used by critics to define the notion that the Brontës were somehow uncultivated and cut off from society.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Brontës and the Woman Question**

The late 1840s saw political unrest and revolutions throughout Europe, and it is within this context that Charlotte and Emily Brontë were engaged in most of their work on their novels. Writing in the *Quarterly Review* in December 1848, Elizabeth Rigby made the connection

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, due to the constraints of space within this thesis, material on Anne Brontë will not be included here, although this may be an area for future research.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Jay, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elisabeth Jay, ed. and intro., Penguin, London, 1997, pp. ix-xxxii (ix).

<sup>5</sup> The fact that relatively little is known about their lives, Emily's in particular, has also contributed to this.

between *Jane Eyre* and the political situation, noting that the 'tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has written *Jane Eyre*'.<sup>6</sup> Ever since its publication, the novel has been viewed as a groundbreaking text, one which challenges notions about what role a woman should play, and it is therefore a vital text when considering the Woman Question within English literature (as indeed are all of Charlotte Brontë's novels).

Caroline Helstone in *Shirley* directly voices the fundamental concern regarding the Woman Question when she asks: 'What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?'<sup>7</sup> The question of what position a woman should hold in society is a recurring theme in Brontë's fiction. The first and main option open to women at this time was, of course, to be a wife and mother. Because of this expectation, there was a genuine fear of becoming an 'old maid'; as Caroline herself comments, 'the matrimonial market is overstocked' (293). Indeed, in 1850, women outnumbered men in England by 360,000 (9.14m and 8.78m), and thirty percent of women over the age of twenty were unmarried.<sup>8</sup> Hence it is not surprising that terms such as 'odd women' came about to describe this type. Furthermore, increasing numbers of women began to choose careers outside the caring professions, which was also seen as being unnatural and 'odd'. Showalter has shown how Victorian medical science was used to justify limiting women to their biological role as mothers, and the idea was propagated that if women were engaged in intellectual pursuits, they rendered themselves unable to have children (what was

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Patricia Ingham, 'Introduction', in Ingham, ed., 2003, pp. 1-8 (3).

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, Wordsworth Classics, London, 1993, p. 133. All subsequent references to *Shirley* will be to this edition. Page numbers for this work, and for all other subsequent primary texts (once the first reference has been given) will be cited in the main text, in parentheses.

<sup>8</sup> *Women's Status in Mid-19<sup>th</sup>-Century England: A Brief Overview* (no author stated), accessed 24.02.2009, p.1. <http://members.lycos.co.uk/HastingsHistory/19/overview.htm>

referred to as 'ovarian neuralgia').<sup>9</sup> Monsieur Paul's comment in *Villette* encapsulates this debate, as he claims that a woman of intellect is a 'luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife or worker'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in the eyes of many people in the mid-nineteenth century, an intellectual woman was also a 'superfluous woman'.

Brontë depicts her unmarried heroines with great care; for the most part, they are independently minded and spirited women. Yet we should consider the fact that the narratives of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley Keeldar*, *Caroline Helstone* and *Frances Henri* all conclude with their marriages.<sup>11</sup> One may therefore ask whether it is the hero who is responsible for the heroine's self-awakening and desire to make something of her life. For this very reason, Brontë's friend, Mary Taylor, was highly critical of *Shirley*. In a letter to Brontë in April 1850, she wrote: 'I have seen some extracts from *Shirley*, in which you talk of women working. And this first duty, this great necessity, you seem to think that some women may indulge in – if they give up marriage and don't make themselves too disagreeable to the other sex. You are a coward and a traitor!'<sup>12</sup>

The true 'old maids' – those who remain unmarried – are treated differently. As Boumelha has observed, they are shown to 'have stories and worth of their own', but are presented in a patronising way.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, she identifies a 'fear of unwomanliness' in *Shirley*, in the

<sup>9</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Herbert Rosengarten, ed., and Margaret Smith, ed. and intro., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 445. All subsequent references to *Villette* will be to this edition.

<sup>11</sup> Although Lucy Snowe does not marry Monsieur Paul, this was her intention.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Penny Boumelha, '*Shirley*', in Ingham, ed., 2003, pp. 91-106 (92).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

provocatively-named spinster Miss Mann, and Shirley's jocular description of herself as 'Captain Keeldar' (101). Yet perhaps the most evocative depiction of a spinster comes in *Villette*, in the character of Miss Marchmont, whose world is a highly enclosed and suffocating space: 'Two hot, close rooms [...] and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all' in which Lucy feels 'narrowed' to her 'lot' (45). Here Lucy displays real fear at becoming a spinster, a future possibility embodied by Miss Marchmont. However, despite the 'narrowing' reality of life as an unmarried woman, through Caroline Helstone, Brontë issues this plea on their behalf: 'Give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age' (294).

The second aspect of the Woman Question that is dramatised in Charlotte Brontë's works is women's education. Although Lowood is more associated with its neglect of its 'inmates', it should not be forgotten that Jane's education there provides her with the means to advance herself in later life. Jane then moves into the education profession, firstly as a governess and then as a teacher. Although these were accepted occupations for women, there is a 'revolutionary' aspect in Jane's teaching at Riverford; she is educating disadvantaged girls who would otherwise have no formal schooling. However, there is still the sense that this 'work' is not *for* Jane; she is dedicated to the service of others, unlike women writers of Brontë's generation, who were viewed as engaging in a 'self-centred' and 'threatening' occupation for a woman.<sup>14</sup>

Reading is a further key theme which relates to women's education in Charlotte Brontë's novels, and women are often seen with books. Books offer Jane Eyre an escape from the harsh

<sup>14</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 22.

reality of her life with the Reed family, as she takes her copy of Bewick's *History of British Birds* behind the curtain on the window seat. Significant and sustained treatment of the reading theme is to be found in *Shirley*, as we are told that Caroline and Shirley enjoy similar types of books ('such books as Miss Keeldar had read with the most pleasure were Miss Helstone's delight also' [167]). In another scene, they read poetry aloud together while there is a storm outside, which intimates how literature can provide solace (168-169). Shirley later argues for an alternative reading of patriarchal texts, such as St Paul's 'let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection'.<sup>15</sup> Shirley reinterprets this as 'Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection' (247). Boumelha has described this as 'the novel's registering of its own fictionality'.<sup>16</sup> One might add that by using this technique, Brontë herself is able to be critical of such male-authored texts through the filter of her own characters.

The final aspect of the Woman Question alluded to in Brontë's novels is the emphasis on women working and what it is to be an independent woman. *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* in particular are dedicated to the heroine's self-discovery, which is achieved whilst working. However, in *Villette*, Brontë was accused of complaining about the fact that Lucy Snowe works out of necessity rather than because she really wants to; *The Spectator* argued that the novel 'far more than *Jane Eyre* sounds like a bitter complaint against the destiny of those women whom circumstances reduce to a necessity of working for their living'.<sup>17</sup> Yet if it was a 'bitter complaint', it was one that was born out of reality; this novel is the one that most

<sup>15</sup> Taken from 1 Timothy 2:11.

<sup>16</sup> Boumelha, 2003, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> February 1853, pp. 155-156. Cited in Judy Giles, 'Villette', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008, pp. 1-3 (1). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=8625>

accurately represents Brontë's own working life in Belgium, and the lives of many other single women who did not have a family to support them.

Caroline Helstone, however, does not need to work, as she is provided for by her uncle. She wants to become a governess (she feels this would be 'useful'), but this is discouraged, and even derided, as Mr Helstone comments that her desire to do something different is 'fantastical and whimsical', and that 'it's in her sex' (145). Although his words seem unreasonable, it is the case that Caroline is no Jane or Lucy; she has a limited outlook on life and is, at times, self-pitying, and the main reason that she wants to work lies in the fear of becoming an 'old maid'. Working for her therefore is not a statement of 'feminism'; it is more an 'insurance policy' in case she is unable to follow the expected path of becoming a wife and mother.

*Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, forms a complete contrast in terms of context, as there are no direct discussions of the Woman Question. The only women who work are servants, and most female characters are comfortable with the role that they are assigned in their society. None of the novel's female characters display any anxiety about remaining unmarried, as it is almost taken for granted that they will. This may partly be explained in the fact that the novel is not set in the immediate present; the world of the 1760s onwards that it depicts is far removed from the 1840s when it was written. However, it might be argued that the Woman Question is alluded to implicitly, in the sense that Brontë 'introduces us to a world where men battle for the favours of apparently high-spirited and independent women'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 249.

By choosing to set the novel in the past, Emily Brontë is able to avoid writing about contemporary issues, thereby defying the common practice for a woman writer of the time to discuss the Woman Question. Unfortunately, she did not write any more novels, so one can only speculate as to whether Brontë may have dealt with the Woman Question more directly in subsequent works. Nonetheless, in *Wuthering Heights*, it seems that male and female suffering are of equal measure. If one is to take the view that the goal of female emancipation is to achieve equality, then to this extent, *Wuthering Heights* is truly a 'feminist' text.

### The 'Brontë Myth' Revisited: Biography and Pseudonym as Barriers

Elaine Showalter has observed that the use of the male pseudonym was an indication of how Charlotte Brontë's generation of women writers felt that 'the will to write as a vocation [was] in direct conflict with their status as women' (Brontë wrote that 'authoresses are liable to be looked upon with prejudice'<sup>19</sup>). Showalter deems the pseudonym to be like 'Eve's fig leaf', a signal of the 'loss of innocence'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, a pseudonym is the ultimate mask or barrier for a writer, especially when a female writer takes on either a masculine name (as in the case of George Eliot), or the somewhat androgynous names – Acton, Currer and Ellis Bell – adopted by the Brontës. Out of the three Brontë sisters though, it was Charlotte upon whom the pseudonym had the greatest impact (or at least, upon our perception of Charlotte), a fact that was influenced by her own story: the Elizabeth Gaskell biography.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elisabeth Jay, ed. and intro., Penguin, London, 1997, p. 215. All subsequent references to *The Life* will be to this edition.

<sup>20</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 19.



More than one hundred and fifty years after its publication, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is still a major source of information on the Brontës, and a text of great significance in literary history, as it is the 'first full-length biography of a female novelist to be written by a sister novelist' (as far as we know, in any language, in the world).<sup>21</sup> Patrick Brontë commissioned the work following Charlotte's death in 1855, and he was keen for Gaskell to express her critical opinion on his daughter's works.<sup>22</sup> However, Gaskell wanted to emphasise Charlotte Brontë the woman, and not the writer, Currer Bell. Jay has remarked that Gaskell was tempted to 'refashion Charlotte's life along more suitable lines';<sup>23</sup> that is, to attempt to justify what Gaskell perceived as 'naughtiness' in Brontë's works.<sup>24</sup> In this way, Gaskell has erected an 'extra-textual' barrier of sorts, as she points to the two separate identities of Charlotte Brontë and Currer Bell, describing them as being 'difficult to be reconciled' (259). This highlights the conflict between duty (the role as wife and mother) and desire (the role of author). Gaskell goes on to note that if a woman chooses to become a writer, she cannot neglect her 'principal work in life' (that is, looking after a family) at the same time, but urges any woman who possesses the talent to write not to shrink from her responsibility. In her words, such a woman 'must not hide her gift in a napkin' (258-9). Emily Brontë, on the other hand, was not restricted by her extra-text in the same way as her sister, as it was not her destiny to marry. Indeed, her confidence in her own identity might be said to be illustrated in both the unconventional nature of *Wuthering Heights* as a novel, and the strength displayed by her spirited female characters.

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<sup>21</sup> Jay, p. ix.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Gaskell once said that 'the difference between Miss Brontë and me is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness'. Cited in Jay, p. xiii.

Recent critics have sought to dispel the myth that the Brontës were hermits, isolated from society in the wilds of the Yorkshire moors, by pointing out that they were well and truly engaged in the political and social debates of the day. As Giles has noted, Haworth was 'set in some of the most dramatic and bleak scenery in England', but it was at the same time a 'bustling centre with a vibrant cultural and political life'.<sup>25</sup> The sisters read widely, having access to books in the parsonage, those from the circulating libraries in nearby Keighley, and also *Blackwood's Magazine*, which offered commentary on politics (Tory) and literature.<sup>26</sup> Sally Shuttleworth has shown how Charlotte's novels, far from 'anticipating' Freudian thought (as some critics have claimed), are responding to Victorian psychological theory, which was particularly concerned with issues of self-control (where man represented rationality and control and women represented spirituality and bodily subjection).<sup>27</sup>

It should also be remembered that Charlotte and Emily did spend a significant amount of time away from Haworth, during their time in Belgium. These experiences certainly shaped Charlotte's writing; she was unhappily employed as a teacher and a governess, and it is widely held that her experience with Monsieur Heger forms the basis for the stormy relationship between Lucy Snowe and Monsieur Paul in *Villette*.<sup>28</sup> Emily's time in Belgium saw her learn German, and she is said to have been influenced by German Romantic philosophy, particularly G. H. Schubert's 'pathology of "split personality"',<sup>29</sup> which inspired the writing of E. T. A. Hoffmann (notably in *Der Sandmann* [1817]). Davies argues that this influence is brought to

<sup>25</sup> Giles, 2001a, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> See Giles, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë*, Northcote House, Plymouth, 1998, p. 49.

bear in *Wuthering Heights*, in Brontë's dramatisation of the strife and yet mutual necessity of opposites.<sup>30</sup>

Although Patrick Brontë wanted his daughters to be educated to a high standard,<sup>31</sup> he did not approve of the kind of reading and writing that they indulged in, and Charlotte in particular tried to 'deny herself' her favourite pastime. She wrote that 'sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself, and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, he has been described as 'the archetypal example of the dark devouring love of Victorian patriarchy',<sup>33</sup> as he was extremely protective of his daughters to the extent of being controlling. Perhaps more significantly for the wider context though, this highlights the misalignment between women's education and what was then expected of them; they were required to be 'accomplished' but were then not permitted to do anything with these skills.

The expectation was for Charlotte to marry, and she turned down a few proposals before eventually accepting Arthur Nicholls. At this time, she was lonely, and still grieving for the losses of Emily, Anne and Branwell, who all died in 1848. The grief that she felt at these losses is illustrated in the dark and brooding character of *Villette*, with its 'deliberately cold and caustic' heroine, Lucy Snowe, and its refusal to end with the conventional happy

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<sup>30</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Brontë encouraged his children to read, and they had ready access to a number of contemporary journals and newspapers, which they enjoyed reading and discussing. Their Aunt Branwell (their late mother's sister) was responsible for teaching them the 'feminine' occupations of sewing, which they did not particularly enjoy. See *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Robert Southey, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1837. Cited in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 63.

marriage.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Charlotte was no stranger to losing loved ones; by the time she was thirty-two years of age, she had witnessed the deaths of her mother, all four of her sisters, and her only brother. Giles has pointed out how the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth, her two elder sisters, were even more traumatic for Charlotte, as they had acted as mother figures to her following the death of Maria senior. In line with this, Charlotte's fiction is 'full of motherless and orphaned heroines whose loneliness and deprivation is so often the driving force behind their search for a place of belonging'.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, as the eldest surviving sister, the expectations of what a good Victorian woman should be weighed heavily on Charlotte, who had the additional pressure of being a mother figure to Emily, Anne and Branwell.

In keeping with this 'maternal' role, it was always Charlotte who wrote to the publishers, a fact which contributed to the extra-textual barrier of woman versus author. On this point, Sharon Marcus has argued that Brontë 'deploys the distancing effect of mass circulation to conceal her physical person and explore areas otherwise open only to men in the economic market. This splitting of the self is the only way for a woman to take this role in a capitalist society'.<sup>36</sup> Even once Emily and Anne were dead, Charlotte continued to act in this role as mother replacement, and it was left to her to defend them in the wake of criticism of the 'amorality' and 'brutal candour' in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) respectively.<sup>37</sup> In the 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', she wrote that 'neither Emily nor Anne was learned, [...] they always wrote from the impulses of nature'.<sup>38</sup> Although

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<sup>34</sup> Giles, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Giles, 2001a, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon Marcus, 'The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising and *Jane Eyre*', in Ingham, ed., 2003, pp. 146-168 (146).

<sup>37</sup> Davies, p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> In Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Margaret Lane, intro., Everyman, London, 1975, p. xvii. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

Charlotte intended the Notice to 'wipe the dust of their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil', her comments on the 'impulsive' tendencies of her sisters have, paradoxically, further contributed to the 'Brontë Myth'.

Although the sisters were very close, they did have disagreements about their writing, especially when it came to the depiction of their heroines. In her obituary article on Charlotte (1855), Harriet Martineau related an account of this:

She told her sisters that they were wrong – even morally wrong – in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.' However, she was keen to point out that Jane Eyre 'is not myself, any further than that'.<sup>39</sup>

To the end, Charlotte preferred to hide behind the comparative anonymity of her alter ego, Currer Bell, and it is perhaps not surprising that the one novel that was published under her own name, *Villette*, was the one that she struggled with the most. To write as 'Charlotte Brontë' was to fundamentally challenge her reasons for writing in the first place: as a means of entering a different and more fulfilling reality.

### **Breaking Down the Textual Barrier: Female Voices and Multiple Layers**

As noted in the Introduction, many male-authored texts of this period, such as Storm's *Immensee* (1850) and Turgenev's *Ася* use first-person male narrators. These are deemed textual barriers because they influence how women are viewed. By way of contrast, Charlotte

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<sup>39</sup> Both Martineau and Charlotte Brontë, cited in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 235.

Brontë gives the first-person narrative voice to female characters in two of her novels, the eponymous *Jane Eyre*, and Lucy Snowe in *Villette*; this in itself might be seen as a 'feminist' statement, as it enables both women to speak for themselves. However, in her other two novels, *Shirley*, and the posthumously-published *The Professor*, this female voice disappears, to be replaced by an omniscient narrator and a first-person male narrator respectively. This section, then, will consider the impact of narrative voice, and how it can be viewed as a textual barrier.

The first-person female voice at the beginning of *Jane Eyre* evokes the consciousness of a child. The simple yet evocative way that Jane recounts her life with the Reed family (particularly, the brutal way in which she is treated) invites the sympathies of the reader. In contrast, *Villette* is, for its entirety, the voice of a mature woman. Lucy Snowe's narrative is more detached than Jane's, and adopts a tone that often sounds like that of an omniscient narrator. At the same time, the reader is taken deep into Lucy's complex psychological processes, as she struggles to assert her independence within the highly restrictive environment of Madame Beck's school. This is reflected in a narrative voice which is at times an angry one, full of self-doubt and frustration. The novel can also be viewed as a prototype for later feminist writers, such as Virginia Woolf, particularly in the way it uses the 'stream of consciousness' technique. However, although this insightful and intense narrative displays a more developed and overtly 'feminist' discourse than *Jane Eyre*, the complex thoughts and feelings that Lucy experiences are barriers to her happiness. This is best illustrated in her letters to Dr. John, where she battles with the two opposing notions of 'Reason' and 'Feeling'. In broader terms, Lucy's struggle may be compared to Brontë's own conflict between

fulfilling a typical woman's role as 'Charlotte Brontë' ('Reason') and writing as 'Currer Bell' ('Feeling'). It is rather telling, therefore, that Lucy succumbs to 'Reason'. Paradoxically, then, the female voice may be seen as a barrier in its own right; Lucy's struggle to come to terms with her own identity is acted out on the most public of stages, as the entire narrative is filtered through her consciousness. In giving Lucy (and to a lesser extent, Jane) the power of narration, Charlotte Brontë creates the extra-textual barrier of being narrator and character in one's own story.

Brontë's two lesser-known novels (*Shirley* and *The Professor*), on the other hand, both use more direct textual barriers which affect the characterisation and development of the female protagonists. *The Professor* employs a multi-layered narrative technique. It begins with a letter from the narrator, William Crimsworth, to a friend, and then continues with his first-person narrative. For a woman writer to use a male voice as a first-person narrator was an unprecedented move, and there are many possibilities as to why Brontë chose to write under what is essentially a double pseudonym. It may be that like many women working in the 'male-dominated literary tradition', she is attempting to 'resolve the ambiguities of her situation' and 'allay the anxieties of female authorship'.<sup>40</sup> However, it could also be the case that the 'appropriation of male voice may challenge a tradition of androcentric narrative and Victorian patriarchal hegemony'.<sup>41</sup>

Gilbert and Gubar view Crimsworth as a 'feminine' character; as they quite rightly observe, he reacts in a similar way to female characters, such as Lucy Snowe, to his "female"

<sup>40</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 316.

<sup>41</sup> Annette R. Federico, 'The Other Case: Gender and Narration in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*', in Ingham, ed., 2003, pp. 184-202 (185).

powerlessness', in his 'claustrophobic feelings of enclosure, burial, imprisonment, and then with a rebellious decision to escape'.<sup>42</sup> However, two key points must be noted here. First of all, although there are times when the heroine, Frances Henri, begins to develop into a more emancipated woman, Crimsworth is always the dominant force in their relationship. From the very outset, he is set up as the 'master' and she as the 'pupil'. This type of relationship is a common motif in Charlotte Brontë's novels, and is probably a reference to her own painfully unrequited love of Monsieur Heger during her time in Belgium. It is a striking feature of Jane's relationship with Rochester (she continues to refer to him as 'Master' even after they are married), and it is revisited in *Villette*, in the relationship between Paulina Home and Graham Bretton.<sup>43</sup> Crimsworth takes credit for Frances' change in demeanour to being radiant and happy after she has had some lessons with him, saying that he takes pride in her like a gardener would a plant.<sup>44</sup> He continues to refer to her in this patronising way, later noting that he has found his 'lost sheep' (125). When Frances displays both talent and autonomy in writing an imaginative old-Saxon ghost tale ('this she had done without a hint from me' [98]), Crimsworth criticises the mistakes in orthography and verb construction (whilst admitting that he 'had hitherto seen nothing like it in the course of my professorial experience [98]). Even after they are married, this master/pupil relationship continues; she still calls him 'Monsieur' and not 'William', and he calls her 'my pupil' (125).

All the same, Frances is 'emancipated' in some respects. For example, Crimsworth does not want her to work, saying that she deserves 'a rest' after working so hard for so long, but he

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 320.

<sup>43</sup> Subsequent chapters will also explore the 'male educator' motif. We should perhaps note here that in *Wuthering Heights*, the role of educator is reversed, as it is Cathy who teaches Hareton to read.

<sup>44</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, Wordsworth Classics, London, 1994, p. 109. All subsequent references will be to this edition.



permits her to find employment when she reveals a desire to do so. Her wish and their subsequent move to England to open a school drives the plot to its conclusion, thereby designating Frances a role as typologically male and 'mobile',<sup>45</sup> but we understand that she would not have been able to do this without her husband's financial support. The contradictions that are inherent in their relationship are also a feature of Frances' dual personality; as a meek and mild wife on the one hand and a commanding schoolmistress on the other. Finally, we should highlight how Crimsworth's union with Frances both solves the mystery surrounding her (Crimsworth is determined to find out how she has learned to write so well in English), and follows a conventional chase/seduction model, as he succeeds in his quest to 'get that Genevese girl for my wife' (131).

Another important point to note is that all of the female characters in *The Professor*, including the heroine, are seen through Crimsworth's eyes. It is true to say that Frances never has her own story and she is not as fully developed as characters such as Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe. Furthermore, Brontë exposes the flawed nature of the way in which men see women in stereotypes. In the words of Shirley Keeldar: 'The cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women. They do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil. Their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend' (264). In *The Professor*, Brontë uses the technique of structural doubling, in the juxtaposition of the headmistress Zoraïde Reuter, the archetypal *femme fatale*, with Frances, the demure heroine.<sup>46</sup> Here, Brontë subverts and parodies this dichotomy; although Zoraïde is a *femme fatale* 'type', she is frequently seen engaged in the 'feminine'

<sup>45</sup> Andrew discusses this in relation to Tolstoy's *Семейное счастье* (1859). See Andrew, 2007, p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> This is a theme that will be revisited throughout this thesis. See, for example, the pairing of Liza and Varvara in Turgenev's *Дворянское гнездо* (1859) in Chapter Five.

activity of knitting, in a manner not dissimilar to the women by the guillotine in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

In *The Professor*, Brontë is able to expose the flaws inherent in a patriarchal value system, particularly in her characterisation of William Crimsworth. To this end, Federico has described the novel as 'a fascinating transposition of Brontë's culture's construction of men as masters of their emotions'.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, we may consider Crimsworth to be an English literary example of a superfluous man; he is most certainly not a typical hero figure, and in terms of its self-pitying style, his narrative has affinities with that of Turgenev's Chulkaturin in *Дневник лишнего человека*.

In *Shirley*, the shift in narrative technique signals perhaps the most significant textual barrier for a female character in Brontë's works. The greater part of the text uses the omniscient narrator, during which Shirley is portrayed as a strong female character, emancipated and even revolutionary in some of her ideas. She gives money to the poor, and is even seen toting a gun just before the riot scene (although she admits to Caroline that she 'could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof' [254]). Yet her fortunate position as a wealthy heiress is tinged with irony, as we learn that she has been given her masculine name by her parents after they were desperately disappointed that they did not have a boy. In keeping with this, the gender boundaries are blurred at times; Shirley often refers to herself in the third person, as 'he', and has the alter ego of 'Captain Keeldar'. In this parody of masculinity, Shirley reveals her own insecurity and feeling of being uncomfortable with an identity that has essentially been constructed for her. Moreover, the plot is resolved in

<sup>47</sup> Federico, p. 197.

the penultimate chapter (Chapter 36), not through the omniscient narrator, but through the diary of Louis Moore, where we learn that Shirley has 'submitted' to marriage, something which she had previously described as 'a terrible thought' (161). This constitutes a real disappointment for women who had looked upon Shirley as a breath of fresh air; as Boumelha has observed, 'Shirley loses her right to direct speech; her rejection of Robert and her acceptance of Louis are given to us through the words of men, in indirect speech, as a character in their stories'. She ends up just like the 'old maids' in the text, who are 'never permitted to speak'.<sup>48</sup>

The character of Shirley Keeldar is said to be based upon Emily Brontë, and the novel has even been said to 'mythologize' Emily.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the most obvious parallel is in their 'pets'; temperamental bulldogs, considered by others to be savage. We are told that Shirley's dog, Tartar, 'loved his mistress [...] but was mostly indifferent to the rest of the world' (207). Shirley's adopted 'masculine' persona may also be a veiled reference to Emily; indeed, Monsieur Heger is purported to have said that Emily should have been a man. However, Davies has observed that 'as it was, Emily was just a cantankerous, outspoken female, with a useless gift'.<sup>50</sup> I would suggest that Charlotte recognised this trait in Emily, and created Shirley in order to explore how Emily's life might have been. In creating and then destroying Shirley Keeldar – by taking away her 'voice' – Brontë criticises a society in which women with distinct identities ultimately have to conform to the 'norm' of marriage and motherhood. In this sense, both Emily and Shirley could be seen as women before their time.

<sup>48</sup> Boumelha, 2003, p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 251.

<sup>50</sup> Davies, p. 23.

Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, like Charlotte's novels, uses narrative techniques to subvert and challenge gender stereotypes. The complex narrative framework, with its 'stories within stories', achieves this in two ways. Firstly (as will also be explored in Chapter Three on Theodor Storm<sup>51</sup>), it leads us to question the nature of truth in the text, particularly Lockwood's. Secondly, it can be contended that *Wuthering Heights* is very much a woman's text; within this complex framework, apart from Lockwood, the predominant voices are female.

The outer frame of the narrative – our 'way in' to the text – is related by Mr Lockwood. He is not someone we trust as a narrator, due to his own character flaws; indeed, he is viewed as somewhat naïve, and as the archetypal 'man of letters', he is completely out of place at *Wuthering Heights* (but he is very much at home at Thrushcross Grange). He therefore remains a stranger who is let in on the story, and because he does not become involved in the plot in the same way as Nelly, he lacks her narratorial authority. The key to Lockwood is that he thinks life would be like literature, and by stumbling upon the almost unreal set-up at *Wuthering Heights* (a collection of people who hate each other!), this seems to be confirmed. He also views women in stereotypes; he describes Cathy<sup>52</sup> on one hand as a 'beneficent fairy' (10) but then as a 'little witch' (12). Jacobs has described him as a 'mockery of conventional masculinity';<sup>53</sup> I would add to this that Brontë is parodying him as an example of how men tell stories. By combining Lockwood's 'outer frame' with Nelly's 'inner frame', in combination with the various digressions of diary entries and letters, Brontë seems to suggest that it is

<sup>51</sup> Here I will explore how Storm uses the same technique in *Der Schimmelreiter*.

<sup>52</sup> For the purposes of clarity, I shall refer to Catherine Earnshaw Linton as 'Catherine', and her daughter, Catherine Linton Heathcliff as 'Cathy'.

<sup>53</sup> Jacobs, p. 220.

women who have the power to create stories and it is men who report them. If this is the case, then Brontë is taking issue with the notion of female authors 'copying' male texts.

The main narrator is of course Nelly Dean, the down-to-earth, matter-of-fact housekeeper of Thrushcross Grange. She narrates the course of the last forty years in a relaxed and friendly manner, but as readers, we are invited to trust her judgement. However, it is important to note that Nelly is also an integral part of the plot, and therefore cannot act as an unbiased narrator as she is too emotionally involved with the characters. On this point, Matthews has commented that 'story becomes the only mode of being'.<sup>54</sup> There are even times when Nelly's interference changes the course of events; for example, when Catherine is ill and Nelly believes that she is acting. Kavanagh has used psychoanalytic criticism to take this analysis further, and argues that Nelly is an 'agent of Patriarchal law' in her 'control of the text' and 'crucial interventions in the narrative'.<sup>55</sup> Nelly's function as a listener is just as important as that of narrator; as Macovski remarks, 'the most crucial scenes of the novel centre around those dialogues in which she herself must play the listener to Heathcliff's and Catherine's revelatory confessions'.<sup>56</sup>

If we are to consider *Wuthering Heights* as a 'feminine' text, it is somewhat surprising that the voice of the main 'heroine' – Catherine – is somewhat muted. All other female characters get the chance to directly relate their story, even Zillah the servant, yet Catherine is always seen through the eyes of others, most usually Nelly. Indeed, all of this has the effect of contributing

<sup>54</sup> John T. Matthews, 'Framing in *Wuthering Heights*', in Stoneman, Patsy, ed., *Wuthering Heights*, Macmillan, London, 1993, pp. 54-73 (55).

<sup>55</sup> James H. Kavanagh, *Emily Brontë*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Macovski, 'Voicing a Silent History: *Wuthering Heights* as Dialogic Text', in Stoneman, ed., pp. 100-117 (105).

to Catherine's enigmatic status. There are two examples where Catherine's voice is 'heard'. Her first small narrative comes in the form of her childhood diary, which displaces her voice, as it is heard through Lockwood. In addition to this, by the time it is related she has been dead some twenty years. Because her voice is muted, she turns instead to writing (much like the Brontës), in her childish scribbling of different permutations of her name, over and over again, like a plea for help. The second example is when Catherine disowns Heathcliff to Nelly, which is the turning point in the novel, from which all its tragedy springs.

The second aspect of the narrative structure that can be deemed to be a barrier is that Brontë has deliberately set the novel in the past. The present time in the novel is 1801-1802 (the dates are notably very precise), but the earliest scenes when Catherine and Heathcliff are children go back some forty years prior to that. By referring to this specific period of time, Brontë might be said to be re-creating the early days of the novel. Post-modern thought might suggest that the text is 'laying bare the device'; this is yet another barrier, as the text is aware of its own status as a text.<sup>57</sup> All of this may go a long way to explaining why contemporary critics were at a loss to understand *Wuthering Heights*. A typical comment comes in *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, January 15, 1848:

There seems to us great power in this book but a purposeless power, which we feel a great desire to see turned to better account. We are quite confident that the writer of *Wuthering Heights* wants but the practised skill to make a great artist; perhaps, a great dramatic artist.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Other novels that do this are Lermontov's *Герой нашего времени* (1841), which is very similar to *Wuthering Heights* in its experimental approach to prose, and Chernyshevsky's *что делать*, which goes one step further in that the omniscient third-person narrator frequently interrupts the narrative to directly address the reader.

<sup>58</sup> Cited in 'Excerpts from Contemporary Reviews of *Wuthering Heights*', accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2009. [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/contemp\\_rev.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/contemp_rev.html)

So, to conclude, textual barriers are of significance in both Charlotte's and Emily Brontë's works, as both authors seek to subvert conventional narrative techniques in order to challenge established patriarchal literary traditions. This has the effect of simultaneously liberating and restricting the female characters; Lucy (and to a lesser extent, Jane) is given a voice but struggles with the burden of using it, whereas Catherine – usually viewed as an independent character – is muted. *Shirley* and *The Professor* both represent experiments in narrative technique which seek to highlight the restrictions which faced women. Although it is a highly structured and restricted text on a literary level, *Wuthering Heights* might be deemed to be the most 'free', because it seeks to defy convention in its parody of the way that men tell stories. Moreover, if it is the case that we do not trust Lockwood, as the narrator of the outer frame of the text and the ultimate purveyor of information, then it might be argued that Brontë is inviting us to question whether the story exists at all.

### **Actual Barriers: Enclosure and Protection**

Actual physical barriers and their semiotics within the Brontës' novels have been a rich source of material for feminist critics in the last thirty years. As noted in the Introduction, critics<sup>59</sup> have suggested that the confined spaces within the works are a protest against the restrictions which faced women. More recent criticism, notably the work of Joe Andrew, has explored how women occupy clearly defined 'spaces' within texts.<sup>60</sup> This next section will now explore how these actual barriers are used in the works discussed thus far, and will suggest that

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<sup>59</sup> Such as Gilbert and Gubar.

<sup>60</sup> See Andrew, 2007.

*Wuthering Heights* is a 'freer' text than any of Charlotte's novels, because the physical barriers seem to be erected here in order to be broken down.

*Jane Eyre* is rich in barrier imagery from start to finish. Confined spaces, such as the dreaded Red Room, the 'pseudo-convent'<sup>61</sup> Lowood School, and the attic where Bertha is kept prisoner, are instrumental in defining the role of women. For the most part, these barriers constitute attempts by 'agents of patriarchy'<sup>62</sup> to take away the identity of the heroine, most often the one that is associated with her sexual being.

The Red Room is the first 'prison' encountered by Jane. Although the red hues of its décor would seem to suggest warmth, the room itself is actually cold, and appropriately enough, was the death chamber of Jane's beloved uncle, Mr Reed. Instead of warmth being inviting, then, here it is stifling. Showalter has also argued that the room has 'strong associations with the adult female body' and that Jane's incarceration there 'has curious anthropological affinities to the menarchal ceremonies of Eskimo and South Sea Island tribes'.<sup>63</sup> So not only is Jane growing up, she has also demonstrated signs of what was considered to be adult female sexuality: being a 'mad cat'.<sup>64</sup> Mrs Reed's response is to shut her away, as she represents a threat to the established social order. She is also deeply troubled by Jane's unbreakable spirit; despite everything she has gone through, she still shows independence of mind. To put it more simply, Mrs Reed does not like being disobeyed.

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<sup>61</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 117.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Daly's term. See *Gyn/Ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism: With a New Intergalactic Introduction*, Beacon Books, Boston, 1990, p. xxv.

<sup>63</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 115.

<sup>64</sup> Loc. cit.



Lowood School, which, according to Gaskell, was immediately identifiable with Cowan's Bridge,<sup>65</sup> is defined by its enclosed spaces and strict regimes. The fear of female sexuality is again in evidence, this time seen through the treatment of the pupils. They are not allowed to display sexuality or, for that matter, individuality, and they are almost androgynous in their identical brown uniforms and short-cropped hair. The exercise that they are forced to take in the 'enclosed garden',<sup>66</sup> even in freezing weather, contributes to their sexless appearance, keeping them thin, along with the lack of palatable food. Lowood's regimes have a lasting effect on Jane, and might be said to result in her becoming institutionalised.<sup>67</sup> Even once she leaves for her post at Thornfield, she finds solace in small spaces, being particularly relieved that her bedroom there is small (94).

The attic, however, is not so clearly defined. Although Bertha is 'fearful and ghastly', 'the foul German spectre' (284), the fact remains that in incarcerating her, Rochester is acting as an agent of patriarchy. At the same time, Jane's personal involvement with him as heroine of the text serves to justify his actions. Grenier points out that Showalter's idea of Bertha being Jane's demonic 'double', who must first die in order for Jane to realise her true self, means that critics have been able to gloss over the fact that Bertha's treatment is 'anti-feminist' and that the death of a woman can never be a good thing.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The school that Charlotte and Emily attended, where their two elder sisters died. Charlotte later said that she would not have written the account had she known it would be construed as such.

<sup>66</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Wordsworth Classics, London, 1992, p. 43. All subsequent references to *Jane Eyre* will be to this edition.

<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that the school is called 'Lowood Institution'.

<sup>68</sup> Grenier, p. 137.

Other actual barriers in *Jane Eyre* are seen in a positive way – as something to protect. For example, after Jane has left Thornfield following the revelation that Rochester is already married, she shelters in a ‘moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle’ (324). It is significant that she calls upon ‘universal mother, Nature’ to help her; at possibly her lowest point in the novel, Jane turns to a substitute mother in the absence of her own. Another natural barrier which is seen positively (but this time in the sense that it is there to be overcome) is in *Shirley*, when the eponymous heroine is pictured, ‘sure-footed and agile’, jumping over hedges and fences (255). Here we might identify affinities with male-authored literary heroines from other cultures that are seen to jump over barriers, such as Turgenev’s Asya and Fontane’s Grete Minde (1880). This again highlights the way in which Brontë, to some extent, seems to be recreating male stereotypes of women.

The confined spaces in *Villette* are yet more restrictive than in *Jane Eyre*. Upon Lucy’s introduction to Madame Beck’s ‘Pensionnat de Demoiselles’, our attention is drawn to the small size of the spaces that the pupils inhabit; the rooms are ‘the queerest little dormitories’, with ‘tiny little beds’, and – as if to further highlight the restrictive regime – we learn that they were once ‘nuns’ cells’ (83). This serves two additional functions: firstly, the use of the word ‘cells’ is highly evocative and appropriate, as the pupils (and indeed, Lucy) are almost kept prisoners, under the watchful eye of Madame Beck. Secondly, it introduces us to the theme of the nun, which is an important motif recurring throughout the text. She is said to be a young girl, ‘buried alive, for some sin against her vow’ (131). This ghostly figure appears at points of crisis in Lucy’s life, and would therefore seem to represent her fear of being controlled.

Additionally, it should be remembered that Brontë was highly critical of Catholicism<sup>69</sup> and it is likely that the image of the nun was to her representative of all that was repressive about the faith.

Lucy, however, quickly learns to fit in with this culture of enclosure, and her action of locking one of her ill-behaved pupils in the closet wins the approval of Madame Beck, who is watching through the keyhole (99). This is important to Lucy's survival within the school, as she shows herself to be highly adaptable. This trait is further illustrated in the scene when she is locked up in the attic by Monsieur Paul so that she can learn her lines. Far from finding this oppressive, Lucy is able to use this to her advantage, by being good at acting the (male) role, and it is after this that her relationship with Monsieur Paul starts to intensify. In this way, Lucy uses barriers to her own advantage. The 'forbidden alley' outside, which is a very narrow passage with overgrown shrubs (and where Lucy most often meets the nun) becomes one of her favourite places, again showing how a more natural barrier (such as the crag in *Jane Eyre*) may be seen as protective rather than oppressive. However, at the same time (and opposite in effect to what happens to Jane), there is a sense that Lucy has become claustrophobic after being 'shut up' in one guise or another for so long. She becomes uncomfortable with the crowds of people in the green room before the play: 'It was so clamorous with voices: it stifled me, it was so hot, choking, thronged' (170).

As the Introduction has suggested, the window is an example of a 'threshold barrier', and it is one that is important to an analysis of the semiotics of barriers in both Charlotte's and Emily Brontë's fiction. Moreover, it does not have a fixed meaning; a closed window can signify

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<sup>69</sup> See Giles, 2004, p. 3.

something being shut off, representing a character's longing to go outside (i.e. to escape), or – in the case of Catherine – to be let in. An open window can also be viewed as a barrier, especially if what the character is gazing upon is 'forbidden', but at the same time, it suggests the possibility of escape. This section will now go on to look at examples of both closed and open windows.

The first example of a window in *Jane Eyre* is a closed one, as Jane looks out upon the 'drear November day', noting that the 'clear panes of glass' were 'protecting' her from it (2). In this case, Jane is glad of the barrier of the window. However, the next window image is one not of protection, but restriction, as the windows in the Red Room are suggestively all covered up, with a combination of curtains and blinds that are 'always down' (7). The final, crucial window scene occurs right at the end of the novel. Here, we learn that after starting the fire that destroys Thornfield, Bertha made her escape through a skylight (the only access to the roof) before jumping to her death (434). Although this 'escape' has negative connotations because it leads to Bertha's death, it is achieved by going through the barrier of a window. Furthermore, this open window at the novel's conclusion (where they were previously all closed) enables Jane's negative double to be killed off and thus Jane can realise her true self. This is therefore an example of a barrier that is there to be overcome.

The window in *The Professor* provides us with an example of both kinds, as it is pictured both closed and then open. When Crimsworth is first employed as a schoolmaster, we are told that the window in his room has been sealed up, because Zoraïde Reuter does not want a male teacher to be able to see the girls playing in the garden (this is what it looks out upon).

However, once he has gained her trust, the window is unblocked and he is able to look out of it. This window goes on to play a key plot function, as it is when looking out of it that Crimsworth realises that Zoraïde is emotionally involved with Monsieur Pelet, and that she is not interested in him.

One of the most enduring images of *Wuthering Heights* (one that is familiar even to those who have not necessarily read the novel<sup>70</sup>) is that of Catherine's ghost, begging to be let in through the window. Van Ghent has argued that windows in the text 'serve to separate the "inside" from the "outside," the "human" from the alien and terrible "other"'.<sup>71</sup> In the case of Catherine, they serve to illustrate her tortured restlessness which comes about as a result of her choosing Edgar over her spiritual lover, her 'other half' Heathcliff; when she is inside, she longs to be outside, and when she is outside, she wants to be let in. Other important examples of the window image come when Heathcliff is pictured outside Thrushcross Grange looking in (39), and just before Catherine's death when she is longing for fresh air. Here we should note the affinity with other heroines who wish for fresh air just before their deaths, such as Fontane's Effi Briest.

Another threshold barrier that plays a crucial role in *Wuthering Heights* in particular is that of the door. Closed doors usually mean locked ones, and many characters are imprisoned in rooms at key moments in the text. The first example of this is when Heathcliff is locked in the cellar while Catherine and Edgar get to know each other; this is the start of the novel's tragedy, as Catherine turns her back on her 'true' love, Heathcliff. In a reversal of roles,

<sup>70</sup> This is largely thanks to Kate Bush's 1978 hit, 'Wuthering Heights', which topped the UK singles charts for four weeks.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Linda H. Peterson, *Wuthering Heights*, Bedford Books, Boston and New York, 1992, p. 299.

Heathcliff later does the imprisoning, as he locks Nelly in a room, rendering her powerless to stop the marriage of Cathy and Linton. On this occasion, we as readers also feel powerless, as Nelly is our means of finding out information. Drawing upon Bakhtinian theory, Parker has highlighted the importance of crossing thresholds and changing places in the text; she suggests that the door is a central aspect in this regard, particularly because Heathcliff is often pictured at doorways.<sup>72</sup> This is significant because Heathcliff has found the ability to overcome his barriers by adopting precisely those codes that oppressed him; in the case of the door, he is first locked up (as a child) and then becomes the one who imprisons.

In the same way as we have seen in the case of textual barriers, Catherine is also the most restricted character in the novel in terms of actual barriers. From the moment she runs barefooted across the moors to Thrushcross Grange, Catherine is subjected to a series of imprisonments, beginning with her enforced convalescence while her ankle heals and she recovers from fever. She then feels 'trapped' in her marriage to Edgar, and in response to this, she shuts herself in her chamber and starves herself. This self-imposed exile leads to her famous 'mad scene' (Chapter 12), from which she never truly recovers. The culmination of Catherine being shut in comes with her 'confinement' (pregnancy and childbirth), which is the cause of her death.<sup>73</sup> It might be argued that Catherine's sickbed is similar to the attic, as – like Bertha – she is shut in for 'her own good'. Both characters display similar traits of 'madness', but it seems more acceptable in Catherine because we 'know' her as a character. Additionally, Catherine's madness is seen through Nelly, who narrates in the third person, whereas Bertha is

<sup>72</sup> Patricia Parker, 'The (Self-) Identity of the Literary Text: Property, Proper Place, and Proper Name in *Wuthering Heights*', in Stoneman, ed., pp. 176-203 (184).

<sup>73</sup> Chapter Six explores the affinities between Catherine and Anna Karenina as regards their post-natal illness.

filtered through Jane's first-person narrative. As Catherine is a 'free' character in her love of the outside and her spirited temperament, being shut in represents the harshest punishment.

It is noteworthy, then, that Cathy *is* able to overcome the barrier of being locked in a room, when she has been imprisoned by Heathcliff so that she can marry Linton (243). Ironically, this is achieved by escaping through a window: the very window through which her mother's ghost longs to be let in. Gilbert and Gubar have observed that Cathy here displays her dutiful nature, and that she is running back to the 'world of fathers and older brothers' instead of away from it, like her mother and Isabella.<sup>74</sup> I would view this differently; she is still running away from patriarchal law, but a worse kind: that laid down by Heathcliff. Gilbert and Gubar have also observed that Cathy's successes have the effect of showing how her mother's 'originality' was repudiated by Victorian society.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, it would seem that Catherine is treated in much the same way as Shirley; both of these unique, spirited women are silenced and have to be content with the conventional path of becoming a wife and mother. However, Emily Brontë could not permit this to happen to her heroine, so she offers her the escape into death. In the case of Cathy, one might contend that although she is now going to be a wife (and probably a mother), she has – in a similar manner to Jane Eyre – arrived at this destiny on her own terms and through her own choosing. Barriers have been put in her way, but she has overcome them, and it is most significant that these barriers are precisely the ones that curtailed her mother. The world was not ready for a Catherine Earnshaw, in much the same way as it was not ready for a Shirley Keeldar.

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<sup>74</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 299.

<sup>75</sup> *Loc. cit.*

The wall surrounding Thrushcross Grange is a barrier that shields Cathy from the 'other' world that is Wuthering Heights. As Nelly tells us, 'Wuthering Heights and Mr Heathcliff did not exist for her: she was a perfect recluse' (162). As Cathy reaches adulthood, she longs to venture into the unfamiliar territory that is beyond the range of the park, asking Nelly, 'Ellen, how long will it be before I can walk to the top of those hills? I wonder what lies on the other side – is it the sea?' (162). When this longing is not satisfied, Cathy manages to figure a way out; moreover, she resents Nelly's attempts to keep her away from Wuthering Heights. She comments, 'I can get over the wall... The Grange is not a prison, Ellen, and you are not my jailer' (207). This illustrates again how Cathy is more 'free' than her mother, who *was* imprisoned at Thrushcross Grange.

The houses themselves can also be seen as barriers. Both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange are viewed simultaneously as prisons or safe havens, depending upon the character in question. As we have seen, Catherine makes frequent references to how she views Thrushcross Grange as a 'prison'. Isabella, on the other hand, comes to view Wuthering Heights as a prison and Thrushcross Grange as a place of safety. One character who views both houses as prisons at some point in the text is Cathy. As a young adult, she feels confined within the civility of Thrushcross Grange and longs to explore. She is granted freedom (albeit through her own cunning) and goes to Wuthering Heights, which at this time represents freedom. However, this then comes to be a prison too, as she is forced to marry the insipid Linton Heathcliff. When a character is in the 'wrong' house, it tends to lead to destruction. Catherine's rightful home is the moors next to Wuthering Heights, and her haunting of it is symbolic of her regret at leaving to go to Thrushcross Grange.



The location of Wuthering Heights may also be deemed to be a barrier. It is shut off from the rest of the community by nature, and there are constant reminders of its isolation. It is difficult to get to, and only those with insider knowledge can survive there. Parker has shown how Lockwood puts barriers between himself and the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights in an attempt to protect himself from its 'wretched inmates' (6); a table is put between himself and the dog, and books are used to keep out Catherine's ghost.<sup>76</sup> However, it is significant that the house becomes more open towards the end of the novel, once Heathcliff has begun to deteriorate. This is shown in the planting of bushes from Thrushcross Grange, and the opening of doors and windows that had previously been closed. Nevertheless, as Cathy and Hareton plan to move to Thrushcross Grange, Wuthering Heights is left for the ghosts.

The second type of actual barrier is that of external adornment. These broadly include clothing, curtains, drapes and veils, which can shield, disguise and also exclude. In this way, these barriers have the ability to be seen as both protective and restrictive. Jane's relationship with Rochester is defined by these barriers on more than one occasion. Firstly, she is pictured behind a curtain at Rochester's party (168), which highlights her exclusion from the society of Blanche Ingram et al. Then, a barrier lets her in to a relationship with Rochester; when he is disguised as a gypsy, he is able to find out more about her and therefore falls more in love with her. The curtain reappears as a threat to Jane's and Rochester's relationship, as Bertha sets one on fire in Rochester's chamber (146).

Female awareness of how clothes can be used to define character is crucial to an understanding of identity in Charlotte Brontë's novels. Jane, for example, recognises how

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<sup>76</sup> Parker, p. 183.

clothes can be a barrier to seeing who people really are, and refuses to wear expensive gowns, saying that she does not wish to be a 'jay in borrowed plumes' (259). Ironically, this theme is revisited when Bertha – the true 'Mrs Rochester' – appears before Jane in her wedding gown. Jane tells Rochester how she 'took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror' (284). In this action of possessing Jane's veil, it is as if Bertha is reclaiming the 'borrowed plumes' that are rightfully hers.

Frances Henri is also depicted in her wedding dress, at the end of *The Professor*. Again, this is a negative scene; she is dressed in very simple attire, with a veil covering her face (right down to her knees) and she is in tears. This behaviour has affinities with that of Kitty in *Анна Каренина*, who is also highly emotional on her wedding day. There is a sense in which both of these heroines are saying goodbye to an old way of life which they are mourning, despite the fact they are both marrying someone whom they love.

In *Villette*, Lucy is careful to dress modestly, choosing a dress of 'purple-gray' for the fête, in contrast with the elaborate gowns worn by the pupils, and the other teachers (161). Indeed, Lucy does not approve of finery. Using the same terminology as Jane, she describes Ginevra Fanshawe as a 'jay in borrowed plumes', and tells her that she preferred her in her plain gingham dress that she was wearing when they first met (109). In common with other 'society beauties' such as Rosamond Vincy (*Middlemarch*) and Hélène Bezukhov (*Война и мир*), Ginevra is viewed as shallow and selfish. In the wider context, her relationship with Lucy could be described as a microcosm of Lucy's struggle to be accepted in society as a whole, as

she is neither beautiful nor well-connected. Monsieur Paul is candid in his opinions on how a woman should dress, and this is one reason why he admires Lucy. Yet while she is reserved in her manner of dressing, Lucy also wishes to be seen as 'womanly', and is angry when she is made to dress as a man. Furthermore, she shows great independence of mind and spirit as she modifies her costume for the play, noting that she is willing to play a man's part, but that her mode of dress 'must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me' (171-2).

In *Wuthering Heights*, clothes define a character's social status. Great emphasis is placed upon Catherine's finery when she returns from Thrushcross Grange. This might be seen as a barrier between her and Heathcliff in two ways: in the physical sense, as she is unable to walk properly due to the cloak being draped all over her feet; and in the familiar sense, as Heathcliff does not 'know' her now she is dressed in this way (as opposed to the barefooted tomboy she was before she left *Wuthering Heights*). The cloak, similar to those that the Lintons are covered with, identifies Catherine with the 'other' life that is represented by Thrushcross Grange, hence forming a 'vestimentary marker'<sup>77</sup> of the beginning of her 'fall'. A key scene in which clothing may be deemed to be a barrier comes just before Catherine's death. Here, Nelly covers the mirror with a shawl because Catherine cannot bear to see her reflection. This exemplifies how a barrier of disguise may shield reality, but Brontë shows this to be temporary and illusory; when the shawl slips from the mirror, a terrified Catherine is forced to confront who she has become: 'Mrs Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange' (107).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Here Christa's term applies in the way he originally intended it; not as a marker of gender, but of social status. See, for example, Christa, pp. 127-134.

<sup>78</sup> This image is also used in Storm's *Auf dem Staatshof*. In Storm's work, the mirrors in the *Staatshof* are covered up because mirror images are said to bring bad luck and be a sign of impending death.

Actual barriers form a key part of the fabric of the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Of *Wuthering Heights*, Parker has noted that 'the crossing of boundaries undermines the identity of the text'.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the tragedy in the novel springs from Catherine crossing the threshold from *Wuthering Heights* to *Thrushcross Grange*, but because marriage to Edgar is not her predestined path (in terms of the world of the novel), Catherine is trapped in by the actual barriers of windows, walls and doors. Her daughter is able to overcome these barriers by becoming a modified version of her mother; her spiritedness remains, but – like *Jane Eyre* – she learns to adapt her behaviour to fit in with established social norms.

#### **'Who are you, Miss Snowe?': Identity as Perceived Barrier**

For the purposes of this chapter, the most important perceived barriers are class, the way in which women are seen as children, and finally, the problem of women questioning their identity. This last barrier is embodied in the image of the mirror, and also through portraits.

Social and class barriers might be said to be the catalysts for all of the tragedy in *Wuthering Heights*. As Bronfen has noted, Catherine's and Heathcliff's relationship is located beyond social law, implicitly because it verges on the incestuous, and explicitly because it is a 'misalliance between a landowner's daughter and a servant'.<sup>80</sup> However, the relationship between Hareton and Cathy is not only within social law, it also (on a spiritual level) seems to right the wrongs of Heathcliff and Catherine not being together (which was due mainly to class conflict). It is no coincidence that the two couples have the same initials, and that young

<sup>79</sup> Parker, p. 186.

<sup>80</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p. 307.

Cathy becomes Catherine Earnshaw; in a book concerned with symmetry, opposites and doubles, this represents a return full circle to the original Catherine, albeit a much milder and more socially acceptable version.

An important subtext within the barrier of social class is the notion of being an outsider or a stranger. The main outsider in *Wuthering Heights* is of course Heathcliff; from his unknown origins in Liverpool to ownership of both Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, he remains on the periphery, in terms of his behaviour and his relationships with others. It is his destiny to remain 'outside', on the moors with his beloved Catherine, and he finds peace (of sorts) only once they have been reunited in death. In her depiction of the outsider figure, it was Emily who was more confident in using a hero (Heathcliff is after all the main character in the text) as opposed to a heroine. Indeed, Charlotte wrote in a letter to James Taylor in 1849 that 'in delineating male character, I labour under disadvantages; intuition and theory will not adequately supply the place of observation and experience. When I write about women, I am sure of my ground – in the other case I am not so sure'.<sup>81</sup> It is true that Charlotte did portray a marginalised male protagonist in the figure of William Crimsworth, but he is nowhere near as convincing or as memorable as Heathcliff. So this again is an example of how Emily Brontë seeks to subvert gender codes by transposing what might be deemed a typical situation for a female character onto a male.

Gilbert and Gubar have taken this analysis one step further, by arguing that although he displays 'outward masculinity', Heathcliff is a 'feminine' character. They base this assessment (in a similar way to William Crimsworth) on what they describe as the 'deeply associative

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Showalter, 1977, p. 133.

level [...], where younger sons and bastards and devils unite with women in rebelling against the tyranny of heaven'.<sup>82</sup> This is certainly a convincing argument; however, one should not overlook the fact that Heathcliff is able to utilise patriarchal structures and activities as a means to achieve his main aim, which is to gain revenge on Edgar Linton and Hindley Earnshaw. First of all, he marries the childlike (and indeed childish) Isabella, with the sole aim of taking over Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff then rejoices when Catherine gives birth to a girl, as this prevents Edgar from having a male heir to take over upon his death. He takes advantage of Hindley's propensity to drink, and wins Wuthering Heights from him in a card game (a traditionally masculine domain). In perhaps the cruellest stroke of all, Heathcliff subverts the role of the father in his attempt to brutalise Hareton. However, this is shown to backfire; not only does Hareton end up being 'civilised' by Cathy, he is also the only person who is truly sorry for Heathcliff's death.

If men are 'outsiders' or 'strangers', then it is the role of a woman to be 'marginal'. Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre can most certainly be described as 'marginal women', as they are both 'ward figures' (much like the *воспитаница* type in Russian literature<sup>83</sup>). As Miss Abbot informs Jane: 'And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them [...] it is your place to be humble' (7). Jane also has the barrier of her profession to overcome in her relationship with Rochester, as she is the governess and he is the master. Indeed, Jane is looked down upon by the 'society women' such as Blanche Ingram. Jacobus notes that 'though increasingly professionalized, the role of teacher retains many of the anomalies of the

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<sup>82</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 294.

<sup>83</sup> See Grenier, 2001.

governess figure (mother substitute, educator, companion), and that the governess was 'economically non-negotiable, she is denied both social and sexual recognition'.<sup>84</sup>

It is also the case that marginal women often use creative activities or performance as a means of escaping the harsh reality of their lives. Jane Eyre's talent as an artist draws people to her in a positive way, which is in contrast to a female artist depicted by a male author, Rosa Hexel in Fontane's *Cécile* (1887).<sup>85</sup> Jane uses drawing as escapism from her awful way of life and it initially allows her solitude, but it later brings her the admiration and love of others, particularly Diana and Mary Rivers. Although Catherine Earnshaw is not 'marginal' in terms of her social status (like Jane and Lucy), what Nelly calls her 'performance' may also be viewed as a way of escaping the truths that she does not wish to face. Furthermore, this alienates her in the worst possible sense as she is deemed to be 'mad'.

In *Villette*, female performance takes on a different aspect. The role of actress is initially forced upon Lucy; furthermore, it is a role as a man. However, Lucy is able to make this role her own, and she comes to enjoy what is a chance to escape her 'narrowed lot'. Paradoxically, in a place where she is constantly surveyed, being watched on a stage is escapism, because she is acting out a role that is not truly her. The most important example of female performance in *Villette*, however, is to be found in the character of Vashti. Along with the nun, she represents one of Lucy's 'other' sides; in this case, her anger and passion (much like Bertha is said to represent the socially unacceptable aspect of Jane). The fire in the theatre, the cause of which is unclear, may be said to represent the fear within Victorian society at what might happen if

<sup>84</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in *Villette*', in Jacobus, Mary, ed., *Women Writing and Women Writing About Women*, Croom Helm, London, 1979, pp. 42-60 (45-46).

<sup>85</sup> This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

female passion remained unchecked. Graham Bretton's reaction to Vashti exemplifies this; we are told that he judged her as 'a woman, not an artist: it was a damning judgement' (325). Vashti's appearance also forms a thematic link with a later Fontane work, *Grete Minde*, where a fire breaks out during the performance of *Das Jüngste Gericht*. Here again, there is a sense that this was ignited by an excess of female sexuality and passion.

The second perceived barrier is the way in which women are seen as children. As we have noted of the narrative voice, this influences how *Jane Eyre* is perceived. However, unlike the childlike heroines who will be analysed in the chapters on Storm and Fontane (and, to a lesser extent, Turgenev), Jane is only seen as a child when she actually is one. When Rochester uses childish pet names for her, such as his 'little friend' and 'pet lamb' (215), the space surrounding Jane seems to close; firstly, in a 'leafy enclosure' (214) and later in the tree-lined orchard (247). Jane reacts with the defensive remark: 'I am no bird, and no net ensnares me' (253). This denial simultaneously reveals her feelings of vulnerability and asserts Jane's status as woman, not child. The reference to the image of the bird anticipates other heroines, such as Elisabeth in Storm's *Immensee* and Elena in Turgenev's *Накануне*. However, whereas these heroines speak of their longing to be free like birds, Jane stakes the claim that she is not one. This is a fine example of how Brontë takes a stereotypical image associated with women and subverts it.

Paulina Home in *Villette* is a good example of how women are seen as children. Even though she is nearly eighteen when we meet her after the fire, she is still shown to lisp and stammer slightly, especially in male company. When Graham talks about her to Lucy, he refers to her



as 'little Polly' (395). Lucy seems aware of Paulina's imminent womanhood, as she tells him that he should not call her that anymore, but Graham still appears to want to hold on to the idea of her as a child. The sense here is not that there are paedophilic undertones (as in other texts that will later be considered, such as Fontane's *Ellernklipp*), but rather that he wants to be her master.

*Wuthering Heights* is a different matter again. We know both Catherines from children, so this has an impact on the way we perceive them. Moreover, we almost always see them through Nelly, who is bound by her job as servant (almost like a nanny) to describe them from a 'maternal' point of view. Indeed, Q.D. Leavis sees Nelly as the mother figure in the book, 'whose truly feminine nature satisfies itself in nurturing all the children in the book in turn'.<sup>86</sup> This constitutes a barrier for both Catherine and Cathy, as it seems that Nelly always sees them as children, and that they never grow up in her eyes. This is especially the case for Catherine, whose behaviour Nelly deems to be childish even when she is a grown woman.

The final perceived barrier relates to female identity, and the way in which they are seen to constantly question who they are. Two objects that are essential in this regard are mirrors and portraits, which both seem to function as barriers to the female characters in Charlotte's and Emily Brontë's fiction. Mirrors invite a woman to define herself, whereas portraits are ready-made depictions, most often (certainly within the context of the nineteenth century) painted by men. As John Berger has remarked, 'men *act* and women *appear*. Men look at women.

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<sup>86</sup> Q. D. Leavis, 'A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*', in Stoneman, ed., pp. 24-38 (28).

Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women to themselves'.<sup>87</sup>

This 'relation of women to themselves' comes up time and again. From the very beginning of *Jane Eyre*, when the young Jane looks upon her 'strange little figure' (8) in the Red Room, she is often seen to look at herself and question who she is. Just before her failed wedding to Rochester, she describes herself as 'Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not' (275), and this is followed by her seeing herself in the mirror as an 'image of a stranger' in her bridal outfit (287). Moreover, the ghastly reflection of Bertha that she sees in the mirror behind her (it is so awful that she believes it to be a ghost) might be said to represent Jane's fear of this 'other' side to her identity (her passion), and she is only able to be comfortable with her self-image once Bertha is dead.

The meaning attached to the mirror motif changes throughout the course of *Villette*. At the beginning of the novel, it has negative connotations, as Lucy sees herself as 'a faded, hollow-eyed vision' (44) during her time as a companion for Miss Marchmont. This negative view of herself reinforces Lucy's state of mind at this time, where she is genuinely fearful that her destiny is to become just like her employer, a lonely 'old maid'. The mirror in *Villette* is also linked to the surveillance theme, as we learn that Madame Beck has one angled so that she can see into the garden. Lucy's self-image gradually becomes more positive as her confidence in her own identity grows, and this change is highlighted in a series of encounters with mirrors. When she is truly happy, she is able to see herself more objectively, perhaps, as she notes, 'as others see me' (when she goes to the concert with Graham and Mrs Bretton [262]). This

<sup>87</sup> Cited in Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Arrow, London, 2006, p. 16.

change is brought about not only by Lucy's own developing self-confidence, but also as a result of her flourishing romance with Monsieur Paul. Significantly, the turning point in their relationship comes when he claims – whilst they are both in front of a mirror – that he and Lucy have 'affinity': 'Do you see it mademoiselle, when you look in the glass?' (460).

Jacobus has claimed that Lucy is 'placed at the centre of a distorting hall of mirrors', and that she defines herself through other women.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the question of who Lucy is – something that we are all wondering, not least Lucy herself – is posed by another woman, the coquettish Ginevra Fanshawe. She asks: 'Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?' (383). At this point, Lucy is able to respond with humour, and is not affected by Ginevra's comment that she was once a 'nobody': 'Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise' (383). However, it is only once Lucy can ask the question 'Who are you?' to someone else (the ghostly nun) and not have it asked of herself that she can begin to achieve true fulfilment and inner peace. Jacobus has also observed that the question posed ('Who are you? And why do you come to me?') has 'implications for the system of representation employed in the novel', and that the 'configuration of characters around Lucy is equally expressive of her quest for identity and of her self-estrangement'.<sup>89</sup>

Within the context of this chapter, and perhaps literature of this period as a whole, the most haunting and enduring image of a woman looking in a mirror comes in *Wuthering Heights*, in Catherine's 'mad scene'. As we have already noted, Catherine is too frightened to confront her own image, so Nelly covers the mirror up with a shawl. It has been suggested that Catherine

<sup>88</sup> Jacobus, p. 50.

<sup>89</sup> Loc. cit.

notes a division between herself and her mirrored image, as she asks, 'Is that Catherine Linton?' The fact that she cannot recognise herself shows the 'absence of her true self in the role of wife and mother'.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Bronfen argues that this 'mirrored double signifies death'. Parallels may be drawn between this incident and the Jane/Bertha mirror scene in *Jane Eyre*. However, whereas Catherine herself has to die, leaving behind a new 'good' double in her daughter, it is only an aspect of Jane that dies (Bertha, her 'bad' double).

Charlotte Brontë's use of the portrait changes throughout her works, as she shows pictures of women (*The Professor*), through to women drawing/painting (*Jane Eyre*), and finally, to them becoming critics of art (*Villette*). At the symbolic heart of *The Professor* is the portrait of Crimsworth's mother. She haunts the narrative with her 'serious grey eye' (9) and serves as a reminder of 'perfect' femininity. From the outset, she is held up as the ideal, particularly in the way that she is contrasted to the young and coquettish wife of Crimsworth's brother, Edward. In a reference to women being drawn, the schoolgirls are deemed by Monsieur Pelet to be 'lovely creatures all of them – heads for artists. [...] And Caroline de Blémont! Ah, there is beauty – beauty in perfection!' (69). Crimsworth admits here that he feels uncomfortable with Pelet's tone; it is noteworthy that he later feels unable to describe Frances Henri, to the extent that he directly addresses the reader to pass comment on this: 'Now, reader, though I have spent more than a page in describing Mlle Henri, I know well enough that I have left on your mind's eye no distinct picture of her' (90). Crimsworth is thus unable to 'define' Frances in stereotypical terms, as what he feels is true love.

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<sup>90</sup> Bronfen, p. 309.

Women are also seen in pictures in *Shirley*; Caroline's dead aunt, Mary Cave (whom we never meet during the narrative, but we hear about), is described in idealistic terms: 'a girl with the face of Madonna; a girl of living marble – stillness personified' (39). Her tragedy is that she does not say what she wants, and Helstone is an inattentive husband ('he thought so long as a woman was silent nothing ailed her' [39]). She might be said to be an extreme version of the 'Helen Burns' type; the self-sacrificing heroine.

Portraits in *Jane Eyre* – and more specifically, Jane's ability to draw them – play an important enabling role in Jane's independence. After the party at Thornfield (where Jane is excluded), she is highly critical of her own image, comparing herself to Blanche Ingram in the two pictures that she draws ('Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor and plain', and 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank' [158-159]). It is not surprising that in her mood of self-denigration, Jane chooses to draw her own picture in chalk, whereas the portrait of Blanche is to be done on ivory, with the 'freshest, finest, clearest tints'. Yet although Jane's self-criticism might be seen as destructive, she is at least able to define herself, instead of *being* defined. In this sense, *Jane Eyre* is a revolutionary heroine because she paints, and in these portraits she has the chance to determine how women and men appear from a woman's point of view.

Lucy Snowe is not an artist like Jane, but she does critique art. The scene in the gallery, where she is looking at the 'static, male-fabricated images of women'<sup>91</sup> shows her in quite a privileged position: gazing at (and therefore judging) another woman. She is now watching, instead of being watched. Her reaction to the Cleopatra portrait reveals Lucy's innocence in the face of a highly sexualised picture; she comments that 'she lay half-reclined on a couch:

<sup>91</sup> Jacobus, p. 47.

why, it would be difficult to say; [...] she appeared in hearty health. [...] She had no business to lounge away the noon on the sofa' (250). Monsieur Paul, observing Lucy, is appalled that she has the audacity to look upon it: 'How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?' (252). The strength of Monsieur Paul's reaction would suggest that he is uncomfortable with the notion of Lucy being exposed to female sexuality, as he views her as spiritually and morally pure (much like himself, as we have seen in the 'affinity' scene). However, it is interesting to note that Lucy finds the series of four portraits of 'La vie d'une femme' more distasteful, deeming the four 'Ange's to be 'insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless non-entities!' (253).

The final test for Lucy's relationship with Monsieur Paul centres round a portrait, that of his ex-lover, Justine Marie. Controversially, she was a nun, and she is immortalised in a picture which, in poor light, Lucy mistakes for a Madonna. Lucy discovers that Justine Marie was not a perfectly beautiful woman: 'The face, though not beautiful, was pleasing; pale, young, and shaded with the dejection of grief or ill health' (490). Her encounter with the portrait affirms Lucy's love for Monsieur Paul, as it means that she is able to understand more about his faith, and allay some of her misconceptions: 'Whatever Romanism may be, there are good Romanists: this man, Emanuel, seemed of the best' (496). Additionally, it invokes feelings of jealousy, and it is in discussing these with Monsieur Paul that he is able not only to allay them, but also to ask for her hand in marriage. Through her exposure to a series of images of women, in both mirrors and portraits, Lucy is finally able to overcome the barrier of what it is to be physically 'perfect', and to discover true confidence in her own self-image.

## Conclusion

The textual, actual and perceived barriers employed in Charlotte's and Emily Brontë's novels operate in two ways. Firstly, as many feminist critics have established, they can act as a protest against restrictions. Textual barriers can parody patriarchal conventions in narrative; physical barriers can 'imprison' women (but they can be removed); and perceived barriers can stifle (but they can also be overcome). Secondly, barriers can act as protective mechanisms: the narrative structure and perceived barriers can shield readers and protagonists alike from truth, and enclosed physical spaces can keep characters away from harm. On a final important point, the Bakhtinian premise which holds that the threshold represents a 'turning point or crisis' is applicable to all of the novels explored in this chapter, particularly *Wuthering Heights*.

The extra-textual barrier of the pseudonym also functions as a protective mechanism against the reality of the struggles of a woman writer in mid-nineteenth-century Victorian Britain and as a restriction for Charlotte Brontë in particular, because her two identities as woman and author were in perpetual conflict with each other. Regarding this extra-text, we can, to some extent, apply Showalter's theory that Jane may achieve true fulfilment only when Helen Burns and Bertha, her opposite 'doubles' are destroyed<sup>92</sup> to Brontë's own life. Indeed, Jay sees Anne and Emily as occupying positions 'at either end of the spectrum of behaviour to which Charlotte's conflict of duty and desire inclined her'.<sup>93</sup> This conflict is central to an understanding of Charlotte's life and writing; on the one hand, she was a 'writer of exotic tales

<sup>92</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 113.

<sup>93</sup> Jay, p. xix.

of passion, intrigue and danger, on the other the sensible elder sister meeting financial obligations to her family'.<sup>94</sup> In this way, Emily could be described as her dark 'Bertha' double, whereas Anne represents her meek, 'Helen Burns' double. Although we can say for certain that Charlotte Brontë did not achieve any kind of fulfilment in her sisters' deaths, it was after this that she wrote what is perhaps considered to be her most 'feminist' novel, *Villette*.

Nancy Jacobs has argued that Emily Brontë was opposed to the idea of separate moral standards for men and women, and *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates how she 'moved beyond gender'. Jacobs contrasts this with Charlotte Brontë, who 'eroticized the very dominance/submission dynamic from which she longed to escape'.<sup>95</sup> In conclusion, it is in this dynamic that the extra-textual barrier of Charlotte Brontë's dual identity is most apparent. Emily Brontë was able to 'move beyond gender', at least in part, because she did not have this barrier to overcome.

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<sup>94</sup> Giles, 2001a, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Jacobs, p. 217.



## Chapter Two

### George Eliot and the 'Superfluous Woman': A Subtle Means of Protest?

#### Introduction

Mary Anne Evans<sup>1</sup> ('George Eliot') has been the subject of varied and lively debate amongst feminist critics over the last thirty years. Pauline Nestor has summed up what she describes as 'feminist anger' with George Eliot, which 'has often been based on the contention that her fiction is not autobiographical or empathetic enough'.<sup>2</sup> Showalter places this argument in context most powerfully, as she compares the fates of Eliot's literary heroines with those of Charlotte Brontë's. She notes that the fortunes of Brontë's and Eliot's lives are reversed in the respective fates of two of their most significant heroines, as Jane Eyre becomes the 'heroine of fulfilment' and Maggie Tulliver is the 'heroine of renunciation'.<sup>3</sup> Critics in the 1980s and 1990s sought to move away from the details of Eliot's biography, taking more of a text-based approach, which has revealed 'proto-feminism' in *Daniel Deronda*<sup>4</sup> and 'feminism' in *Middlemarch*.<sup>5</sup> Recent thinking, such as the work of Kate Flint, seeks to place Eliot's

<sup>1</sup> This was the name that she was given by her parents. At the age of eighteen, she dropped the 'e' and became known as 'Mary Ann'. She changed her name to 'Marian' just before she started working for the *Westminster Review*, and was known by this name until her death. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, I shall refer to her throughout as 'George Eliot', as is the convention in most literary criticism concerning her.

<sup>2</sup> Nestor, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Sypher, 'Resisting Gwendolen's "Subjection": *Daniel Deronda's* Proto-Feminism', *Studies in the Novel*, 1996, 28, 4, pp. 506-524.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Ellin Ringler, 'Middlemarch: A Feminist Perspective', *Studies in the Novel*, 1983, 15, 1, pp. 55-61, and Jeanie Thomas, 'An Inconvenient Indefiniteness: George Eliot, *Middlemarch* and Feminism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 1987, 56, 3, pp. 392-415.

representation of the Woman Question in the wider context, by thinking instead about how Eliot explores the relationship between gender and power.<sup>6</sup>

It is against this background, then, that a combination of these approaches will be used in this chapter. As in Chapter One, the methodology will be largely text-based, as the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers are analysed, in three of Eliot's major novels: *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. These works have been selected in order to represent a balanced view of Eliot's earlier and later fiction, and to show how (if at all) the fates of her female characters change over the time separating the novels.<sup>7</sup> However, as it would be difficult to discount Eliot's biography when considering the Woman Question, context will be explored alongside the novels themselves.

Moreover, this chapter will have at its heart a consideration of the 'superfluous woman' type. As the Introduction has outlined, this is a woman who, despite her talents, is unable to fulfil her potential and is forced either to fall back upon the conventional route of love and marriage, or, meets her end in death, thereby becoming 'superfluous'. It might be argued that no more so is this type evident than in Eliot's fiction; indeed, critics have pointed to the 'Saint-Theresa Syndrome',<sup>8</sup> the terms of which are detailed by Eliot in the 'Prelude' to *Middlemarch*: the kind of woman whose 'passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life' but who becomes 'foundress of nothing'.<sup>9</sup> Dorothea Brooke is the example whose destiny is worked out in this text, but

<sup>6</sup> Kate Flint, 'George Eliot and Gender', in Levine, George, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 159-180.

<sup>7</sup> I will also include examples from other Eliot works, but due to limitations of space I have decided to focus on these three novels.

<sup>8</sup> Ringler, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware, 1994, pp. 3-4. All subsequent references to *Middlemarch* will be to this edition.

there are also other 'superfluous women' in Eliot's works, such as Maggie Tulliver, in *The Mill on the Floss*, and Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*. This chapter aims to explore how textual, actual and perceived barriers may be used to quantify the superfluity of these women. Furthermore, it will suggest that the 'superfluous woman' type – far from being representative of Eliot's 'anti-feminism' – is the figure which best represents what McSweeney has described as Eliot's 'continuing quarrel with herself [...] concerning the fate of passionate women [...] in a male-dominated society'.<sup>10</sup>

First of all, we should consider Eliot's life and her attitudes towards the Woman Question (her 'extra-text'), in order to come to a greater understanding of how the 'superfluous woman' in her work came about.

### George Eliot: The Life Behind the Pseudonym

A theme that is common to the lives of both Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot is that of the absent mother. Although Eliot's mother, Christiana Evans, did not die until Eliot was sixteen, she did not play a significant role in her daughter's life. Hughes notes how Mrs Evans was in continual ill-health following her last two pregnancies, and never truly recovered from losing twin boys eighteen months after Eliot's birth.<sup>11</sup> Eliot was sent away to boarding school at the age of five, and her time at home was marked by her mother's disapproval of the unattractive, needy little girl, whose hair did not curl perfectly like her elder sister's did.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Kerry McSweeney, *George Eliot: A Literary Life*, Macmillan, London, 1991, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*, Fourth Estate, London, 1998, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Maddox, p. 5.

Quite understandably, the young Eliot looked elsewhere for affection, and this came from her father, Robert Evans, and her brother, Isaac. Although she did have close female friends later in life (such as Sara Hennell and Cara Bray), she continued to value her relationships with men the most. In a conversation with Eliot in 1880, Edith Simcox reported how she had told her that 'while feeling near to them (women - KA) in one way, she felt far off in another; the friendship and intimacy of men was more to her'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, her relationships with her brother Isaac and father are vital to an understanding of her fiction, as they embody respectively the two emotions of passion and the need for reason (resulting in self-renunciation) felt by Eliot, which combine to devastating effect in *The Mill on the Floss* in particular.

Indeed, it is well-documented that *The Mill on the Floss* is the most autobiographical of Eliot's novels, particularly in its depiction of the problematic brother/sister relationship of Tom and Maggie Tulliver. The 'passionate, intimate connection'<sup>14</sup> that Eliot had with her brother has its parallel in Maggie's adulation of Tom. After her death, Isaac told John Cross how his little sister greeted him with rapture upon his return from boarding-school for the summer holidays, demanding an account of everything that he had been doing.<sup>15</sup> However, in the same way as in *The Mill on the Floss*, the sibling relationship was not without its problems, which were mainly due to Eliot's intense jealousy of anyone or anything that engaged Isaac's attention. A frequently cited example is the pony he acquired when he was nine; Hughes explains how Eliot responded to his transferring of affection from her onto the animal by 'plunging into a

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Haight, p. 532.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

deep, intense grief.<sup>16</sup> Correspondingly, moments in *The Mill on the Floss* when a third party is introduced into Tom's and Maggie's relationship (for example, Lucy or Philip) are the most fraught. Again, in a similar way to Maggie, once Isaac withdrew his companionship from his sister, she sought solace in an imaginary world of her own, inspired by her reading of books such as Aesop's *Fables*.<sup>17</sup> Her intense love for Isaac continued to be replicated in relationships with men throughout her life, many of them socially difficult (those with married men such as John Chapman and, most significantly, George Lewes) and others unrequited (Herbert Spencer). Ironically, it was due to her relationship with Lewes that Isaac refused to speak to his sister, and they were reconciled only following her marriage to John Cross in 1880.

Eliot's relationship with her father was also fraught with difficulty, although she was his favourite as a child (he took to her in the way her mother did not). Following her sister's marriage in 1837, the responsibility for looking after her father fell on Eliot. However, he did not limit her ambitious programme of self-education; Robert Evans paid for his daughter's language tuition (German and Italian) and allowed her time for plenty of reading. At this time, she was still fervently Evangelical, and selected mainly religious texts on questions of doctrine, and biographies of people such as the Evangelical reformer, William Wilberforce. The Bible, of course, remained her 'core text' which she read every day.<sup>18</sup>

The turning point in their relationship came following their move to Coventry from Nuneaton in March 1840. It was here in November 1841 that Eliot met the Unitarian freethinkers, Charles and Cara Bray. Cara's brother was Charles Hennell, whose book *An Inquiry*

<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-46.

*Concerning the Origins of Christianity* (1841) Eliot read with great interest. Although by the end of 1839 Eliot had started to read material by writers she had previously 'outlawed' (as Hughes has it), such as Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller,<sup>19</sup> it was her friendship with the Brays and the Hennells that truly marked the start of her agnosticism and a turn away from the Evangelicalism she had been brought up with. Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1842 marked the beginning of the 'Holy War' between her and her father, which was the five-month period when Eliot refused to go to church. Although this was resolved once Eliot went back to worship, this stage of her life marked the beginning of a belief in self-renunciation that many of her heroines display, particularly Maggie Tulliver. She loved her father dearly, but also found it difficult to reconcile her personal beliefs with his, which highlights the clash between desire and duty.

Following her father's death in 1849, Eliot moved to London to find work, and took lodgings at the publisher John Chapman's house at 142 The Strand. Here she was inspired by the example of the young novelist, Eliza Lynn Linton, a former lodger of Chapman's; Eliot felt that if Linton could write for a living, then so could she.<sup>20</sup> Although she already had published articles in the *Coventry Herald* in the 1840s, there was much more opportunity in London, and it was here that she became editor of John Chapman's *Westminster Review* in 1851. In the early days, her job involved editing other people's works, but she would later contribute articles of her own, under 'Anonymous', as both Eliot and Chapman believed that her work would have less of an impression if people knew her to be a woman.<sup>21</sup> As well as being a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> McSweeney, p. 81.

means of earning, her work on the journal brought her into contact with like-minded intellectuals, the most significant of whom was the love of her life, George Henry Lewes.

Looking at their relationship in the round, one can say the following. In one sense they were social outcasts, living together openly when Lewes remained married to his wife, Agnes; in another they were one of the most celebrated couples in Victorian England. They inspired each other to excellence in their respective fields, and their open house gatherings on a Sunday afternoon at the Priory attracted 'both men and women of social standing'.<sup>22</sup> Maddox has recently emphasised the importance of Lewes to Eliot's success, noting that he was her 'inspiration, her critic, her counsellor and, not least, her literary agent'.<sup>23</sup> It should also be remembered that it was not a deliberate decision on Eliot's and Lewes's part to remain unmarried. The divorce laws in place at the time meant that because Lewes had openly condoned his wife's ongoing affair with Thornton Hunt (thereby saving their children from the stigma of illegitimacy), he would be unable to obtain a divorce from her. However, Eliot considered their relationship to be just as binding as marriage, and although she never officially took Lewes's name, she signed herself as 'Marian Lewes' and always insisted upon being referred to as such.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, whilst she admired *Jane Eyre*, she disapproved of Jane's rejection of Rochester, as she felt that Jane could (and should) 'live as his wife without marriage',<sup>25</sup> just as she herself did with Lewes. In this way, Eliot's need to find convention in an unconventional situation could be a partial explanation for why she denied her heroines the same kind of sexual freedom she enjoyed. It is quite possibly the case that what she wrote in

<sup>22</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'A Woman of Many Names', in Levine, ed., 2001, pp. 20-37 (34).

<sup>23</sup> Maddox, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> McSweeney, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> Haight, pp. 145-6.

her fiction was that which she truly believed, and that her relationship with Lewes was an accidental quirk of fate in her otherwise conservative worldview.

### George Eliot or Marian Evans? The Enduring Pseudonym

In much the same way as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot's own identity holds the key to an understanding of her works. Whereas Brontë is better known by her real name, the pseudonym 'George Eliot' has endured to the extent that this is the name virtually always used to refer to 'Marian Evans'. This section will now explore both the reasons behind Eliot's decision to adopt her pseudonym, and the implications that this has for a reading of her fiction.

The first time the name 'George Eliot' appeared was in a letter to John Blackwood's brother, Major William Blackwood, in which the author thanked him for the payment of fifty guineas for her first work of fiction, 'The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton' (the first of the *Scenes of Clerical Life*), which appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in January and February 1857.<sup>26</sup> There are several known sources for Eliot's choice of name, some of which have particular relevance in the context of a feminist analysis. She told John Cross that she chose 'George Eliot' because 'George was Mr Lewes's Christian name, and Eliot was a good mouth-filling, easily-pronounced name'.<sup>27</sup> Maddox has identified that there was a 'George Eliot Close' on a seventeenth-century map of Chilvers Coton in her father's office at Griff House, but perhaps more importantly, that the name 'George' 'echoed the male disguise of the scandalous French novelist, George Sand, who portrayed the struggles of women against a

<sup>26</sup> Maddox, pp. 89-90.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Haight, p. 220.



repressive society'.<sup>28</sup> Haight has highlighted the connection with Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, who takes the name 'Jane Elliott' when she leaves Rochester.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, 'George Eliot' was not an uncommon name (just as 'Marian Evans' was not) and would not attract attention and a sense of mystery in the same way as 'Currer Bell'. As Showalter has noted, Eliot saw what happened to Charlotte Brontë and was prepared; moreover, 'as the mistress of Lewes', she 'risked more critical hostility by revealing herself than Charlotte Brontë did'.<sup>30</sup>

Eliot's decision to take not only a pseudonym, but an entirely masculine one (as opposed to the androgynous names adopted by the Brontë sisters) may be interpreted in several ways. First of all, as Eliot herself stated, she wanted to be read with the same amount of respect that a male author was read with, but did not have the 'radical innocence' of the Brontës, who 'confronted all sexually biased criticism head-on'.<sup>31</sup> Eliot preferred instead to assume a masculine persona. This concern was vindicated when criticism of *Adam Bede* (1859) changed after the revelation of Eliot's female identity.<sup>32</sup> The pseudonym may also be viewed as a self-protective mechanism. It is well documented that Eliot was sensitive to criticism; she stopped reading reviews once they became personal, and gave them all to Lewes to be vetted.<sup>33</sup> Hughes notes how 'George Eliot' became a 'brand name', which 'allowed Marian to keep a crucial psychological distance from any criticism directed towards her work and, by extension, her person'.<sup>34</sup> McDonagh argues that the pseudonym was disguising not the fact that she was a

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<sup>28</sup> Maddox, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup> Haight, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Hughes, p. 263.

woman, but a 'fallen woman', one who was openly living with another woman's husband.<sup>35</sup>

This interpretation locates Eliot's struggle for social acceptance not in her choice of career, but in her choice of man.

In 1880, just a few months before her death, Eliot did get married. However, it was not to Lewes, who had died of stomach cancer two years previously, but to John Cross, a banker, and someone whom she and Lewes referred to as 'nephew'.<sup>36</sup> Despite only being married to Eliot for a matter of months, Cross made a significant contribution to her critical reception after her death, in the biography he compiled of her. Seeking to protect Eliot from further scandal (such as she had been accustomed to while she was alive), he destroyed the first forty-six pages of her private journal from 1849 to 1854, when she was involved with John Chapman and when she first met Lewes.<sup>37</sup> As McDonagh has argued, his work was carefully crafted to portray a woman who was 'very much the respectable daughter of provincial England, not the urban intellectual and cosmopolitan writer who lived for most of her adult life with the mercurial Lewes'.<sup>38</sup> In this way, Cross contributed to a kind of 'Eliot Myth', similar to the 'Brontë Myth'; this may be considered to be an extra-textual barrier, as for much of the next century, the Eliot canon was restricted to her more 'conventional' works such as *Middlemarch*, whilst works that showed another side to her fiction, such as *The Lifted Veil* (1859), were largely ignored.

<sup>35</sup> Josephine McDonagh, *George Eliot*, Northcote House, Plymouth, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Haight, p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> McDonagh, p. 5.

Whatever Eliot's reasons were for continuing to hide behind her pseudonym, we should consider the question of who is truly the voice behind her novels: is it 'Marian Evans' or is it 'George Eliot'?

### 'A Question so Entangled': George Eliot and the Woman Question

The thirty years separating Charlotte Brontë's proto-feminist novel *Jane Eyre* and Eliot's last major novel, *Daniel Deronda*, had seen the women's movement gather pace. The Second Reform Bill was passed in 1867, with the amendment (recommended by John Stuart Mill) of the word 'man' to 'person', which was designed to open up the way for women to vote in the future.<sup>39</sup> Eliot, however, was not so progressive. Whilst she praised Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft in her article for the *Leader* in 1855 for their refusal to idealise women, noting that 'their ardent hopes of what women may become do not prevent them seeing and painting women as they are',<sup>40</sup> she did not sign John Stuart Mill's petition that women be granted suffrage. As Flint has noted, she wrote to Mill's supporter, John Morley, in 1867 that 'as a fact of mere zoological existence, woman seems to me to have the worse share in existence... And in the thorough recognition of that worse share, I think there is a basis for a sublimer resignation in woman and a more regenerating tenderness in man'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Maddox, p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> George Eliot, 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' (1855), in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, Nicholas Warren, ed. and A. S. Byatt, ed. and intro., Penguin, London, 1990, pp. 332-338 (337). All subsequent references to Eliot's journal articles will be taken from this edition.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Flint, 2001, p. 162.

Eliot's relationship with the Woman Question, then, was fraught with difficulty, and is, at best, ambivalent. It was to her a 'question so entangled',<sup>42</sup> and one on which she did not like to be quoted.<sup>43</sup> The problem for Eliot was that her phenomenal success led contemporary activists and later feminists to expect more from her than from other Victorian women intellectuals,<sup>44</sup> and her refusal both to engage directly with the question of women's rights, and her scorn for her sister authors led to collective anger against her.

This section will now look briefly at Eliot and the Woman Question in three key areas: her journal articles, her relationship with activists in her personal life, and her fiction (focusing specifically on the question of women's education). Whilst not wishing to exaggerate any 'feminism' on Eliot's part, I will examine how her engagement with the Woman Question was tempered by her concern with improving society in general.

The very title of 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', which appeared in the *Westminster Review* in October 1856,<sup>45</sup> may seem to be a denial of the Woman Question, as it indicates a profound scepticism about her fellow women's ability to write as a profession. However, it becomes clear that Eliot is expressing a general disdain with the lack of literary talent evident in these novels; furthermore, she claims that the 'lady novelists' are writing not out of necessity, but vanity (142). She is highly critical of women showing off their Classical knowledge in their writing (which, she argues, is usually minimal), and this leads into her main complaint against them; that their novels lead men to believe that women's education is a waste of time ('the

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Charles Bray, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1857, in *Letters* (nine volumes), Gordon Haight, ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 1954-1978, Vol. II, p. 396.

<sup>43</sup> McSweeney, pp. 83-84.

<sup>44</sup> Deirdre David, cited in Nestor, p. 160.

<sup>45</sup> Many of the works Eliot refers to were written anonymously. Two of the writers named are Lady Chatterton (1806-1876) and Lady Caroline Scott (1784-1857).

most mischievous form of feminine silliness is the literary form, because it tends to confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women' [154]). She believed that a truly cultured woman should be 'all the simpler and less obtrusive for her knowledge' (155); that is, she should not use her knowledge to show off, but rather, to make more accurate observations about the world.

Eliot made similar comments in her article about French women novelists ('Madame de Sablé: Woman in France'), which appeared in the *Westminster Review*, in October 1854, and it is helpful to view these articles alongside each other. Citing the examples of (among others) Madame de Staël and George Sand, she contends that French women's writing was natural and unaffected, both in its choice of genre (mainly letters and memoirs) and because the women depicted what they saw, 'without any intention to prove that women could write as well as men, without affecting manly views or suppressing womanly ones' (9). This is why, Eliot claims, French women (more so than any others) had a 'vital influence on the development of literature' (9). Her conclusion indicates Eliot's egalitarian beliefs. We read, for example: 'women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men' (36) and 'let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man' (37). In this way, if we take the articles side by side, then the opinions in 'Silly Novels' are perhaps not so 'unsisterly' and extreme after all.

Eliot was not entirely disengaged from questions of women's rights in her personal life either. In 1846, she read and admired the work of George Sand, commenting that the French writer

had 'that "great power of God" manifested in her'.<sup>46</sup> She had 'significant friendships'<sup>47</sup> with activists such as Barbara Bodichon (whose petition Eliot signed in 1856, one which urged enactment of a law to permit married women to own property<sup>48</sup>), as well as Bessie Raynor Parkes, and Edith Simcox (Simcox in particular she considered to be her 'spiritual daughter'<sup>49</sup>). Her use of the word 'daughter' is interesting, in that it suggests Eliot's own sense of it not being the time or place to speak for the rights of women, but that it was something that may be achieved in the future. This would fit in with what McSweeney has described as Eliot's 'gradualist bias',<sup>50</sup> that is, the way in which she advocates slow and sustainable change, not revolution. Bodenheimer has also considered the impact of Eliot's early life on her attitude towards the Woman Question, and has located her unwillingness to engage directly with the cause of feminist advancement in these experiences as a young woman, in what she calls the 'painful lesson of the Holy War'; that is, that 'strongly held theoretical positions, no matter how enlightened and correct, can cause pain, disruption, and the release of irrational destructive behaviour in actual families or communities'.<sup>51</sup>

One should also consider the possibility that criticism by reviewers discouraged Eliot from writing more about the Woman Question. In the original 'Finale' of *Middlemarch*, Eliot emphasised society's culpability in Dorothea's predicament, in its action of 'smiling on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age'. Several reviews observed that 'Middlemarch does *not* smile, certainly not Celia, Mrs Cadwallader, Sir

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Sara Hennell, May 1846. *Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 277-278.

<sup>47</sup> McDonagh, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Haight, p. 204.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> McSweeney, p. 119.

<sup>51</sup> Bodenheimer, p. 35.

James Chettam, nor even Mr Brooke'.<sup>52</sup> Eliot then changed the disputed paragraph to a more general complaint about the 'imperfect social state', which is now taken as the standard.<sup>53</sup>

While this revision has been viewed as Eliot 'putting Dorothea in her place',<sup>54</sup> Blake suggests an alternative: that Eliot wanted to engage with issues relating to the Woman Question but changed her mind.<sup>55</sup>

Eliot's stance on women's education sees her at her most 'feminist'. She contributed towards the cost of setting up Girton College (the first Cambridge college for women), and continued to provide 'small gifts' towards this cause each year, along with the Women's Hospital and the Women's College.<sup>56</sup> However, as Maddox has noted, Eliot did not believe that she would see women admitted to university in her lifetime.<sup>57</sup> This is perhaps indicative not only of Eliot's conservatism, but also of her own frustration that she had to work so hard to gain substantial knowledge and recognition. This comes across most powerfully in the desperate attempts of her heroines to prove themselves in a masculine world, where being a woman is seen as a 'disability',<sup>58</sup> as we will now see in examining these issues in her fiction.

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<sup>52</sup> Kathleen Blake, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature*, Harvester, Brighton, 1983, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot*, Athlone Press, London, 1959, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> Blake, p. 27. When considering the relevance of *Middlemarch* to the Woman Question, we should also remember that this novel, like *Wuthering Heights*, is set in the past, albeit not so far in the past.

<sup>56</sup> Haight, p. 460.

<sup>57</sup> Maddox, p. 148.

<sup>58</sup> Hardy, 1959, p. 47.

## Educating Eliot's Heroines

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie is keen to read the books in Mr Stelling's study, but Tom tells her 'triumphantly' that she cannot because they are in Latin.<sup>59</sup> Maggie's counter-argument that she 'could learn Latin very soon' (156) is threatening to Tom, as he is well aware that his sister is cleverer than he is. He therefore resorts to putting her down by telling her Mr Stelling's verdict on girls' learning: 'They've a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow' (158). Tom's putdown serves to reaffirm to Maggie that education – in the way that Tom is learning – is not for her. Indeed, education for Eliot's women is an activity that women can partake in only if they sacrifice other aspects of their lives, such as love and relationships. Maggie's reading becomes her tool not for self-fulfilment, but for self-renunciation. This process is complex, and covers three stages: in the first stage (childhood), she uses reading as a form of escape from reality (in the same way as Jane Eyre), creating a fantasy world for herself. One of the first observations the narrator makes about her is that 'there were few sounds that roused Maggie when she was dreaming over her book' (18). The second phase is her self-education and thirst for knowledge; here, Maggie wants to be like Tom and learn similar things to him. The third and final stage is almost the complete inverse of the first stage, when she uses books in her process of self-renunciation. Reading to escape no longer satisfies her; we are told that 'she could make dream-worlds of her own – but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life' (298). It is after this that she comes across the Thomas à Kempis book (*De Imitatione Christi*), which brings about her change of personality from

<sup>59</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, A. S. Byatt, ed. and intro., Penguin, London, 2003, p. 153. All subsequent references will be to this edition.



'this once "contrairy" child' to one 'so submissive, so backward to assert her own will' (306). It is surely no coincidence that Eliot herself bought a copy of this book, just before her father died. In a similar way to Maggie, it was Eliot's feeling that 'true peace lay in resignation'.<sup>60</sup>

Feminist critics have viewed Maggie's reading with great interest, precisely because it is both a form of self-fulfilment and self-denial. Focusing on the latter, Mary Jacobus has described Maggie's rejection of Stephen Guest as an act of submission to her 'invisible teacher', Thomas à Kempis.<sup>61</sup> This interpretation evokes the common theme of the young woman and the male educator figure, which was encountered in Chapter One and will be revisited in later chapters. This theme is developed more fully in *Middlemarch*, in the depiction of Dorothea's and Casaubon's relationship. In the early stages of their courtship, Dorothea is keen to please Casaubon, and her desire to help him in his work comes about as a result of her wanting 'to be more useful' (58). While she is Casaubon's wife, her 'education' is determined by his needs, and not something that she does for her own sake. She even suggests that she could read the texts aloud to Casaubon without understanding what they actually mean: 'Could I not learn to read Latin and Greek aloud to you, as Milton's daughters did to their father, without understanding what they read?' (58). Dorothea is desperate, like Maggie, to understand the masculine domain of Greek and Latin texts, but her lack of knowledge here relegates her to the role of scribe. Gilbert and Gubar argue that this is precisely what Casaubon wants; that he 'only perceives Dorothea as a decorous complement to his own existence'.<sup>62</sup> Nestor has described Dorothea's inability to decipher the Greek and Latin texts, and the art in Rome as

<sup>60</sup> Haight, p. 67.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Phyllis Susan Dee, 'Female Sexuality and Triangular Desire in *Vanity Fair* and *The Mill on the Floss*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 1999, 35, 4, pp. 391-416 (407).

<sup>62</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 501.

being 'suggestive of a more general interpretative incapacity', one which causes her to 'imagine a romance' with Casaubon.<sup>63</sup> Robertson goes further with this argument, contending that Eliot 'places much of the blame for Dorothea's infatuation with Casaubon on her schooling'.<sup>64</sup> This idea has implications for the wider scope of this study, in the sense that it relocates the definition used in the Introduction of the 'superfluous woman' closer to the original definition of the superfluous man: someone who 'despite (or because of) their excellent education [in abstract philosophy] is unable to deal with the realities of [Russian] life'.<sup>65</sup> Whilst Dorothea's education is neither excellent (nor in abstract philosophy!), she undoubtedly has traits of 'Hamletism' in her idealistic view of the world.

Whilst Eliot's criticism of Dorothea's education is implicit, she is more openly disparaging of women who are 'accomplished', such as Rosamond. We are told that she is 'industrious', although 'she would never do anything that was disagreeable to her' (156). Furthermore, it is her schooling that prompts her to seek to marry well, as she 'had been at school with girls of higher position, whose brothers, she felt sure, it would have been possible for her to be more interested in, than in these inevitable Middlemarch companions' (90). Eliot is not entirely without sympathy for Rosamond; as Blake has observed, Eliot is keen to remind us how little Rosamond has to do.<sup>66</sup> Gwendolen Harleth is also portrayed as a victim of her upbringing and education; in fact, the first book of *Daniel Deronda*, which focuses on her, is called 'The Spoilt Child'. Although Gwendolen later becomes aware that education and reading may be a route to self-fulfilment, this is only achieved through the male educator figure of Deronda,

<sup>63</sup> Nestor, p. 133.

<sup>64</sup> Linda Robertson, 'From Reality to Fiction: Benefits and Hazards in Continental Education', in Rignall, ed., pp. 156-165 (164).

<sup>65</sup> Andrew, 1982, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Blake, p. 44.

whose approval she is desperate to win. Choosing a 'miscellaneous selection – Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Butler, Burke, Guizot', Gwendolen hopes that 'by dipping into them all in succession, with her rapid understanding she might get a point of view nearer to his level'.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion, one should consider that Eliot is also critical of the education afforded to men, albeit subtly. Both Casaubon's lifelong quest for the 'Key to all Mythologies' and Tom's attempts to learn the Classics are depicted with ironic disdain. What Eliot believed was more important was a 'more thorough education' for both men and women, which, she claimed, would 'do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment, and to propagate the true gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit'.<sup>68</sup>

### Woman as Other and Angel: Textual Barriers

With the exception of *The Lifted Veil*,<sup>69</sup> the narrative voice employed by Eliot is that of the omniscient narrator. In her earlier fiction, such as *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, this 'voice' professes itself to be masculine; for example, in Chapter 2 of 'Janet's Repentance' when the narrator recalls appearing in coat-tails for the first time.<sup>70</sup> However, after the publication of *The Mill on the Floss*, the masculine self-references stopped, as it became

<sup>67</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware, 1996, pp. 453-454. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Flint, p. 165.

<sup>69</sup> This short story, in which Eliot uses a first-person male narrator, achieves a similar effect to Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*. It also has affinities with Turgenev's *Дневник лишнего человека*, as both narrators relate their story from their deathbeds.

<sup>70</sup> George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, David Lodge, ed. and intro., Penguin, London, 1973, p. 256. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

widely known that 'George Eliot' was a woman.<sup>71</sup> Yet even after this 'unmasking', something that did not change was the omniscient voice, which was a hallmark of Eliot's fiction. It may be contended that this voice is a textual barrier in itself, as Eliot distances herself from the narrative in a way that Charlotte Brontë did not (in her use of first-person female narrators).

Indeed, it was not until Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, that there are notable female voices. Here, Mirah and also Deronda's mother, Princess Alcharisi, relate their stories in sustained sections of first-person narrative, in which they both reveal how they suffered because of their fathers. Although this enables them to 'have their say', both women remain on the periphery of the narrative in terms of their character development; Princess Alcharisi only appears on two occasions, and Mirah functions more as an 'idealised type'.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, their roles as female performers marginalise them further still. Another example of a female voice in *Daniel Deronda* comes in Gwendolen's letter to the eponymous hero at the end of the novel. She writes: 'I have remembered your words – that I may live to be one of the best women, who make others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I' (675). Although this takes place 'off stage', so to speak, and is full of uncertainty as to what the future holds for her, the letter functions as a conclusion to Gwendolen's story in which she plays a direct role (unlike, for example, Dorothea, whose marriage to Ladislaw is revealed through the comments of the omniscient narrator).

Eliot's use of epigraphs, which was not commonplace in the literature of the period, may also be viewed as a textual barrier. They are used in her three final novels: *Felix Holt*, *The Radical*

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<sup>71</sup> McSweeney, p. 80.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

(1866), *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, and are taken from a wide range of sources, from Shakespeare to Goethe (and even included some written by Eliot herself). Going back to the notion that Eliot lacked self-confidence in her identity as a woman writer, it may be tempting to infer that the epigraphs are there as evidence of her vast intellect, as they display depth of cultural knowledge and her ability in several languages. However, another way to look at the epigraphs is to emphasise how they contribute to what Hans Ulrich Seeber has called the 'common cultural heritage'<sup>73</sup> that Eliot's fiction shares with Europe. He claims that this is apparent in *Middlemarch* in particular, which he considers to be 'a European novel'.<sup>74</sup> This is an interesting alternative view of a text which is usually perceived as quintessentially 'English', and one that has significance for the wider context of this thesis.

The main textual barrier in Eliot's fiction that will be explored here is the language that is used in relation to women. As subsequent chapters on male authors will discuss, women are frequently seen as either Other (Whore) or Angel (Madonna), and these opposites are often played off against each other in the same text. This technique of 'structural doubling' that Eliot employs in *Adam Bede*, in the characters of Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris<sup>75</sup> recurs in all of Eliot's novels, with the most important examples in the pairings of Maggie and Lucy (*The Mill on the Floss*), Rosamond and Dorothea (*Middlemarch*), and Gwendolen and Mirah (*Daniel Deronda*). However, Maggie, and (to a lesser extent) Gwendolen are more complicated in the sense that their characterisation begins as Other but becomes Angel. Eliot's use of this technique may or may not be different to male writers' use of it; to this end, I shall

<sup>73</sup> Hans Ulrich Seeber, 'Cultural Synthesis in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', in Rignall, ed., pp. 17-32 (20).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> Nestor, p. 45.

analyse her exposition of Other women first of all, then the Angels, and finally, what will be termed the 'hybrid' types, Maggie and Gwendolen.

Eliot uses several different techniques to evoke 'otherness', which include the comparison between women and animals (and particularly the use of the image of the serpent), the use of water folklore (the 'water-nixie') and her choice of names for her female characters. Early examples of woman as Other in Eliot's fiction are to be found in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, in both 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story' (Caterina) and 'Janet's Repentance' (Janet). Caterina's otherness centres on the fact that she is a 'furriner' (130); born in Italy to an impoverished musician, whose wife died of fever when Caterina was just four months old, she is adopted by Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel following a trip to Milan. She is characterised as various animals or creatures during the course of the story; she is referred to as a 'little monkey' (167) or a 'black-eyed monkey' (142) by Sir Christopher, as well as being described as a 'little singing bird' (146), a 'mad little thing' (146), a 'gypsy changeling' (146) and a 'kitten' (149). Caterina's association with nature, and also the fact that she becomes ill when she falls in love, may invite comparison with Turgenev's Asya, from his novella of the same name, which was published one year later, in 1858. Both Caterina and Asya are seen through male eyes (Asya through the unnamed narrator, N. N., and Caterina through Sir Christopher and the omniscient [masculine] narrator), although the difference in narrative perspective (first-person narrative in Turgenev's tale and third-person narrative in Eliot's) makes for a slightly more balanced view of our perception of Caterina.

Janet Dempster's otherness is also seen through a man: her violent husband. In a bizarre and sustained rant after an accident (which proves fatal), Robert Dempster seems frightened of his wife, a victim of domestic violence and a reformed alcoholic whose repentance is referred to in the title of the story. Hitherto, his abuse of Janet has been subtle, and always behind closed doors, but this attack is witnessed by others and uses stereotypical images of women:

'She's coming... she's cold... she's dead... she'll strangle me with her black hair. Ah!' he shrieked aloud, 'her hair is all serpents... they're black serpents... they hiss... they hiss... let me go... let me go... she wants to drag me with her cold arms... her arms are serpents... they are great white serpents... they'll twine round me...' (381)

This is the first example of Eliot's use of the serpent image in relation to women, which recurs throughout her work. Although the serpents that Robert Dempster describes are black, in later, more developed examples, the colour green becomes an important part of this image, and the women who are deemed to be 'other' are often associated with green.

Bertha Grant, from Eliot's short story *The Lifted Veil*, is one such example. As well as having 'pale green eyes',<sup>76</sup> Bertha also wears a 'white ball-dress with green leaves' (19) and a brooch in the shape of a serpent in one of Latimer's pre-visions, in which he imagines himself to be unhappily married to her: 'She came with her candle and stood over me with a bitter smile of contempt; I saw the great emerald brooch on her bosom, a studded serpent with diamond eyes' (19). Bertha (in a similar way to her namesake, Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*) represents threatening sexuality; she 'has a love of power' (16) and taunts Latimer by wearing the ring he gives to her on a chain close to her bosom (17). She is also associated with water; she is described as a 'water-nixie' the first time we meet her (11), and then as a 'pale, fatal-eyed

<sup>76</sup> George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*, Helen Small, ed. and intro., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 11. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

woman, with the green weeds [who] looked like a birth from some cold, sedgy stream, the daughter of an aged river' (12).<sup>77</sup>

Rosamond Vincy is another woman deemed to be Other; Gilbert and Gubar note that she is 'associated early in the novel with sirens, serpents and devilishly alluring charms'.<sup>78</sup> Rosamond's otherness is developed by way of her symbolic 'double', Lydgate's French lover, the actress Madame Laure, who murders her husband on stage (Lydgate believes at first that it was an accident, but she tells him that she 'meant to do it' [143]). Indeed, Laure's actions influence Lydgate's subsequent perceptions of Rosamond in two ways. In the early stages of their relationship, Lydgate is keen to reinforce in his own mind the fact that Rosamond is entirely different to Laure; whereas Laure had 'dark eyes' (140) and a 'sweet matronliness' (141), he emphasises Rosamond's 'infantile blondness' (148). Eliot reinforces this difference in Lydgate's mind between the two women in her narratorial intervention: 'Since he had had the memory of Laure [...], the divine cow no longer attracted him, and Rosamond was her very opposite' (148). After their marriage starts to become strained, Lydgate reverts to associating her with the stereotypical images of Other women that he had previously stopped using, such as serpents, and in this example, water sprites: 'The shallowness of a waternixie's soul may have a charm until she becomes didactic' (605). At a particularly low point, he wonders if Rosamond would kill him (just like Laure murdered her husband) because he 'wearied her', saying that 'It is the way with all women' (550). However, we are then told that this 'power of generalising' was 'immediately thwarted by Lydgate's memory of wondering

<sup>77</sup> Readers of Russian literature may well see clear links between Eliot's use of imagery in relation to Bertha and Turgenev's depiction of the *femme fatale* Mariya Polozova in *Вешние воды* (1872).

<sup>78</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 514.



impressions from the behaviour of another woman – from Dorothea's looks and tones of emotion about her husband' (550-551).

Although the reference to 'generalising' does 'lay bare the device' at this point, the stereotyping of women continues in characters such as Dorothea, who is a typical 'heroine of renunciation'.<sup>79</sup> There are sustained references to her purity and goodness, evoked mainly by way of comparisons with religious figures. This is established from the very beginning of the novel, with Eliot's use of the example of Saint Theresa, who 'found her epos in the form of a religious order' (3). After she has saved Lydgate from ruin by becoming his benefactress, he declares that 'this young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary' (718). Dorothea's tendency towards this 'Saint Theresa Syndrome' (that is, her sacrifice of self in marrying Casaubon) is reinforced by comments which compare her marriage to becoming a nun. Mrs Cadwallader, for example, thinks it is 'as good as going to a nunnery' (53), while Ladislaw views it more severely: as 'the most horrible of virgin sacrifices' (335).

The meaning behind Eliot's choice of name for her heroine is not so clearly defined. Seeber gives a detailed account of both fictional and factual Dorotheas, noting that this name 'became a synonym for a curious combination, also characteristic of Eliot's heroine, of women's emancipation and wifely devotion to a husband'.<sup>80</sup> He notes first of all how an English Dorothea, one Dorothea Beale, was a pioneer of women's education. He then cites several examples of German Dorotheas in particular who followed this pattern; for example, Goethe's

<sup>79</sup> Romola (from the novel of the same name [1862-1863]) is also another example of this type of heroine. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of space, this will not be considered here in any detail. *Romola's* status as historical novel (set in late-fifteenth-century Italy) also makes it less pertinent to the topic here.

<sup>80</sup> Seeber, p. 29.

Dorothea in *Hermann und Dorothea* (1798), Dorothea Tieck and Dorothea Schlegel.<sup>81</sup> It is more than probable that Eliot was familiar with these women, as she was interested in German culture from a young age, and travelled extensively in Germany in 1854-1855 with Lewes. While considering cross-cultural connections, it should also be noted that there are similarities between Dorothea and Turgenev's two most famous heroines, Liza from *Дворянское гнездо* and Elena from *Накануне*, who are both self-sacrificing heroines, with Elena in particular displaying 'wifely devotion' to Insarov. However, a name that is not just implied, but one within the text itself, is Dorothea's nickname, given to her by her sister Celia – Dodo. This choice of name hints very strongly at Dorothea's status as a 'superfluous woman'.

Mirah from *Daniel Deronda* is another example of the Angel type, but is more clearly defined as such than Dorothea. As we have already observed, Mirah is more of a symbol than a character in her own right, serving as a foil to Gwendolen. Firstly, she is her love 'rival' for the affections of Deronda. Whilst Eliot allows the 'good' heroine, Mirah, to 'get her man' (thereby playing to convention), it should be remembered that Mirah's marriage to Deronda also functions as a resolution to the 'Jewish plot' in the novel. Mirah also acts as Gwendolen's 'double' in their parallel 'rescues' by Deronda; whereas Mirah is rescued physically (he stops her from jumping in the river), Gwendolen is rescued spiritually. Finally, Mirah's genuine talent as a singer is contrasted with Gwendolen's delusions of stardom.

Turning now to what will be called here the 'hybrid' type of heroine, the origins of the idea of her existence should first be traced. Gilbert and Gubar have famously argued that Eliot herself

<sup>81</sup> Dorothea Tieck contributed to the Schlegel and Tieck translation of Shakespeare into German. Dorothea Schlegel left her former husband for the Romantic critic Friedrich Schlegel, and converted to Catholicism from Judaism for him. Under his influence, she later became a novelist. Seeber, pp. 29-30.

was an 'angel of destruction'; an author who was 'involved in punishing male characters who specifically symbolise patriarchal power'. Maggie Tulliver, they claim, is the best fictional manifestation of this, as she is woman at her 'most monstrous when she tries to turn herself into an angel of renunciation'.<sup>82</sup> Maggie (and Gwendolen after her) may be viewed as a hybrid type of both Other and Angel (or 'Madonna and Medusa', as Gilbert and Gubar have put it<sup>83</sup>), as will now be explored.

The first indication of Maggie's dual identity comes in her name. Whilst 'Maggie' is commonly a shortened form of 'Margaret', it may also be derived from 'Magdalene'. It is possible, then, that Eliot may have chosen this name for its associations with Mary Magdalene, a sinner who subsequently repents. This would seem to fit in with Maggie's path from naughty child to self-renouncing woman.

Her otherness is developed from the outset of *The Mill on the Floss*, and initially takes the form of an association with animals. For example, she is referred to as a 'Shetland pony' (16) and a 'Skye terrier' (31). This is reinforced by the 'structural doubling' of Maggie and her cousin, Lucy Deane, which, the narrator observes, is 'like the contrast between a rough, dark, overgrown puppy and a white kitten' (66). The serpent image is used in relation to the young Maggie; after she has pushed Lucy into the mud, she is referred to as a 'small Medusa with her snakes cropped' (106). Her association with the gypsies is another aspect of this; not only does Maggie decide that they would take her in because she is always told that she is 'half wild' (112), but they also represent marginalisation.

<sup>82</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 491.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 492.

A further aspect of Maggie's otherness which is more developed than in other Eliot heroines is her association with witchcraft. This theme is introduced from the very outset, when she describes a passage about witch trials from Defoe's *The History of the Devil* to her father and Mr Riley: 'That old woman in the water's a witch' (20). Furthermore, Mr Riley's comment that it is 'not quite the right book for a little girl' (21) serves to place Maggie's otherness in the public domain. Another important reference to witchcraft comes ahead of her fateful liaison with Stephen Guest, as Lucy comments that her ability to look beautiful even when she is dressed in 'shabby' clothing is 'witchery' (387).

However, the language used by Eliot to describe Maggie changes in the latter part of the novel, and begins to include aspects of idealisation. She is described as 'queenly' (306) and a 'very fine girl' (351), one who possesses a 'glow' (313). Yet although Maggie's outward behaviour in spending nights 'lain on the hard floor for a penance' (310) indicates her self-renunciation, Eliot is keen to remind us of the 'sense of uneasiness in looking at her – a sense of opposing elements [...], like a damped fire leaping out again when all seemed safe' (310-11). In this way, although Maggie becomes the 'heroine of renunciation', traits of otherness remain.

In a similar way to Maggie, Gwendolen may be also seen as a combination of Other and Angel. The first description of her sees Eliot return to mythical stereotyping, as she is depicted as a 'Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments' (7). A few pages later, the serpent image is used to describe her way of 'figure and drapery', which is 'attractive to all eyes except those

which discerned in them too close a resemblance to the serpent, and objected to the revival of serpent-worship' (13).

After her marriage to Grandcourt, Gwendolen's behaviour changes to more like that of an Angel. From being the 'spoiled child' of the Book One, she becomes 'poor Gwendolen' (350), the victim of a tyrannical husband, who 'meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him' (263). Her 'repentance', which is encouraged by Deronda, paradoxically coincides with Grandcourt's downfall and death. As we have seen with Maggie, although Gwendolen's behaviour changes, the language of otherness remains. Like Rosamond, she is described as a water-sprite, but here Eliot includes a specific reference to Gwendolen being like Melusine ('who had ties with some world which is independent of ours' [518]).<sup>84</sup> In view of this association, it is perhaps no coincidence that Grandcourt is led to his death on the water, linking back with Gilbert's and Gubar's theory that Eliot 'punishes' her most patriarchal male characters by killing them off. Yet now she has become an Angel, Gwendolen is haunted by the fact that she felt unable to save him, although she has been released into comparative freedom as a widow.

This section has discussed Eliot's manipulation of the stereotypical imagery and language associated with women. Maggie and Gwendolen (and to a lesser degree, Dorothea) are examples of how she sought to subvert these stereotypes. Moreover, it is in these women that she shows most powerfully that women are destined to be 'superfluous' whilst they are subject to these stereotypes, whether they are Other or Angel.

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<sup>84</sup> The Melusine motif will also be explored in the chapter on Fontane.

### A More Subtle Means of Protest: Actual Barriers

There are numerous actual barriers in Eliot's fiction, which can be broadly divided into two types. The first type of actual barrier that will be dealt with here is the barrier of external adornment. In this instance, this includes hair, and the clothing and accessories that women wear, which may be deemed 'vestimentary markers' of their class, status or personality type. This will include the evocative image of the veil. Again, as in the section on textual barriers, it will become apparent that Maggie and Gwendolen have elements of Other and Angel in their clothing. The second type of actual barrier here encompasses threshold barriers, such as windows, doors and walls, and natural barriers such as trees, hedges and water. The barrier of water in particular is a developed and recurring motif in Eliot's fiction.<sup>85</sup> This section aims to illustrate how, like Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Eliot uses actual barriers as a means of protest, but in a more subtle way. Her use of more 'fluid' barriers like clothing and water is more sustained than physical barriers and enclosed spaces as in the Brontës.

The 'heroines of renunciation' are defined as such by their clothing. Dorothea's wardrobe, for example, punctuates her development as a character. The very first sentence of Book One is a consideration of the type of clothing that she wears, as the narrator tells us that 'Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress' (5). We are then told that the main reason that Dorothea likes to dress plainly is her religion: 'She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery' (6). We may contrast this to the 'society girl'

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<sup>85</sup> Eliot's use of water can be linked thematically to Storm and Turgenev, as will be noted in Chapters Three and Five respectively.

Rosamond, who has 'excellent taste in costume' (89), which is part of her appeal to the wider Middlemarch community. Dorothea's clothing, which is linked with her self-sacrificing traits, forms part of the reason behind her marriage to Casaubon and may therefore be viewed as a barrier.

Dorothea's attire whilst on her honeymoon also reinforces her as a Madonna type; indeed, this draws attention from Ladislav and his artist friend, Naumann, not least because she is standing next to the reclining Ariadne (Naumann observes this to be 'a fine bit of antithesis'

[177]):

[Dorothea] was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair (176).

This description idealises Dorothea and leads into Naumann's claim that 'she should be dressed as a nun' (177), which links back to the previous comments about the restrictive nature of her marriage. It is not long after this passage that the extent of her unhappiness is revealed.

Dorothea is also defined by the mourning clothes that she wears after Casaubon's death. Far from making her look unattractive, the dress, which was 'an experiment in the utmost laying on of crape [...] made her face look all the younger, with its recovered bloom' (502). It is noteworthy that it is not Dorothea's decision to remove her widow's cap; it is at Celia's suggestion that this is done. Although Dorothea agrees to this, she feels that she would be uncomfortable without it, as it has become for her a 'sort of shell', without which she feels

'rather bare and exposed' (509). In this way, although Dorothea has been released from her marriage, she initially uses the state of widowhood to impose restrictions upon herself and seems almost afraid of her own sexuality.

Maggie's clothing is significant at various points in her story, and is an important part of her non-conformity to the codes of St Ogg's society. Her behaviour in childhood signals her rebellion, as she ruins the dress and bonnet that has been made out of one of Aunt Pullet's old ones by basting it with roast beef (64-65). Frith's article, which considers questions of gender and national identity, explores the significance of clothing in *The Mill on the Floss*, focusing on Maggie's exclusion from the Dodson tradition. She claims that this is most apparent in the unshrouding of Aunt Pullet's bonnet, which has an 'allegiance to custom, tradition and respectability', and the fact that Maggie takes her bonnets off means that she is excluded from this 'painful mystery'.<sup>86</sup> After Maggie has become self-renouncing, Aunt Pullet's cast-offs are again the subject of her disapproval, but this time for the reason that they are 'too showy' (351) and would draw unwanted attention to her. Although Maggie attempts to dress demurely, the simple white muslin dress that she wears at the bazaar 'appeared with marked distinction among the more adorned and conventional women around her' (447). Paradoxically, by attempting to be an Angel, she becomes Other. The one occasion when Maggie does conform to social expectations is when she allows Lucy to dress her in clothing that makes her attractive (387); this leads to the disastrous romance plot with Stephen Guest.

<sup>86</sup> Gill Frith, 'Playing with Shawls: George Eliot's Use of *Corinne* in *The Mill on the Floss*', in Rignall, ed., pp. 225-239 (237).



Maggie's hair is another key motif. It is both a symbol of her non-conformity (in the sense that it is too unruly to be styled in the way that her mother would like it to be) and of her rebellion, when she cuts it off. Maggie's look changes, as might be expected as she gets older, but her hair continues to be a symbol of her development. From being the 'small Medusa with her snakes cropped' (106), her hairstyle changes to being 'braided and coiled' once she returns home from school after her father's failed legal challenge (197), and then finally it becomes a 'jet-black coronet' when she first meets Stephen (391). Although she does not cover her hair with an actual veil, Maggie does possess a metaphorical one, described by Philip when he tells her that she would be a 'brilliant woman – all wit and bright imagination' but for her 'veil of dull quiescence'; that is, her refusal to enjoy life (342).

'Vestimentary markers' also play an important role in Gwendolen's characterisation; this is particularly the case with her jewellery. One of her first actions in the novel is to pawn one of her necklaces, so that she is able to win money at gambling to send home to her mother (14). This act of female independence is foiled by Deronda, as he obtains the necklace and returns it to Gwendolen. The act of chivalry serves to undermine her independence, and leads her to accept Grandcourt's proposal of marriage (she marries him to guarantee financial support for her mother and sisters). In addition, the Grandcourt family diamonds may be viewed as a barrier to Gwendolen's happiness. First of all, they are returned to her by their previous owner, Mrs Glasher, Grandcourt's mistress and mother of his children, with a spiteful note which haunts Gwendolen: 'I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine' (351). The diamonds are also used as a weapon by Grandcourt to assert his authority over Gwendolen; he forces her to wear them when she does not want to (353-354). Gwendolen

retaliates by participating in her own game of jewels, as she invokes her husband's wrath by wearing the necklace that Deronda regained for her around her wrist (371).

Eliot cleverly manipulates Gwendolen's use of the veil, which becomes a 'vestimentary marker' of her journey into widowhood. When Deronda visits her (because she has asked him for advice), she covers her head with black lace (504), because Grandcourt had previously been angry at her 'damnably vulgar' friendship with Deronda (371). After Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen receives Deronda, wearing not the black colour of mourning as may be expected, but a white shawl (571). This suggests not only Gwendolen's redemption, but also the fact that she is at peace now that her husband is dead.

In a similar way to the Brontë sisters, Eliot uses actual physical barriers to evoke the sense of enclosed female space. Here, as in other chapters, Lotman's theory of mobile/immobile characters will be considered for its implications for Eliot's heroines.

In her first novel, *Adam Bede*, Eliot's demarcation of domestic space is suggestive of a more traditional role for women. Indeed, McDonagh has shown how Dinah, who begins the novel as a preacher (conducting her sermons outside), finishes the novel inside the house, as Adam's wife. She notes that Dinah '*comes indoors* – is domesticated'.<sup>87</sup> McDonagh observes how the reverse is true for Hetty; she is 'punished' for her transgressions by being 'sent out of doors';<sup>88</sup> that is, excluded from domestic space.

<sup>87</sup> McDonagh, p. 24.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25. As Chapter Six will explore, Anna Karenina is 'punished' in a similar way.

Subsequent Eliot novels evoke this sense of restrictive female space with an increasing sense of injustice. Perhaps the most enclosed space facing one of Eliot's female characters is Dorothea's and Casaubon's marital home, Lowick, and the sense of her being a 'prisoner' there is evoked from her very first visit. We are told that the grounds, with their rows of yew trees,<sup>89</sup> are 'confined' and the house itself is 'small-windowed and melancholy-looking' (67). Inside the house, Dorothea is taken into the 'long library' with its 'dark bookshelves' (67), and from there, Casaubon leads her to her chamber, which was used by his (now dead) mother. Moreover, once Dorothea realises the constraining nature of her marriage, the house seems to become even more confining:

Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight (256).

Barbara Hardy has identified a ghostly sub-text in *Middlemarch*, which she argues is brought out by reading *Effi Briest* and *Анна Каренина* alongside Eliot's novel.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, we can see how this is especially relevant to the heroine's move to the marital home in *Middlemarch* and *Effi Briest*. Yet whereas Effi is haunted by her 'Chinaman', Dorothea is the victim of 'a ghost of a ghost';<sup>91</sup> that is, Casaubon. Indeed, Casaubon's 'Dead Hand' places a 'barrier' between Dorothea and Ladislaw from beyond the grave (593).

Even as a widow, Dorothea continues to have clearly demarcated space; this locates her in 'feminine' places, such as the 'prettiest of upstairs sitting rooms' (454). The library, which she

<sup>89</sup> A symbol of death, as they are usually planted in graveyards.

<sup>90</sup> Hardy, 1997, p. 78.

<sup>91</sup> Loc. cit.

longs to inhabit, does not belong to her because it is a 'masculine' space. This is most clearly indicated when she does not want to receive Ladislav in there (503); it is still Casaubon's space, over which she has no control. It is surely also no coincidence that the name of the house – 'Lowick' – sounds like 'Lowood', one of Charlotte Brontë's most restrictive female spaces. Finally, and in another link with Charlotte Brontë, Ladislav's comment that Dorothea will be 'buried alive' at Lowick (206) may also remind us of the cramped nuns' 'cells' in *Villette*.

Gwendolen is 'imprisoned' in her marriage to Grandcourt, who has a 'will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor' (351). Gwendolen recognises that she is trapped and desperately wants to escape: 'The humiliation of standing an obvious prisoner, with her husband barring the door, was not to be borne any longer' (495). Just before he drowns, the images become even more violent and suggestive of death; even the 'walls had begun to be an imprisonment' and Grandcourt's 'words had the power of thumb-screws and the cold touch of the rack' (565).

Like Dorothea, there are hints prior to Gwendolen's marriage that she will be restricted; it is ironic that she believes that marriage will be 'the gate into a larger freedom' (119). The most significant symbolic precursor of this is her meeting with Mrs Glasher, which takes place in the enclosed space of the 'Whispering Stones', which are 'two tall conical blocks that leaned towards each other like gigantic grey-mantled figures' (123). The stones are near to a beech grove – a further barrier – which means that the women's meeting cannot be seen. Although Gwendolen agrees not to marry Grandcourt whilst she is trapped within the confines of the

'Whispering Stones', she later changes her mind, thereby going back on a pact made in female space.

The Red Deeps, the forest where Maggie and Philip meet in secret, is another example of a natural actual barrier, with its 'grand Scotch firs' (310). Showalter has described the Red Deeps as 'Eliot's equivalent of the red-room, an adolescent female space in which sexual longing and dread are mingled'.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, in the same way that the Red Room in *Jane Eyre* anticipates Jane's passage into womanhood, the 'Red Deeps' hints at Maggie's awakening sexuality. However, what is perhaps more important to note here is the sense of sadness that Maggie feels once Tom has discovered her secret meeting-place; he has appropriated her space. It is also here that Maggie and Tom have their confrontation about Philip, and it is from this point that their relationship sours (Chapter Five of Book Five, 'The Cloven Tree'). So from being a space where Maggie is free to enjoy life, the Red Deeps becomes the 'Valley of Humiliation' (Book Four).

Nonetheless, Eliot's heroines are not entirely restricted by actual barriers. One barrier that may be either 'open' or 'closed' (that is, an enabler or disabler of female characters) is water. In Eliot's fiction, water often represents death. This is developed from the early works; *Adam Bede* opens with Thias Bede's death by drowning, and in the same novel, Hetty tries to drown herself after she has killed her baby. Mirah in *Daniel Deronda* is about to throw herself in the river when Deronda first meets her. Eliot's most sustained use of water imagery is in *The Mill on the Floss*, as water is viewed as both a means of making money (it is after all, the Floss that powers the mill!) and as a threat. The novel is punctuated by concerns about the water level in

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<sup>92</sup> Showalter, 1977, p. 125.

St Ogg's, with the ongoing question of whether a dam should be built. Mrs Tulliver alludes to her fear of Maggie drowning on several occasions, the most significant of which comes when she runs away to the gypsies (110). This fear is realised later, as both Maggie and Tom drown in the flood that destroys St Ogg's at the end. Nestor has viewed Maggie's death as 'a form of fantastical euthanasia',<sup>93</sup> noting that this was recognised by Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, in his comments that 'Providence was kind in removing Maggie. She could not have been happy here'.<sup>94</sup> There are further examples in which heroines are perhaps more obviously 'rescued' by water; Grandcourt's death by drowning, which releases Gwendolen from their loveless marriage, and Romola's escape from her husband in a boat.<sup>95</sup>

Water is, furthermore, part of the travel imagery so often found in the novel of adultery, as it represents a loss of control.<sup>96</sup> With this in mind, it is significant that Maggie's moments of crisis within the text come when she is more 'mobile' (this is also notable of Rosamond, who loses her baby after horse-riding). An early example of this is when she runs away to the gypsies (Book One, Chapter 11). The most destructive instance of Maggie's mobility comes in her infamous boat trip with Stephen Guest, which is the culmination of their affair. Eliot emphasises the loss of control, particularly in the title of the chapter which contains the incident, 'Borne Along by the Tide' (Book Six, Chapter 13). Tony Tanner has shown how the boat journey takes Maggie from the 'city' (what is socially acceptable) to the 'field' (what is not), because 'the gliding water induces a loss of volition and exclusion of memory'.<sup>97</sup> Even once Stephen and Maggie realise the implications of their actions, it is too late because they

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<sup>93</sup> Nestor, p. 71.

<sup>94</sup> Cited in loc. cit.

<sup>95</sup> We might draw parallels with Storm's *Auf dem Staatshof* here, and his depiction of Anne Lene's death.

<sup>96</sup> This theme will be revisited in Chapter Four (Fontane) and Chapter Six (Tolstoy).

<sup>97</sup> Tanner, p. 68.

'suddenly find that they are outside of their known domain'.<sup>98</sup> Maggie's return to the 'city' then sees her become fully excluded from St Ogg's society.

Eliot's use of actual barriers, then, is highly complex. Whilst her presentation of problematic 'mobile' female characters would seem to be 'anti-feminist', this is alongside her increasingly sympathetic presentation of enclosed female spaces. Eliot's use of water, dresses and veils forms a more subtle means of protest than the Brontë sisters' rooms and boxes. Nonetheless, it remains the case that she 'brooded on the curtailment of women's lives'.<sup>99</sup>

### Identity, Role and the 'Superfluous Woman': Perceived Barriers

The two main types of perceived barrier in Eliot's fiction relate to class barriers and social expectation, and to female identity and role. Perceived barriers in particular elucidate the existence of the 'superfluous woman' type and will be considered below.

If we turn first of all to the pressure that society exerts upon the individual, it should be noted that this is a popular theme in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. It becomes apparent that men, just as much as women, are the victims of social pressures. Rosamond views Lydgate as an ideal match because he is of 'good birth' (155), but her romantic ideals are destroyed when it becomes apparent that he does not have enough money to keep her in the manner to which she *thinks* she should become accustomed. Her aunt, Mrs Bulstrode, warns Rosamond against this ('You must not think of living in high style' [277]), but by this time, Rosamond has

<sup>98</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>99</sup> Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, Harvester, Brighton, 1986, p. 180.

already decided that Lydgate will be her husband. Dorothea, on the other hand, goes against convention by rejecting Sir James, who is an 'ideal' match by Middlemarch standards, as he is both well-born and wealthy. Dorothea's unconventional choice of Casaubon, which may be seen as a 'rebellion' against the norms of Middlemarch society, paradoxically leads her to superfluity as his wife. Moreover, and as has already been noted, in the original ending of the novel, Eliot was highly critical of society for allowing this to happen.

Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt is most certainly one of convenience. Not only does it give her 'the brilliant position she had longed for' (255), it also means that her mother and sisters will be able to remain in the manner to which they have become accustomed (they no longer have to move to Sawyer's Cottage, which Gwendolen views as being 'like a bad dream' [221]). We may draw parallels between Gwendolen's marriage of convenience and that of Anna to Karenin in *Анна Каренина*; indeed, McSweeney has noted that the contemporary setting and Gwendolen's social world invites comparison with both Tolstoy's most famous heroine, and Isabel Archer in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880).<sup>100</sup> This comparison can be extended to include Fontane's *Effi Briest*; she too marries for status and is uncomfortable with the role that is subsequently allotted to her. Eliot, however, makes it easier to dislike Grandcourt, as he is considerably more unpleasant than either Innstetten or Karenin.

Another aspect of the perceived barrier of social expectation comes in *The Mill on the Floss*, and is what one might describe as 'being a Dodson':

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<sup>100</sup> McSweeney, p. 134.



There were particular ways of doing everything in that family: particular ways of bleaching the linen, of making the cowslip wine, curing the hams and keeping the bottled gooseberries, so that no daughter of that house could be indifferent to the privilege of having been born a Dodson, rather than a Gibson or a Watson (47).

As already noted, Maggie is excluded from these traditions, because she is something 'other' than a Dodson; that is, she is more like her father's side of the family, the Tullivers. It is particularly telling, then, that Mrs Tulliver seems to be more concerned about losing her china and tablecloths than she is about her husband's illness, after he loses his legal dispute with Wakem. In this way, after her husband's death, Mrs Tulliver remains a part of that culture in which she was brought up, yet Maggie is placed in a vacuum, as she is not a 'Dodson', and her father is gone. In broader terms though, much of Maggie's tragedy stems from the fact that she does not fit in with what is expected of a young woman in St Ogg's. This is reinforced by public opinion (described by Eliot as 'the world's wife'), which is 'always feminine in gender' (509). It is this public opinion that makes an outcast of Maggie when she returns to St Ogg's after her 'elopement' with Stephen.

The second perceived barrier relates to identity and self. As has been observed in Chapter One, mirrors and portraits are important in an interpretation of women's self-representation in Charlotte Brontë's novels. Eliot takes this further, as she uses different forms of female (self-) representation, which depend on the character type in question. Where the Other women most often look in mirrors, the Angel type is represented by others (always men) in art.

The earliest instance of this female narcissism in Eliot's fiction is Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*. What Ogden has described as Hetty's 'nightly self-devotional services in her bedroom'<sup>101</sup> are the clearest indications of her self-preoccupation, and are seen as a major character flaw. In a key scene, Hetty's mirror worship is juxtaposed against 'Dinah's Methodist gaze', which is 'positively visionary',<sup>102</sup> as the latter looks out of her bedroom window, visualising the presence of 'Love and Sympathy'.<sup>103</sup>

A particularly defining moment in *Middlemarch* (one which reworks the technique used in *Adam Bede*) is when Rosamond (another worshipper of her own reflection) looks in the mirror at the same time as Mary Garth. Mary 'laughingly' comments that she is a 'brown patch' by the side of her cousin, to which Rosamond replies:

'No one thinks of your appearance, you are so sensible and useful, Mary. Beauty is of very little consequence in reality,' said Rosamond, turning her head towards Mary, but with eyes swerving towards the new view of her neck in the glass (105).

Not only does this take an ironic swipe at Rosamond's vanity, it also reveals Mary's ease with her own appearance, although she is aware that she is 'plain'. Mary later passes comment on the stereotypes that are used in relation to women's appearance, observing that Rosamond is 'just the sort of beautiful creature that is imprisoned with ogres in fairy-tales' (127).

In contrast, the heroines of renunciation are drawn or painted by other characters. They do not seek to define themselves; they are defined. Dorothea, for example, does not look in mirrors,

<sup>101</sup> Daryl Ogden, 'Double Visions: Sarah Stickney Ellis, George Eliot and the Politics of Domesticity', *Women's Studies*, 1996, 25, 6, pp. 585-602 (592).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 593.

<sup>103</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Penguin, London, 1994, p. 157.

yet she is painted on her honeymoon, as 'Santa Clara' (202). Prior to this, there is a key conversation between Ladislav and his artist friend (Naumann) on the nature of beauty. Ladislav's comments here show his sensitivity to character and also his ability to see beyond a woman's looks:

'Language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being vague. After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection. I feel that especially about representations of women. As if a woman were a mere coloured superficies! You must wait for movement and tone' (178).

Dorothea herself becomes aware of how paintings can have this 'insistent imperfection', in the scene when she holds the miniature of Ladislav's mother, Casaubon's Aunt Julia, who was disowned by her family because of her choice of husband. We are told that she 'took the little oval picture in her palm and made a bed for it there, and leaned her cheek upon it, as if that would soothe the creature who had suffered unjust condemnation' (509). Dorothea here shows a profound awareness of the tragedy of a woman who is not only defined, but unable to tell her own story.

Maggie, again, is a complicated hybrid; in this regard, she develops from Other to Angel during the course of the text in terms of her self-identity and definition by others. When she shows traits of otherness as a child, she looks at herself in the mirror at her hair after she has cut it off. Yet it is left to Tom to comment upon what she looks like: 'O, my buttons, what a queer thing you look! Look at yourself in the glass – you look like the idiot we throw our nutshells to at school' (69). In keeping with her traits of self-renunciation, she is later uncomfortable with the idea of looking at herself in the mirror. For example, she lets Mrs Tulliver do her hair because she is 'glad of anything that would soothe her mother', whilst

'steadily refusing to look at herself in the glass' (306). Furthermore, Maggie is painted (on two occasions) by Philip, and his representations of her in art trace her development from 'queer little girl' (312) to beautiful young woman. She is 'painted' in the metaphorical sense by Lucy, and when she dresses Maggie for the occasion of meeting Stephen for the first time, we are told that it is 'as if she had been arranging Maggie for a portrait' (387).

Gwendolen's attitude to herself changes throughout *Daniel Deronda*. At the beginning, she is a vain young girl who enjoys looking at herself in the mirror; she even kisses her reflection in one scene (13). Her unhappy marriage brings about diminished self-confidence, which is evidenced in her change of attitude to her reflection: 'she no longer felt inclined to kiss her fortunate image in the glass' (351). Nestor has pointed out that Gwendolen is objectified by the male gaze, and that this 'preoccupation with her own reflection' shows that she has 'learned to identify herself as male onlookers have constructed her'.<sup>104</sup> However, what should be noted about Gwendolen is that she is not painted or sketched (even though Hans Meyrick, the artist, does refer to her as the 'Vandyke duchess' [463]), thereby resisting definition by others.

The final perceived barrier, and perhaps the most important, is the question of what role a woman should play. It should, first of all, be noted that none of Eliot's major heroines are seen as having a vocation as such. Hardy has viewed this lack of vocation for women as being indicative of them being 'deprived of the hero's outlet in action and of their opportunities'.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Nestor, pp. 145-146.

<sup>105</sup> Hardy, 1959, p. 51.

Blake, however, contends that *Middlemarch* is a 'great feminist work',<sup>106</sup> precisely because it focuses on what she calls 'the 'postponement' by society of a woman's aspirations, causing her to fall back on love and marriage'.<sup>107</sup> This section will now look at the roles that Dorothea, Maggie and Gwendolen play, in light of these two opposing notions.

Dorothea, much like Eliot herself, aspires to be with men, and is more comfortable in their company. It seems that she would much rather talk to Sir James or Lydgate about social reform than converse with Celia about babies. This tendency was noted by the contemporary critic, Frederick Napier Broome, who called her a 'masculine type', because 'unsatisfied ambitions are masculine rather than female ills'.<sup>108</sup>

It is therefore somewhat difficult to accept that Dorothea chooses the 'vocation' of being Casaubon's wife; as Miss Brooke, she occupies herself with broader social concerns, such as her housing projects. However, this never truly comes to fruition, and she would have been reliant upon the money of a man (Sir James) to make this happen. Therefore, we are invited to question whether Dorothea's ideas are just 'delusion' or whether they are a sign of a genuinely emancipated woman.<sup>109</sup> Eliot answers this question in two ways. As a young woman, Dorothea's ideals are frustrated, because she has neither the money nor what we might now call the 'life experience' to make a genuine difference. Yet as a widow, with Casaubon's

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<sup>106</sup> Blake, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>109</sup> The critics Amy Mandelker (*Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question and the Victorian Novel*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1993) and Goscilo (2003) have taken these two opposing views (emancipation and delusion respectively) on Tolstoy's characterisation of Anna.

money behind her, she is able to concentrate upon a charitable 'project' much closer to home: saving Lydgate and Rosamond from bankruptcy.

It is true that Dorothea is empowered by Eliot in her choice of marrying Ladislaw; Gilbert and Gubar view this as 'the most subversive act available to her within the context defined by the author, since it is the only act prohibited by the stipulations of the dead man, and by her family and friends as well'.<sup>110</sup> However, in light of what has just been observed about Dorothea's projects, this surely begs the question: Is 'choosing a man' enough for her? In the Finale, Eliot hints that she could have done so much more with her life: 'Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother' (779). Being a mother, then, is seen very much as second best, and it is Dorothea's fate to 'make do' with this. She comments: 'I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up' (507). Regardless of why she has 'given it up' – whether it is the fault of society or marriage to Casaubon – this statement, more than anything, sums up Dorothea's status as a 'superfluous woman'.

Although she could have married either Stephen or Philip, Maggie never becomes a wife. Eliot prepares the reader for this possibility from early in the novel, as Mr Tulliver laments the fact that his 'poor little wench' will 'have nobody but Tom, belike, when I'm gone' (90). Yet it is also not Maggie's destiny to have a glittering career. As Hardy has observed, although she does work ('a dreary situation in a school' [380]), we never see her there, and we also see

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<sup>110</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 528.

nothing of the schoolroom when she is working as governess to Dr Kenn's children.<sup>111</sup> However, it should be remembered that Maggie is not employed in this position for long, because Dr Kenn's parishioners object to it; public opinion is that 'it was enough to make poor Mrs Kenn turn in her grave' (527). In this way, Maggie becomes 'superfluous' because of society's judgement, and not through any fault of her own. Indeed, she wants to be of use by working: 'She was not without practical intentions: the love of independence was too strong an inheritance and a habit for her not to remember that she must get her bread' (512).

Gwendolen questions the notion of marriage being a 'vocation', and more particularly, the idea of making oneself attractive in order to gain a husband: 'What is the use of my being charming, if it is to end in my being dull and not minding anything? Is that what marriage always comes to?' (22) Furthermore, the narrator comments that Gwendolen's 'thoughts never dwelled on marriage as the fulfilment of her ambition' (30). However, this is precisely what she ends up doing, as her attempts to find work in an alternative sphere (as an actress or singer) fail at the first hurdle, when Klesmer tells her that she is not good enough. It is then with much sadness that she 'submits' to becoming Grandcourt's wife, in order to provide for her mother and sisters (who are described on more than one occasion as 'superfluous' [24, 190]). From Gwendolen's point of view, this is a preferable alternative to becoming a governess, which she considers to be 'hardship', claiming that she 'would rather emigrate than be a governess' (194).

It is not the case that Eliot's female characters are entirely without vocation. Deronda's mother, Princess Alcharisi, has had a successful career as a singer. Furthermore, she had to

<sup>111</sup> Hardy, 1959, p. 51.

struggle to achieve this, as her father disapproved of her art: 'He hated that Jewish women should be thought of by the Christian world as a sort of ware to make public singers and actresses of' (523). However, it should be noted that in the end, the Princess is judged as an 'unsatisfactory mother' rather than being a 'dedicated artist'.<sup>112</sup> This comes about as Eliot depicts her from the point of view of the eponymous hero, Deronda, the long-forgotten son who longs to be reunited with his mother. Her decision to forsake him for the second time, by refusing to play a subsequent part in his life, is therefore seen as rather cruel.

Indeed, it is the women with more 'traditional' careers who demand greater respect. Mrs Garth, for example, is a teacher, and is known in Middlemarch as 'your fine Mrs Garth' (226). She is praised for being financially prudent; she has saved money from her teaching so that her son Alfred can go to college and train to be an engineer. However, this is cruelly taken away after her husband (Caleb Garth) guarantees a bill for the future son-in-law, Fred Vincy, upon which he subsequently defaults. Caleb Garth fittingly observes that 'a woman, let her be as good as she may, has got to put up with the life her husband makes for her' (240).

Like her mother, Mary Garth is keen to support herself financially and is also good with money. Although her work as Peter Featherstone's companion is no great vocation, it serves as a means to an end, as she is not reliant upon others (unlike Rosamond). She chooses not to follow her mother's career path in becoming a teacher, claiming that she 'is not fit for that: my mind is too fond of wandering on its own way' (127). She finds her true vocation by way of marriage to Fred, but this is not marriage itself; rather, it is writing. Although people in Middlemarch believe that she wrote Fred's book on agricultural method, it was in fact the case

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<sup>112</sup> Nestor, p. 147.



that she 'wrote a little book for her boys' (775). In a work that attests very much to the 'middle way' it is also unsurprising that Fred's and Mary's marriage is the happiest out of all of the couples in *Middlemarch* (they achieve a 'solid mutual happiness' [775]).

Despite these positive points, it would almost certainly be a misnomer to interpret Eliot's limited depiction of working women as 'feminism'. Blake convincingly argues that men are also affected by women's lack of vocation; she cites the example of Lydgate as being 'the victim of the vocational vacuum for women that makes a husband the most available instrument of a wife's ambition'.<sup>113</sup> As already identified, Eliot was concerned about what she deemed to be 'the deepest disgrace' of 'insist[ing] on doing work for which we are unfit', but this was linked with her belief in the development of society as a whole as opposed to just women's development.

## Conclusion

This study of the semiotics of barriers in Eliot's fiction has (perhaps unsurprisingly) revealed a similar ambivalence to the Woman Question that she felt in her own life. Whereas one can discern 'feminist' aspects by exploring textual, actual and perceived barriers, there are also elements of Eliot's adherence to traditional values, where a woman's 'place' was with her family.

The existence of the 'superfluous woman' raises difficult questions, and may quite simply be viewed as an example of Eliot putting women in their 'proper sphere'. However, another way

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<sup>113</sup> Blake, p. 35.

to look at Eliot's depiction of the 'superfluous woman' type is as a means of protest; one that is testament to her own frustrations at her exclusion from polite society and her lifelong struggle for acceptance as a talented woman in a man's world. Nestor has observed that Eliot felt an 'aversion and disdain for the prurient interest of the public, which condemned her to a socially reclusive life for the better part of her career'.<sup>114</sup> Although she enjoyed enormous success as a writer, this came at a high price, as Eliot felt unable to voice her true opinion on many subjects without the disguise of a pseudonym. In this way, the novel form may be deemed a barrier in its own right, as Eliot felt unable to write what she truly felt in what was viewed as a 'form of social commentary'.<sup>115</sup> This may also be why all of Eliot's novels were set in the past; by referring to a time gone by, Eliot was able to make veiled comments on Victorian society. Indeed, the predicament of someone like Dorothea was just as relevant to a woman in the 1870s as it had been in the 1830s.

As Hughes has noted, Eliot 'never rejected feminism, but she shied away from a single reading of it', and she knew from her own experiences that 'it was possible to be deeply dependent on male attention and yet enjoy a career which involved beating the best of them'.<sup>116</sup> Regardless of the extent of Eliot's 'feminism', she should be celebrated as arguably the finest English novelist of the Victorian period (or perhaps any period), which in itself is an enormous achievement for either a woman or a man.

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<sup>114</sup> Nestor, p. 126.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. The same can be said of Russian writers of this period, particularly Turgenev.

<sup>116</sup> Hughes, p. 486.

## Chapter Three

### Women in Theodor Storm: The Opposition of Conformity and Otherness

#### Introduction

Research on German literature has not usually considered the works of Theodor Storm for their contribution to the Woman Question. Storm is more commonly known as a *Heimatsdichter*, whose works both evoked the traditions of the region he depicted, Schleswig Holstein, and implicitly criticised the prevailing social and political structures (Jackson has termed him a 'democratic humanitarian').<sup>1</sup> Consideration of the Woman Question in Storm's works is muted, particularly in comparison to Theodor Fontane; in this regard, his female characters have little in the way of vocation, other than marriage. Moreover, women who do not conform to this pattern are socially excluded and designated a role as Other, as Storm portrays them as either lonely spinsters or 'demonic' women. More recent research, however, has identified that it is necessary to re-evaluate Storm's contribution to the Woman Question, due to the fact that he often wrote 'about women for primarily women readers'. This research proposed to 'investigate Storm's narrative strategies with respect to the dominant patriarchy of his time', in order to determine whether these narrative strategies were used 'to challenge questionable social institutions or ideologies'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Jackson, *The Life and Works of a Democratic Humanitarian*, Berg, Oxford, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Betz, *Book Reviews*, Monatshefte, 2002, 94, 4, pp. 549-554 (549). Here, Betz reviews *Theodor Storm: Narrative Strategies and Patriarchy*, David A. Jackson and Mark G. Ward, eds, New York, The Edwin Mellon Press, 1999.

This chapter seeks to further this research by offering a new interpretation of Storm's works from a gender-based perspective; to this end, it traces the development of female character types in Storm's works. The first of these types is the 'weak woman', one who conforms to social expectations. This type has her binary opposites in two sub-types of women who are Other; these two sub-types shall be termed the 'marginal female performer', and the 'demonic woman'. I examine the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers for each of these types in turn, and consider the extent to which all of these women are 'superfluous'. This analysis of barriers aims to show that despite Storm's perceived lack of engagement with the Woman Question, issues of concern to women are present in the sub-text of his works. In order to provide a balanced assessment of Storm's female characters, a representative cross-section of his novellas (from the early work *Marthe und ihre Uhr*, through to his final work, *Der Schimmelreiter*) will be discussed.

### Storm, Women and the 'Extra-Text'

An important part of the methodology adopted in this thesis is to consider how biographical details (Lotman's 'extra-text') influence a particular writer's attitudes towards women. In Storm's case, his relationships with women throughout his life have been identified as both a source for his attitudes towards his female characters, and some of the inspiration for his writing.<sup>3</sup> This section will now explore whether this extra-text is in opposition to text, as Lotman's theory states.

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<sup>3</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 21.

In a similar way to the Brontë sisters and George Eliot, Storm's early life was marked by the absence of a mother figure. Reportedly starved of affection by his mother, Lucie Storm (née Woldsen), Storm looked for substitute mother figures, who came in the form of his maternal great-grandmother, Elsabe Feddersen, and Lena Wies, the local baker's step-daughter.<sup>4</sup> At the age of thirteen, Storm was devastated by the death of his eight-year-old sister (also Lucie), and it was her death that prompted him to write his first poem. Jackson has considered how Lucie's death gave rise to Storm's 'preoccupation with the incest theme', which is evident in *Celeste* (1840), the poem 'Geschwisterblut' (1853) and *Eekenhof* (1879).<sup>5</sup>

Storm's somewhat peculiar relationship with Bertha von Buchan, whom he met in 1836 when she was just eleven years old (he was nineteen) may even be said to have had paedophilic undertones. He became infatuated, and was inspired to write fairy-tales and poems for her. Storm proposed marriage when Bertha turned sixteen, but she refused.<sup>6</sup> Jackson alludes to the influence of Storm's relationships with his sister and Bertha von Buchan on Storm's writing, noting that he wrote things either for them or in response to traumatic events surrounding them.<sup>7</sup> I would contend that both their influence and the incest/paedophile theme permeate much deeper into Storm's narrative fiction. Many of Storm's heroines are seen as, or perceived to be like, children; moreover, they are often presented as 'sister' figures to the male narrators. This chapter will later examine how Storm's depiction of these child(like) heroines operates as a perceived barrier to their development into women, because their characterisation is controlled, both by Storm and his male narrators.

<sup>4</sup> Denis Jackson, 'Introduction', in Theodor Storm, *Hans and Heinz Kirch*, Denis Jackson and Anja Nauck, trans., Angel Books, London, 1999, p. 16. Storm's debt to Lena Wies will be examined later in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Denis Jackson, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 21.

Storm's two marriages are another aspect of his 'extra-text' which provided some of the material for his works, and the respective fates of his two wives, Constanze Esmarch and Dorothea Jensen, were intertwined in more ways than one. Soon after he married Constanze in 1846, he began a passionate affair with Dorothea. Whilst at this time, her presence overshadowed his marriage to Constanze, the roles were later reversed when Storm married Dorothea after Constanze's death in 1865. In a letter to Ludwig Pietsch of 1866, Storm referred to his second wife as 'eine Perle', which, along with its more usual meaning of 'a pearl', can indicate an invaluable home help.<sup>8</sup> In the same letter, Storm makes no attempt to hide the fact that he viewed Dorothea as a replacement for Constanze; not only had he lost his wife of nineteen years, he was also left with seven children to care for. Dorothea, quite understandably, found the situation almost impossible; Jackson has observed that she 'could cope neither with a large household of young daughters and difficult teenage sons nor with Storm's cult of his dead wife'.<sup>9</sup> This was compounded by the fact that Storm insisted that the children did not call her 'mother', rather, 'Tante Do'. Storm was later to dramatise a similar situation in *Viola Tricolor* (1874), where a large part of the blame for the family's problems is apportioned to the stepmother, Ines. The plot line is driven by her psychological disturbances and her gradual coming to terms with her role as wife and stepmother, and finally, as mother of her own child.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Storm, Letter to Ludwig Pietsch, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1866. In Theodor Storm, *Sämtliche Werke* (two volumes), Christian Jenssen, ed., Emil Vollmer Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1967, p. 1083 (Vol. 2). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to Storm's letters, and to *Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus* (1885) and *Der Schimmelreiter* will be to this edition. All other works are to be found in Volume 1 of this edition.

<sup>9</sup> David Jackson, in Theodor Storm, *The Dykemaster*, Denis Jackson, trans., David A. Jackson, afterword, Angel Books, London, 1996, p. 141.

Storm was the dominant partner in both of his marriages, particularly to Constanze. He considered her to be the ideal woman; while she was intelligent, she was wholly dedicated to her family and did not aspire to be anything other than a wife or mother.<sup>10</sup> In terms of their sexual relationship, Storm was particularly controlling; he claimed that Constanze's body was his 'exclusive property'<sup>11</sup> and he insisted upon sexual relations, despite the debilitating effect of repeated pregnancies and childbirth upon Constanze.<sup>12</sup> She was reported to have suffered at least seven miscarriages in addition to the seven children that survived, and she died after contracting puerperal fever.<sup>13</sup> Storm's attitude towards the physical aspect of human relationships, particularly this idea of 'possessing' the female body, is echoed in his literature, in the acts and thoughts of some of his male characters. The most striking (and rather grotesque) example of this comes in the dramatic ending of *Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus*, when Rolf jumps off the battlements of the castle with the corpse of his beloved, the fifteen-year-old Dagmar. Storm's 'extra-text', then, is very much in line with 'text', although it is less extreme in its expression.

### Germany, Storm and the Woman Question

As the Introduction has argued, the movement for female emancipation was not as well established in Germany as in England or Russia. Against this background, this section will now explore how the restrictions imposed upon German women affected Storm's works, particularly as regards censorship of reading material. I will then consider how the Woman

<sup>10</sup> As we will see in the final chapter on Tolstoy, this is in contrast to Sofya Tolstoy's wish to have hobbies of her own, such as photography.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Storm to Constanze, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1845. Cited in David Jackson, 1992, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard, we may compare Storm to Tolstoy. See Chapter Six.

<sup>13</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 119.

Question is elucidated in Storm's works, by making particular reference to the theme of women's education.

The construction of a national feminine identity distinctly different to that of France added a further dimension to the Woman Question in Germany, as the antagonism towards their Gallic neighbour meant that German women were encouraged to demonstrate their moral superiority over French women. As one historian has remarked, 'sensuality and lasciviousness, frivolity and carelessness, coquetry and love of pleasure were all seen as French vices conveyed through the female gender and from which the German woman as well as the German nation had to be protected'.<sup>14</sup> What Küster describes as the 'moral elevation'<sup>15</sup> of German women meant that they were forced to act in a submissive and dutiful way, unlike the revolutionary and emancipated French *femmes fatales*, who were viewed with distaste in German circles. Although Storm claimed that his criticism of *Madame Bovary* was levelled at Flaubert's 'Passivität' (in contrast to Storm's own need to portray 'ein wenig dramatisches Leben'<sup>16</sup> in his works), it is tempting to infer that this criticism also represents a desire to pass judgement on the type of character who was, within the context of Storm's 'cult of the family',<sup>17</sup> morally 'wrong'.

The establishment and rapid growth of the *Bildungsbürgertum* during the course of the nineteenth century enabled women (mainly middle class) to have access to books, and was therefore a positive development as regards the Woman Question in Germany. However, the

<sup>14</sup> C. Tacke, cited in Küster, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> In a letter from Storm to Turgenev of 1866. Reprinted in Karl Ernst Laage, *Theodor Storm. Studien zu seinem Leben und Werk mit einem Handschriftenkatalog*, Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 4.



texts made available were subject to a high degree of censorship, in order to ensure that they did not contain material deemed to be unsuitable. Storm's works were subject to this censorship, particularly in the 1860s; *Von jenseit des Meeres* (1865) was rejected by *Der Bazar*<sup>18</sup> because 'die Heldin ein uneheliches Kind sei'.<sup>19</sup> Later on in Storm's career, the periodical press wholeheartedly approved of his writing; in an 1888 edition of the magazine *Daheim*, the readers were invited to savour Storm's 'poetic transfigurations of the "German home"', with 'woman's quiet sway in narrow confines'.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that Storm could sometimes sacrifice authenticity under the pressure to write for the public.<sup>21</sup>

As has been identified thus far, women's education is a key theme in any discussion of the Woman Question; it is also alluded to in Storm's works, albeit implicitly. Although Storm's attitudes to women's education verge on the negative in his earlier works, I will now explore how Storm shows increasing engagement with women's education in later works.

First of all, though, it will be illuminating to consider Storm's views on women's education in his own life. In this regard, he was not only supportive of Constanze's education; he also valued her opinions of his work. Jackson has noted that he did not consider a piece of writing to be completed until she had checked it for him, although he was critical of her letters if they contained mistakes in spelling or grammar.<sup>22</sup> In other aspects, Storm sought to control Constanze's education, by 'censoring' her reading, thereby echoing the pressures that he

<sup>18</sup> This was a newspaper for women, edited by Julius Rodenberg.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Storm to Pietsch, 1865. In Theodor Storm, *Sämtliche Werke* (four volumes), Peter Goldammer, ed., Aufbau, Berlin, 1978, Vol. II, p. 727.

<sup>20</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> We may contrast this with Russian writers of the period, who viewed it as their civic duty to portray their own society accurately in literature.

<sup>22</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 39.

himself was subject to. For instance, he was keen that she should read Goethe, but she was not to read 'corrupting French novels like those of Eugène Sue which he himself was reading!'<sup>23</sup>

Women's education is first alluded to in Storm's literary works in *Marthe und ihre Uhr*. Here, Storm highlights the limitations of Marthe's self-education: 'Freilich sprach sie nicht immer grammatisch richtig, obgleich sie viel und mit Aufmerksamkeit las, am liebsten geschichtlichen oder poetischen Inhalts' (46). The books that she reads, therefore, are not 'useful', in that they do not enable Marthe to develop the social skills in which she is lacking. Furthermore, their 'geschichtlich' and 'poetisch' content reinforces Marthe's isolation; like *Jane Eyre*, she reads as a form of escapism, but Storm views this negatively. As Rogers has pointed out, 'loneliness has merely enabled Marthe to read a more than usually large number of books; qualitatively, it has hardly developed her literary responses beyond those of a child'.<sup>24</sup> Here we might also observe the absence of the male educator figure, at which criticism is directed in the works of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot (in the figures of Crimsworth and Casaubon respectively).<sup>25</sup> If we consider this absence alongside Storm's views on Constanze, it may be asserted that Storm believed in the right of a woman to be educated, but that this should be guided by a man.

During the 1850s and 1860s, Storm's views on women's education are represented differently in his fiction, and seem to have become more positive than in the previous example. Pertaining to this point, and in discussion of *Immensee*, *Auf dem Staatshof* and *Auf der Universität*

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Terence Rogers, *Techniques of Solipsism. A Study of Theodor Storm's Narrative Fiction*, The Modern Humanities Research Association, Cambridge, 1970, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> The male educator figure will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four, in relation to Fontane's portrayal of Innstetten in *Effi Briest*.

(1863), Jackson has argued that Storm is critical of the impact of male education upon women. Because German women were rarely admitted to higher education (if at all), they were excluded from the 'socialisation process' in which universities played an important role.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, these Storm novellas depict the reality of male characters going to university, leaving their heroines behind to wait for them. Jackson explores Storm's criticism of this on two levels: firstly, in terms of the male students, who are forced to 'satisfy their needs with musicians and singers (usually female – KA) in student pubs'. Secondly, and more importantly for this discussion, Jackson notes that Storm is critical of the impact on the young women themselves, who are left behind.<sup>27</sup>

Storm's final work, *Der Schimmelreiter*, contains the most positive depiction of an educated woman. Elke Haien is intelligent and capable; prior to her father's death, she has been in sole charge of the dyke administration. However, despite shouldering this responsibility for such a long time, Elke easily reverts to a submissive, feminine-gendered role once she is married. In this example, she lets Hauke (her husband) take the credit for her work, and is also critical of her own abilities. She claims: 'ich kann ja auch nur rechnen; du aber siehst draussen alles, was der Deichgraf doch wohl selber sehen sollte... das ist ja Mannessache!' (736) In the tragic events that follow, Storm invites these gendered roles to be questioned, as Elke allows her inexperienced husband to take responsibility for the dyke, which leads to the flood in which both her life and that of her child is claimed.

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<sup>26</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

In conclusion, one cannot say that Storm's indirect elucidation of the Woman Question is 'feminist' in the same way as Brontë's and Eliot's protestations at women's lack of educational opportunities. Storm does, however, show increasing engagement with the Woman Question in his works, which was consistent with the reality in Germany at the time.

### Convention and Conformity: The 'Weak Woman'

Much of Storm's narrative fiction depicts women who seem to have no choice in the way they lead their lives, and conform to precisely what is expected of them. Examples of this 'weak woman' character type to which I shall now refer are to be found (although not exclusively so) in *Immensee* (Elisabeth), *Auf dem Staatshof* (Anne Lene), *Viola tricolor* (Ines), *Aquis submersus* (1876, Katharina), and *Der Schimmelreiter* (Elke). This section will apply textual, actual and perceived barriers to explore how the oppression of these women is expressed, and will consider the extent to which they are 'superfluous'.

The first type of textual barrier, of narrative structure and voice, is evident in Storm's works as a whole. Most of Storm's novellas use a narrative framing technique; within this frame, Storm's narrators are male, almost without exception.<sup>28</sup> This gender-biased perspective restricts women's movement and development as characters, by denying them a true 'voice' in the text. Although several of Storm's novellas have the heroines' names as titles (*Veronika* [1861], *Lena Wies* [1873], *Renate*, and *Angelika* [1885]), it is left to the male narrator to tell their story. As will be explored in Chapter Five, this is similar to the technique Turgenev uses

<sup>28</sup> There is a short section in *Renate* (1878) in which the eponymous heroine speaks for herself, as will later be discussed.

in *Ася*. In contrast, it is unlike examples illustrated in Chapter One, such as the title character of *Jane Eyre*.<sup>29</sup>

Other novellas, such as *Auf dem Staatshof* and *Auf der Universität*, follow a similar pattern to Turgenev's works *Первая любовь* (1860) and *Вешние воды*. All of these works take the form of a 'confessional' narrative,<sup>30</sup> in which a first-person male narrator recounts the story of a woman with whom he was once in love. The usual outcome of this type of story is the hero's realisation that the woman in question was, in fact, just a phase in his development. This is illustrated by way of the hero's survival; the heroines, in contrast, slip into the background. As Tebben has pointed out about Storm's texts, both Anne Lene and Lore (*Auf der Universität*) are dead by the time the men tell their story.<sup>31</sup> The fate of Turgenev's heroines is less certain; we never find out for definite what happened to Asya, and Zinaida's death is reported some time after the event.

All of these works, then, are very much about the heroine, but the focus is not on her development; rather, it is on the impact of her relationship with the male narrator. In the case of Anne Lene, her story is representative of a broader concern, the demise of the patrician class from which she originates. Marx, the first person narrator, tells her story with great sensitivity, but this is ultimately coloured by the fact that he is in love with her; in this way, the reader is not provided with an objective assessment of her character.

<sup>29</sup> In this sense, Eliot's use of the title *Daniel Deronda* acts as a textual barrier in part; although the novel is narrated omnisciently and follows Deronda's story, it is arguably more concerned with the character of Gwendolen.

<sup>30</sup> This aspect is even more pronounced in *Aquis submersus*, as the narrator of the outer frame relates Johannes's confession, which is written in manuscript form.

<sup>31</sup> Karin Tebben, "'Wo keine Göttinnen sind, da walten Gespenster': Dämoninnen und Philister im Werk Theodor Storms', *The Germanic Review*, 2004, 79, 1, pp. 7-38 (12).

In another sense, Storm is more detached than Turgenev; he is, to some extent, critical of his own narrators, and often casts doubt on the reliability of their testimonies. The most striking example of this is to be found in *Der Schimmelreiter*, when the main narrator (the schoolmaster) comments: 'Das ist die Geschichte von Hauke Haien [...] wie ich sie nach bestem Wissen nur berichten konnte. Freilich die Wirtschafterin unseres Deichgrafen würde sie Ihnen anders erzählt haben...' (816). In this way, Storm uses a multi-layered narrative to question truth; here, one might identify the links with *Wuthering Heights*, where Brontë employs a similar technique in her implicit criticism of Lockwood (as was explored in Chapter One).

The second type of textual barrier, language, is also applicable to the 'weak woman' type. As Rogers has argued of *Angelika*, Erhard's feelings for the eponymous heroine are 'sustained only by an image of his own making' and that he has been in love with a 'figure of fantasy'.<sup>32</sup> The same holds true for many of the submissive female characters in Storm, who are perceived not to be fully psychologically realised people; rather, they are viewed as symbols or images. Jackson has noted that this is especially the case with Anne Lene, who is reified into 'an exquisite, exotic object' and a 'gracious porcelain figure'.<sup>33</sup> One might also note that Storm seeks to emphasise Anne Lene's fragility and transience by way of her association with nature, particularly when she is juxtaposed with the creeping plants covering her family home (172). It is clear that – like Claus Peters, entrepreneur and representative of the New Industrial

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<sup>32</sup> Rogers, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 89.

Age – the plants will continue to grow and prosper, whereas Anne Lene will never carry on her family line.<sup>34</sup>

Anne Lene is also limited by actual barriers, and even the *Staatshof* itself can be considered in these terms. The narrator places great emphasis on its isolated location, away from the main town, 'zu Ende des Weges, der fast eine halbe Stunde dauert' (162). Here, Marx also introduces the threatening presence of the moat ('Graft') surrounding the *Staatshof*, which is 'besonders breit und tief' (162). In view of Anne Lene's metaphorical curtailment, then, it is somewhat ironic that her tragic death comes about as a result of breaking through a barrier, as she falls through the rotten floorboards in the pavilion. Indeed, there is a strong sense that Anne Lene's death by drowning is a kind of 'fantastical euthanasia' in a similar way to Maggie Tulliver's death in *The Mill on the Floss*, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The Bakhtinian chronotope of the threshold may also be applied to a reading of Storm's 'weak women'; threshold barriers (particularly windows, walls and doors) can signify social and moral barriers within the text that female characters must not cross. In *Aquis submersus*, for example, the window takes on sexual connotations as Johannes is seen climbing in through Katharina's window to escape from her brother's dogs. More importantly for the Bakhtinian premise of the threshold representing a moment of crisis in a text, this is the incident in which they conceive their illegitimate child.

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<sup>34</sup> There are two names in German for creeping plants, 'wilder Wein' and 'Jungfernrebe'. Storm quite deliberately uses the latter term, which is etymologically linked with the term 'Jungfrau', or 'virgin'. Fontane also uses the same imagery in relation to Effi Briest, but he chooses to use the term 'wilder Wein'. Another examples of Storm's 'coding' of plant names is to be found in *Viola tricolor*. Here, Storm uses the Latin name for 'pansy' as his title, instead of the German name 'Stiefmütterchen', which would form a direct reference to the subject matter of the novella.

Storm also uses the window motif in *Immensee*. In a double use of barrier imagery, he depicts Elisabeth standing by a window, decorating the cage where she keeps the yellow canary given to her by her husband, Erich (30). The image of the caged bird is representative of Elisabeth herself, as this gift marks the transition from her childhood relationship with Reinhard to her restrictive marriage to Erich. The use of the window in combination with the cage hints at Elisabeth's longing to escape from this marriage and return to her childhood sweetheart. As we have already noted in Chapter One, the image of the bird in a cage is also used in Turgenev's *Накануне* to express Elena's discontent at not being able to lead a fulfilling life at that point in the text, and is subverted by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*.

*Viola tricolor* is another novella rich in textual markers denoting the limits of female space. The window which looks on to the forbidden garden is a recurring image, as both Ines and Nesi (Rudolf's daughter) peer 'mit sehnsüchtigen Augen' (670) through it. The heavy curtains in Rudolf's bedroom also play a similar role in defining female space; Nesi uses them to hide behind, as she knows she is not permitted to be in her father's study (667), and, later in the novella, Ines is able to confide in Rudolf once he opens the curtains (685). A further barrier image is the wall surrounding the 'forbidden garden' that once belonged to Rudolf's first wife. Although there is a door in this wall, Ines and Nesi are prevented from entering, because Rudolf has sole possession of the key. It is only once the family have been in the garden together that they are able to reconcile their differences, but it is of significance that Ines is unable to open the door herself ('Ines wandte alle ihre Kräfte auf [...] aber die Pforte blieb gefangen' (693) and Rudolf has to take charge.



The barriers of external adornment, such as clothing and jewellery, are the second type of actual barrier, which reinforce the reader's perception of female characters. Anne Lene, for instance, 'besonders liebte die weisse Farbe' (173), the archetypal colour of purity and innocence. In this example, Marx also draws attention to the 'feinsten Englischen Handschuhe' that she wears, which serve as a 'vestimentary marker' of her wealth and superior social status at this point in the text. The necklace that was given to Anne Lene on her confirmation day by her grandmother is another 'vestimentary marker' that reinforces her now diminished social status. The 'kleines Kreuz von Diamanten, das sie seitdem an einem schwarzen Bande um den Hals trug' (173) serves as a reminder to her of her family's former wealth, particularly after the incident with the gypsy woman, who accuses Anne Lene's family of exploiting the poor (176).

Storm also uses women's physical features, particularly hair,<sup>35</sup> to define his female characters in a particular way. Anne Lene is again described in idealistic terms, with the sun glinting on her 'goldklares Haar, das ihr in kleinen Locken um das Köpfchen hing' (168). Another 'weak woman', Angelika, has blonde hair, upon which great emphasis is placed, particularly when she is compared to Erhard's young, dark-haired niece. Elisabeth, too, is fair-haired and is associated with the colour white. This imagery not only has the obvious connotations of purity, but also forms a stylistic contrast within the text to the dark, mysterious gypsy girl whom Reinhard meets at university. Although Ines has dark hair, this serves as a contrast to Rudolf's first wife, who exists only in the form of a portrait, with her 'goldblonden Flechten

<sup>35</sup> David Artiss explores the significance of eyes and hands too. See *Theodor Storm: Studies in Ambivalence. Symbol and Myth in his Narrative Fiction*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1978.

über der klaren Stirn' (667). Here, again, we might observe the 'structural doubling' of women in relation to one another, as has been noted in Chapters One and Two.

The final type of barrier is those which are termed perceived barriers; here they may be subdivided into three types. The first type encompasses social conventions and class issues, particularly the 'misalliance' theme; the second type relates to the way in which women are often perceived to be like children; the final type pertains to female identity, which is again questioned in the use of mirror/portrait motifs.

The first perceived barrier that stands in the way of women's happiness in Storm is the pressure to conform to societal norms; this finds particular expression in the pressure to marry the 'right' man (this may be for financial or social reasons). In *Immensee*, Elisabeth and Reinhard are childhood sweethearts; he assumes that they will marry one day, but Elisabeth's mother cajoles her into marrying Erich, who is a better 'match'. Rogers, however, has questioned the theory that Elisabeth's mother's choice of Erich over Reinhard is socially driven, as the two men are of similar wealth and class.<sup>36</sup> He goes on to point out that the reason may be the simple fact that she is 'suspicious of Reinhard'.<sup>37</sup> If this is the case, then Elisabeth may be said to be empowered by her mother, as she encourages her to escape a childhood relationship which may limit her.

In contrast, there can be no doubt that Anne Lene is forced into an engagement with a man whom she does not love due to social and financial reasons. Both of her parents are dead, and

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<sup>36</sup> Rogers, pp. 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

her remaining family are trying desperately to provide her with a viable future; the only option to save Anne Lene from financial and social ruin is an unhappy marriage. However, once she is no longer in possession of property, Anne Lene is not viewed as a suitable match for the Junker, and he calls their engagement off. When the situation is reversed and the woman is the better 'match', Storm highlights the integrity shown by a woman who marries 'below her station'. Elke Haien, for example, marries Hauke even though he is not the good prospect she may have expected as a Dykemaster's daughter.<sup>38</sup> Here Storm depicts a positive example of a relationship that is a form of 'misalliance'; their marriage is one of the happier ones portrayed in Storm's works, and Elke continues to be supportive of her husband throughout, even when he is wrong about the dyke.

In contrast to Elke, Katharina is not permitted to choose her own suitor. Her father is dead, but her brutal brother, Junker Wulf, takes on the role as authoritative patriarch (he wants her to marry his friend, von der Risch). Johannes, Katharina's lover, is not deemed to be a suitable husband for Katharina, because he is an artist, and not an aristocrat. In the end, Katharina marries neither of these men, but the pastor, in order to 'save' herself from moral degradation as an unmarried mother. However, one needs to exercise caution if looking at *Aquis submersus*, one of Storm's *Chroniknovellen*, as a tale that is set some three hundred years previously may not necessarily be an accurate reflection of nineteenth-century Germany. For instance, one needs to question whether Katharina would have married the pastor if the tale had had a contemporary setting. It is therefore helpful in this case to reconsider the impact of censorship; as has already been discussed, *Von jenseit des Meeres* was initially rejected by a journal due to Jenni's status as an 'uneheliches Kind'. Taking this into account, it is arguable

<sup>38</sup> David Jackson, 1996, p. 148.

that Storm was considering his modern audience in these issues of propriety, and that Katharina's marriage to the pastor is not as anachronistic as it may first appear. Moreover, Katharina and Johannes are also victims of the timeless problem of social status impeding a relationship. In using the genre of the *Chroniknovelle*, Storm is able to be more critical of nineteenth-century society's responses to marriages of mixed class, as the shift back in time 'veils' the possibility that he was actually referring to contemporary Germany.

However, we should perhaps not be too quick to deem Storm's portrayal of unhappy matches in marriage (or, indeed, lack of choice in marriage partner) as solely oppressive to women. Male characters are also pressurised into marriage, or not allowed to marry the woman of their choice because of either his or her social status. For example, it remains unclear throughout *Angelika* why Erhard may not marry the eponymous heroine. It is hinted that it is something to do with Erhard's lack of suitable employment, but the reasons for this are not made clear. Philipp (*Auf der Universität*) loves Lore from the very moment that she first attends the dancing school, but her lowly social origins mean that they can never marry. Finally, the doctor in *Drüben am Markt* (1861) cannot marry the mayor's daughter because he is not considered an appropriate match (she marries the local judge). Therefore, although there are more examples of women who are restricted by class barriers and social conventions, the impact of this upon men should not be underestimated.

The second example of a perceived barrier is the fact that many of Storm's heroines are typecast as children, which restricts their growth into women, in the minds of both the narrator and – by implication – the reader. This also impacts upon their role as a sexual being, because

they are unable to escape their association with childhood. Elisabeth, for example, is introduced to us as a wide-eyed five-year-old, and this seems to be the way she remains in Reinhard's mind. Upon his return from university, he greets her with the comment: 'Wie gross du geworden bist!' (30), as if he is talking to a child.<sup>39</sup> Although she is a young woman at the time of the story, Katharina is viewed as a child who needs to be protected; she is described by Johannes as having a 'zarte Kindsgestalt' (951). Ines – another grown woman – is also associated with childlike vulnerability; after sleepwalking in the garden, she goes back into the house 'wie ein Kind' (685). Other heroines, such as Anne Lene and Dagmar (*Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus*) die young and therefore never have the opportunity to be viewed as mature women.

The third and final sub-type of perceived barrier relates to female identity and how this is represented. In this regard, the 'weak woman' type is often immortalised by men in a variety of ways, which here include paintings, sketches and photographs. All of these techniques allow male characters to control future interpretation of females by painting or sketching them in the way that they see them. In *Immensee*, Elisabeth is an artistic subject on two occasions during the narrative: once at the beginning, when Reinhard looks wistfully upon her painting as an old man, and during the main narrative when she informs Reinhard in a letter that 'der Erich zeichnet mich in schwarzer Kreide' (28). The fact that Erich is drawing Elisabeth in black crayon (instead of painting her) hints at his direct and practical nature (in contrast to the dreamer, Reinhard), and also that he wishes to define Elisabeth in very clear terms as 'his' wife. Indeed, as has been established, their marriage is based on convenience, and not love.

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<sup>39</sup> Rogers, p. 11.

In *Viola tricolor*, Ines wants to have her painting done when she thinks she will die following the birth of her daughter, but subsequently decides that she should have a photograph taken. She claims that this is because there would not be enough time to do a painting. However, a more feasible interpretation is that she wants to be different to Rudolf's first wife, whose life-size portrait seems to watch over the family, symbolising Rudolf's idolisation of her, even in death. In this way, Ines lets herself be 'framed' in a defensive response to her husband's inability to let go of his first wife.

Pictures and picture frames in *Aquis submersus* serve as plot devices as well as ways of defining women. In this regard, Johannes claims he is going to get Katharina's portrait framed, but he is actually visiting her aunt to enlist her help in preventing Katharina's impending arranged marriage. Moreover, Johannes is, of course, the artist who paints Katharina, and the narrator of the internal frame narrative. In this way, he can be said to be responsible for 'painting' the characters, especially Katharina, both literally and metaphorically. The portraits themselves also seem to come to life, and they act as omens of tragedy to come.<sup>40</sup> The most important example of this is the painting of Katharina's ancestor, who was said to have cursed her own child (who subsequently drowned) in protest at an arranged marriage. Her portrait 'haunts' Johannes when he is painting Katharina; he notes how 'mich fröstelte, ich hätte nahezu den Stuhl verrücket'. Turning to Katharina, he declares: 'diese Augen haben hier all die Tage auf uns hingesehen' (937). The ghostly portrait here 'warns' Johannes of the tragedy to come; in another death by water, his and Katharina's child drowns at the end of the tale.

<sup>40</sup> We may also think about the role of mirrors as regards omens and superstition, particularly in *Auf dem Staatshof*. After the death of Anne Lene's grandmother, Marx describes going into the house: 'der Spiegel war mit weissen Damasttüchern zugesteckt' (170).

Storm's 'weak women' are, for the most part, unable to overcome the textual, actual and perceived barriers that are put in their way. In depicting his one 'superfluous woman', Elke Haien, Storm questions social conventions and gendered roles, but she too ultimately conforms by becoming a dutiful wife. This chapter will now consider the women Storm deems to be Other; those who may be able to challenge the barriers they face, by not conforming to what is expected of them.

### Woman as Other (Part 1): The 'Marginal Female Performer'

Two biographical sketches by Storm, *Marthe und ihre Uhr* and *Lena Wies* introduce two figures: the marginal woman (Marthe) and the female storyteller (Lena Wies). This section will suggest that these two figures merge in the characters of Lore (*Auf der Universität*) and Jenni (*Von jenseit des Meeres*) and Storm creates the marginal female performer. She becomes marginal largely because of her performing ability, whether that is as a dancer (Lore) or as a storyteller (Jenni), because vocations of this type are deemed to be unsuitable for women.

The character of Marthe is based upon Christine Brick (or 'Tante Brick', as Storm fondly knew her), an old woman who was Storm's housekeeper from 1845-1846.<sup>41</sup> Marthe lives alone, possessing a clearly marked physical space within the four walls of the once vibrant family home; her 'company' consists of inanimate objects which have associations with female oppression (a spinning wheel, and her father's chair). The most important symbol of her loneliness is the clock which chimes out the rhythm of her daily life, and evokes the sense that life has passed Marthe by: 'wenn Marthe in ein Hinbrüten über ihre Einsamkeit verfallen

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, p. 1.

wollte, dann ging der Perpendikel tick, tack! tick, tack! immer härter, immer eindringlicher' (48).

Although the narrator depicts Marthe in the company of her family at two previous Christmases, her loneliness appears to be a constant. In the childhood Christmas scene, her father is the archetypal patriarch, remaining in 'his' chair while the children come up to him, one at a time, to kiss his hand (49). Her mother plays the role of the harassed matriarch on Christmas Day, trying to cook enough apple pie to keep everyone happy, and showing the children how to write letters and numbers on their new board (49-50). The second Christmas sees the unmarried Marthe looking after her parents, who are now invalids. While Marthe assumes the role of carer, her siblings have moved away and had families of their own. Marthe's loneliness starts out as isolation within her own family because she does not 'fit in', and is later manifested as actual physical loneliness, once the rest of the family have either moved away or died.

Although Marthe is presumably 'free' to do what she wants with her life once her parents have died, she is unable to escape what Jackson has described as 'a restricting, restricted patriarchal system'.<sup>42</sup> Her life is governed by a self-perpetuating limitation of freedom, as she becomes a recluse in her strange world with her only 'friends', the items of furniture ('so lieb die regsame und gestaltende Phantasie, welche ihr ganz besonders eigen war, den Dingen um sie her eine Art von Leben und Bewusstsein' [47]). Her marginality has been reinforced for so long that she is unable to escape it. Her only freedom of sorts is manifested in her reading, but as has already been noted, Storm is generally disparaging of her efforts at self-education.

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<sup>42</sup> David Jackson, 1996, p. 142.



Whilst Marthe is a lonely and isolated reader, Lena Wies is a talented creator of fiction. Storm describes the enthusiasm of a young boy running to his favourite place ('Gegangen? – Nein, gelaufen, gerannt!') and claims that he never wanted to leave her house once he was there (573). She is also viewed with authority by Storm, particularly when she reprimands him for being cheeky during the sketch (574); as we have previously observed, he considered her to be a replacement mother figure. It is therefore noteworthy that Lena Wies, the storyteller, is not allowed to narrate her own story. For the greater part of the text, Storm reports her words through the first-person narrator (in this case, Storm himself). It is not until the end that he permits her to speak; this is in the broken words of a dying woman, in North German dialect (*Plattdeutsch*), which serves to put up a further narrative barrier between her and the reader. On a broader level, in Storm's novellas in general, this pattern is repeated, as both Storm and his male narrators appropriate the woman's story. Storm may be said to do this in his frequent use of the fairytale model and the traditional North German legends, which were given to him by Lena Wies (he comments that he learned the 'Kunst des Erzählens' [577] from her), and his male narrators appropriate the woman's story on a textual level by speaking for their heroines. Lena Wies may be viewed as a real life 'superfluous woman', whose talents are limited to relating stories in the home environment, while the male authority figure enjoys the fruits of her labour by enjoying a career as a writer.<sup>43</sup>

Now that we have explored the origins of the 'marginal female performer', this section will trace the development of this type, by examining the characterisation of Lore and Jenni,<sup>44</sup> and how they are restricted by textual, actual and perceived barriers. First of all, and in a similar

<sup>43</sup> Jane Costlow (1991) has presented a similar argument in relation to Ivan Turgenev and his 'appropriation' of Evgeniya Tur's story *Несчастливая*, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>44</sup> We might also consider the character of Lisei in *Pole Poppenspüler* (1874) to be an example of this type.

way to the 'weak woman' type, both of these heroines' stories are told by first-person male narrators who are in love with them. This functions as a textual barrier because Philipp and Alfred are unable to provide objective assessments of Lore and Jenni respectively. As a child, Jenni tells stories about her homeland: 'Sie wusste allerlei Märchen und Geschichten, die sie mit glänzenden Augen und lebhaftem Fingerspiel erzählte; meist wohl aus der Pension [...], auch noch aus ihrer alten Heimat' (390). However, her story-telling ability and the confidence that this brings does not continue into adulthood, and Jenni assumes the behaviour of a typically demure heroine: 'Sie schüttelte den Kopf, indem sie mich gross und ruhig anblickte' (418).

The language used to describe the 'marginal female performers' also functions as a textual barrier. Similarly to the 'weak woman' type, Lore and Jenni are often seen as images or symbols, and this is reinforced by Storm's repeated use of the word 'Gestalt'. As Philipp fantasises about the painting of the young shepherd, 'eine schöne Mädchengestalt' at his feet, he thinks of Lore (305). However, whilst this example typecasts her as Angel, Lore is simultaneously associated with witchcraft. She is said to 'cast a spell' on Philipp ('meine Augen waren wie verzaubert' [291]), and she attends the students' ball, significantly called the 'Hexensabbat' (326). This 'structural doubling' used in relation to Lore links her with Eliot's 'hybrid' heroines, Maggie and Gwendolen, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, and within the context of Storm's fiction, it locates her between the 'weak woman' type and the 'demonic woman' (whose characterisation will be examined in the next section).

Jenni is associated with a more tangible artistic image (the Venus statue in the garden), and her 'weisse Frauengestalt' is more mature than Lore's 'Mädchengestalt'. However, this particular scene is highly evocative of an enigmatic femininity in its use of stereotypical imagery and atmosphere: 'Ich sah drüben am jenseitigen Ufer im Schatten der hohen Baumwand eine weisse Frauengestalt. Sie lehnte an einem Baume, der neben dem Wasser stand, und schien in die Tiefe hinabzublicken' (409).

Actual barriers, on the other hand, do not curtail Lore and Jenni to the same extent as the 'weak woman' type. Indeed, when Lore is on the carousel at the fair which breaks down, the roles are reversed, as it is the hero, Philipp, who struggles to get to her: 'Ich drängte mich aus der Menschenmasse heraus, in die ich eingekeilt war [...] als ich mich hier mit Bitten und Gewalt bis an die Barriere durchgearbeitet hatte, stand ich dicht neben ihr' (307). It is of particular note that Philipp can only get as far as the barrier; he cannot cross this particular threshold, which simultaneously represents the social/class barrier separating him from Lore and reinforces her enigmatic status.

In Jenni's case, the semiotics of actual barriers develops throughout the text. As a child, she is able to break barriers down: 'Diesem leichten, feingliederigen Kinde war kein Baum zu hoch, kein Sprung zu verwegen' (389-390). She is also described as a 'kleiner schöner Teufel' as she escapes detention by climbing out of the classroom window (392). However, once Jenni becomes an adult, her space is more restricted; the conversation with her father that Alfred overhears takes place behind a door (414-415), and she hides her books away in her bedroom,

instead of telling stories like she did when she was younger. This curtailment of Jenni coincides with her becoming a socially accepted part of 'cultured' Western society.

Barriers of external adornment also serve to emphasise the 'taming' of Jenni. Her first appearance in the text is marked by her wearing a veil, which she lifts to reveal that she is not an 'ebenholtzschwarze Negerin', as Alfred had imagined (389). Furthermore, Jenni's wild black hair, which is worn loose as a child, is firmly tied back once she is a married woman,<sup>45</sup> thereby symbolising her transition from 'kleiner schöner Teufel' to respectable woman. Here we can identify thematic affinities between Jenni and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, which appeared five years prior to Storm's novella. As was explored in the previous chapter, the change in the way Maggie wears her hair, from 'Medusa with her snakes cropped' to 'jet-black coronet' also marks her 'taming' and initiation into polite society.

In another link with Eliot, a comparison may be drawn between Gwendolen Harleth and Jenni in terms of the role played by jewellery. Jenni wishes to sell a ring in order to raise the money to return home to her mother, so she asks Alfred to sell it to a jeweller (410). Similarly to *Deronda*, Alfred foils Jenni's plan when he 'buys' the ring himself, despite knowing that she does not want to be dependent on others, particularly her father, for money.

The main perceived barrier for Jenni and Lore is their 'foreign' origin, which has contributed to their lowly social status. Jenni is of mixed race, which means that she is viewed from the outset as strange and different. As Jackson notes, at this time, love for 'coloured' women could only be 'sensual fascination' as they lacked the 'cultural and moral qualities of middle-

<sup>45</sup> Tebben, p. 28.

class German womanhood.' However, Jenni can be 'saved' because she has German blood.<sup>46</sup> Lore's social otherness stems from her family's poor socioeconomic background, and the fact that her father is French; in this way, she is doubly marginal. Mare has noted that although Storm is critical of the bourgeoisie in *Auf der Universität*, he does not suggest that Lore 'should enter a sphere where her aspirations could be satisfied'.<sup>47</sup> Jackson, however, interprets Storm's depiction of Lore more positively. He comments that Lore is 'torn between two worlds. Acceptance of her lot and fear of striking out for new shores coexist with frustration at the prospects of women of her class'.<sup>48</sup>

I would suggest that Lore's marginality has a further aspect; it continues because she defiantly continues with her childhood tendency to perform. For example, upon hearing the rumour that Christoph (her true love) is to marry, she throws her work materials on the floor, bites her lip until it bleeds, and then decides that she will go to the notorious students' ball (328). Jenni, in contrast, eventually accepts her fate as Philipp's wife; as has been observed, she ceases to tell stories. In her suicide, moreover, Lore is seen to be 'punished' for aspiring to a role outside of her prescribed domain. In an awful final dumb show, her corpse is available for everyone to view,<sup>49</sup> as she comes to land on the beach. One of the final images we have of her is 'die kleinen, tanzenden Füße' (339) that Philipp had previously fantasised about, now motionless under her dress.

<sup>46</sup> David Jackson, 1992, pp. 135-137.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Mare, *Theodor Storm and his World*, Cambridge Aids to Learning, Cambridge, 1976, p. 137.

<sup>48</sup> David Jackson, 1992, p. 115.

<sup>49</sup> We may observe parallels here with the fate of Anna Karenina, whose body is also placed on view for others after her suicide. See Chapter Six.

In the characters of Jenni and Lore, then, Storm appears to have created the 'marginal female performer'. The choice for these women is clear: they will remain marginal unless they stifle their creativity and thus become assimilated into cultured society, usually by way of marriage. They cannot be an accepted part of society while they are performers. It is more the case that these women are 'superfluous' (as opposed to the 'weak woman' type discussed in the first section), as they begin by aspiring to something better and have the talent or drive to achieve it, but the expectations of a patriarchal society mean that they end up much the same way.

### Woman as Other (Part 2): The 'Demonic Woman'

Certain female characters in Storm's narrative fiction neither conform nor let themselves be 'tamed' by civilised society. Margret Glansky<sup>50</sup> (*Draussen im Heidedorf* [1872]), Renate<sup>51</sup> and Wulfhild (*Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus*) are strong, determined women, yet within their respective communities they are demonised by way of their association with witchcraft.<sup>52</sup> Applying the semiotics of barriers, this section will now consider how Storm is critical of the way in which these women are made social outcasts on the basis of their non-conformity.

<sup>50</sup> The name 'Margret' would remind a reader familiar with the German literary tradition of Goethe's Gretchen in *Faust* (1808), who is notable for her endurance of suffering. 'Gretchen' is the diminutive form of 'Margaret' (Goethe's heroine is also known as 'Margaret' in the text). Glansky is a Slavic name, which also hints at Margret's isolation for the fact of her 'foreign' origin.

<sup>51</sup> Storm initially wanted to call *Renate* 'Eine Hexe', which suggests how central the notion of witchcraft is to the text. See Artiss, p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> Superstition and witchcraft play an important role in Storm's novellas as part of the background and traditions of the Husum community where his works are set. Storm depicts many secondary characters who are 'demonised'; for example, the gypsy in *Auf dem Staatshof*, Bas Ursel in *Aquis submersus*, Marike the peasant woman in *Renate* and Trin Jans in *Der Schimmelreiter*. These characters are usually harbingers of misfortune, and play an important role in shaping plot, although they do not appear for much of the text.

The textual barrier of language is the first aspect of this demonization. The 'demonic women' are associated with stereotypically evil animals, such as rats and wolves. Wulfhild, for example, kills her first husband with rat poison (498), and Renate claims that she is more afraid of the gossip concerning her father than the rats in her house: 'Die Ratten machen mich nicht fürchten, die laufen hier und überall; aber ich weiss gar wohl, was sie von meinem Vater reden' (1078). Dogs and wolves, which frighten the 'weak woman' type (Ines in *Viola tricolor*, for example, is terrified of Rudolf's dog [684]) are not such a difficult prospect for the 'demonic women'. Renate 'saves' Josias from being attacked by her dog (1050), and Wulfhild quite cruelly proposes that the wolves belonging to her father-in-law be put down (503). At the conclusion of *Draussen im Heidedorf*, Margret is said to have transformed herself into the wolf-like creature that stares in through the window of her purported lover's house (638). Renate's characterisation also shows signs of 'structural doubling', but she is not contrasted with any other women; rather, she is both angel and devil.<sup>53</sup> Artiss claims that this dual vision of her might be described as Josias's 'schizophrenia', because although she is 'identified throughout as his guardian angel', he is 'unable to reconcile his love for her with the hearsay evidence linking her to witchcraft'.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, all of these women possess a bewitchingly beautiful physical appearance, which often has symbolic significance. Margret's pointed teeth have been described as a 'daemonic *Leitmotif*';<sup>55</sup> as Tebben has noted, this vampire imagery is used to evoke the danger of female

<sup>53</sup> Denis Jackson and Antony Wood, in Theodor Storm, *Paul the Puppeteer and other Short Fiction*, Denis Jackson, trans., Angel Books, London, 2004, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Artiss, p. 142.

<sup>55</sup> Jackson and Wood, p. 17.

sexuality.<sup>56</sup> This is reinforced as the white brilliance of her teeth is contrasted with the erotic redness of her lips. Furthermore, Margret is set against a pattern of black imagery, such as the 'schwarzen Lake' and 'Dunkelwerden'.<sup>57</sup> Renate has dark hair, and her eyes are particularly expressive (they are the first thing that Josias notices about her). In another scene, her 'blasser Antlitz' is set against 'das volle Mondlicht' (1079). Wulfhild has blonde hair, and her ice-cold physical features are set off against her gleaming white teeth (499), similar to Margret's. She is also referred to as a 'Gifthehe' (548).

Textual barriers of narrative structure and voice do not affect the 'demonic woman' type to the same extent as the 'weak woman' or the 'marginal female performer'. In this regard, both the omniscient narrator in *Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus* and the judge who narrates *Draussen im Heidedorf* provide a more objective assessment of the female characters than young lovelorn heroes such as Marx and Philipp. Furthermore, and as Artiss has pointed out, Margret's physical appearance eludes the narrator, as her face is seen in shadows.<sup>58</sup> Her image, therefore, is not as clearly defined as those of women such as Anne Lene or Lore. Although this only constitutes a small part of the novella, Margret is also granted the ability to narrate her own story, in her own words. Storm thereby enables a female perspective to be developed, and it is in this part of the text that the reader is able to question the community's prejudices against her, and also to learn of Hinrich's psychological illness that is the more likely cause of his death than Margret's 'witchcraft'. Although Josias's portrayal of Renate is clouded by the fact of his love for her (as is the case with Marx and Philipp), his narrative enables the reader to

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<sup>56</sup> Tebben, p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> Artiss, p. 48.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 40.



see her as an intelligent young woman with a strong personality (as opposed to the community's view of her as a witch).

Storm's 'demonic women' are also less restricted by actual barriers such as walls and doors. Wulfhild, for example, has a clearly marked 'space' (her bedroom), but she is clearly in charge of this domain, as may be noted of the scene when she attempts to seduce Rolf: 'Zornig zog sie das Gewand von ihrem schonen Leibe und bestieg das Ehebett [...] "Komm nun! Du sollst! Du sollst!" rief sie, als konnte sie durch ihren Willen den Ehgemahl in ihre Arme zwingen' (519). We may also apply Lotman's theory of plot typology to the 'demonic women', to assert that they often seek the 'masculine' role of travelling or being on a 'quest'.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to many of the 'immobile' 'weak women' such as Elisabeth (who remains at home whilst Reinhard goes to university), the 'demonic women' are 'mobile': Wulfhild often travels away from home (usually on her own); Margret rejects Hinrich's advances on a coach at the beginning of *Draussen im Heidedorf*; and Renate goes out on her own to look for her father. However, in terms of another Lotmanian theory (that of the binary opposition of inside and outside), the 'demonic women' adopt the typologically female role on the periphery, by the fact of their social exclusion. Furthermore, this is alluded to directly in the title of Margret's story, *Draussen im Heidedorf* (my bold – KA).

Barriers of external adornment, particularly hats (which are, by implication, veils), play an important role in the characterisation of the 'demonic woman'. However, unlike the 'weak woman' or 'marginal female performer' types, the 'demonic women' reject or subvert the symbolism of these 'vestimentary markers' in order to express their desire to rebel. For

<sup>59</sup> See de Lauretis, p. 79.

example, Wulfhild refuses to wear mourning clothes following the death of her first husband, yelling at the servant who brings her a black dress to wear: 'Das sei Gott geklagt, der mich zur Witwe machte! [...] Ich habe darum doch nicht den Tod gefreit! [...] 'Bring mir mein braunes Wollenkleid, das mag genügen!'(499-500). In the crucial communion scene in *Renate*, the eponymous heroine is dressed in black and wears a 'schwarzes Käpplein' (1087). Although her attire might be considered as a 'vestimentary marker' of the church setting in which she finds herself, Renate's subsequent refusal to take communion opens up an alternative interpretation of her black clothing – as that of a witch.

The 'demonic women' are not restricted by the perceived barrier of social conventions, as was observed of the 'weak woman' and 'marginal female performer' types. First of all, there is no evidence that 'misalliance' causes problems in these characters' relationships, as they are seen to mix with people of their own class. Secondly, and unlike so many other Storm heroines, little mention is made of the childhood of the 'demonic woman'. Margret and Wulfhild are never seen as children, and Renate is seen as a young girl only very briefly, in the passage where she 'saves' Josias from her dog. From the very outset, they are all defined as women, and not as girls.

However, the fact that social convention seems not to be important to the 'demonic women' means that they are viewed as strange and threatening within their respective communities. The result of this is the final aspect of demonization, which is their isolation within the text. Margret is an outcast because of her Slovak background, and because the villagers believe that her family are linked to the 'weisser Alp' alleged to suck the spirit out of its victims. However,

and as Rogers has pointed out, it is more to the point that Margret is unpopular in the community because of her beauty and her temperament, and she is, in fact, the victim.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, she reveals herself to be more principled than the rest of the community in her rejection of Hinrich's advances; she feels it would be wrong to embark upon a relationship with him, as he is a married man.

Renate's isolation stems from her intelligence, and the fact that her father is a *Freidenker* (as Storm was), and she rebels against the local community in her refusal to fit in with its religious practices (strictly Lutheran). Within the text, this is viewed as evidence that she is 'evil'. However, in his own life, Storm disapproved of organised religion, and he appears – through his narrator Josias's subsequent forgiveness of Renate – to be sympathetic to her decision to not take communion.

It may be contended that the 'demonic women' are isolated in their respective social worlds due to their ability to break down the barriers that are put in their way. Storm seems to invite us to be critical of the way in which they are seen as a threat to the stability and natural order of the community, especially because this judgement is largely based upon superstition and rumour. In his portrayal of the 'demonic woman' type, Storm is at his most 'feminist', because he questions the reasons behind her isolation, by inviting us to be critical of the impact of superstition and folklore, especially in the hostile and inward-looking communities in *Draussen im Heidedorf* and *Renate*.

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<sup>60</sup> Rogers, p. 104.

## Conclusion

This analysis of textual, actual and perceived barriers has revealed that Storm may be considered to be an exponent of the Woman Question, but in a much more indirect way to that which has been discussed in Chapters One and Two. Furthermore, this discussion of the three different character types discernible in his works – the ‘weak women’, the ‘marginal female performers’ and the ‘demonic women’ – has aimed at illustrating how barriers are utilised to varying extents.

The ‘weak woman’ type truly become the victims of the barriers that are put in their way; characters such as Elisabeth, Katharina and Anne Lene are textually ‘silenced’, physically constrained, and limited by social conventions such as marrying for the sake of a ‘good match’. Furthermore, none of these women are given a happy ending; they either meet their end in death or remain in unhappy marriages. The ‘marginal female performers’, Lore and Jenni, have the ability to break their barriers down, but their freedom is denied as they face the choice to either conform (Jenni) or die (Lore). Although the ‘demonic women’ continue to be social outcasts, they are the women who are least restricted by textual, actual and perceived barriers. As has been argued, Storm questions the reasons behind their social exclusion; furthermore, we might consider that Storm may have chosen to use the ‘veil’ of the *Chroniknovelle* with these stories<sup>61</sup> to diminish the impact of these strong female characters, whose ‘punishment’ was necessary in order to please the reading public.

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<sup>61</sup> *Draussen im Heidedorf* is not one of Storm’s five chronicle novellas (as *Ein Fest auf Haderslevhuus* and *Renate* are), but it is set in the past.

In conclusion, it would be misleading to ascribe to Storm the label of 'feminist', particularly within the context of this thesis; the fact remains that there seem to be very few alternatives for his female characters to follow a fulfilling life. However, his positive depiction of strong female characters in his later works adds a new dimension to Storm's contribution to the Woman Question.

## Chapter Four

### From Sleeping Beauty to Career Woman: The Development of Women's Roles in Theodor Fontane

#### Introduction

It is generally established that Theodor Fontane adopts a predominantly sympathetic stance towards the female characters in his fiction.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident in his non-judgemental treatment of the adulteress, a figure to be found in several of his best-known works, including, among others, his masterpiece *Effi Briest*. In this sense, Fontane both differs from many of his European contemporaries (particularly Tolstoy) and distances himself from the moralistic climate of the Prussian society which he depicts.

However, focusing upon Fontane's novels of adultery does not provide a full picture of the treatment of women in his work as a whole. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to reassess a broader cross-section of Fontane's works, using the methodological framework of the semiotics of barriers. To this end, it will suggest that there is a significant development in Fontane's problematisation of the Woman Question from his earlier 'balladesque' works (especially *Ellernklipp*) to the later social novels (such as *Frau Jenny Treibel* and *Mathilde Möhring*), as his women move from passivity to activity.

Applying the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers, this chapter will consider three different female character types: firstly, those who will be termed the 'fairy-tale

<sup>1</sup> See for example Alan Bance, 'Fontane's *Mathilde Möhring*', *Modern Language Review*, 1974, 69, pp. 121-133.

heroines' of his early, balladesque works (Grete Minde in the novella of the same title, and Hilde in *Ellernklipp*); secondly, the most commonly studied type of Fontane heroine, the 'innocent adulteress' (the eponymous heroines of *Effi Briest* and *Cécile* and Melanie in *L'Adultera* [1882]); and finally, the 'social climbers', Jenny Treibel and Mathilde Möhring. The chapter will also explore how Fontane's textual barriers differ from those of Storm. These barriers are not to be found to the same extent in narrative structure and voice; rather, they are elucidated in thematic material. These thematic barriers come under three main headings: firstly, Fontane's use of fairy-tale imagery and language; secondly, and similar to all three chapters so far, the idea of woman as Other or a threatening presence who needs to be 'tamed' (in many cases this has a religious aspect to it); and finally, the 'female malady' motif. Many of Fontane's heroines are seen as ill and sickly, and often succumb to death as a result of their illnesses, either by simply fading away (Hilde in *Ellernklipp* and *Effi Briest*), or even committing suicide (*Cécile* in the novel of the same name, and Christine Holk in *Unwiederbringlich* [1892]). First of all, though, I will briefly explore the context within which Fontane was writing.

### **The Woman Question in Prussia and the 'Code of Honour'**

Fontane did not begin writing novels until relatively late in life; his first novel (*Vor dem Sturm*) was published in 1878, when he was fifty-nine. By the time he reached the pinnacle of his career as a novelist, many of the other writers that this thesis considers were already dead.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, although he was just one year younger than Storm, there is a real sense that things have moved on in Fontane's works, especially in the later social novels. Indeed, women's

<sup>2</sup> The only writer to outlive Fontane within the context of this thesis was Lev Tolstoy.

position in German society had improved, and to some extent, they enjoyed greater freedom and autonomy (although Germany was behind other European nations in terms of the women's rights movement, as the introduction has identified). There is also a change of location; Fontane's novels are mostly set in Berlin, or involve people from Berlin at fashionable spa resorts (compared to the isolated and somewhat parochial Schleswig-Holstein of Storm's works).

In the light of this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Fontane is more overtly sympathetic towards the plight of women than Storm. He is particularly critical of what has been described as the 'Berlin marriage market';<sup>3</sup> that is, the way polite society dictated an individual's choice of spouse. Fontane's heroines suffer in two distinct ways; either because they are expected to marry for status, not love (as is the case in *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*) or they are prevented from being with the man they love due to class differences (Lene with Botho in *Irrungen, Wirungen* and Corinna with Leopold in *Frau Jenny Treibel*).

Although Fontane's sympathetic tone towards the plight of women cannot be denied, critics have noted that his fictional world does not necessarily portray the reality of life for Berlin women. For example, Silvia Böschenstein's essay on *Frau Jenny Treibel* 'probes the discrepancies between Corinna's limited fictional opportunities for self-improvement and emancipation and the more promising options actually on offer in Berlin in the 1880s'.<sup>4</sup> These opportunities, however, came about as a result of necessity rather than the drive for

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<sup>3</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Chambers, *The Changing Image of Theodor Fontane*, Camden House, Columbia, 1997, p. 94.



emancipation; according to the estimates of Hedwig Dohm,<sup>5</sup> there were more than one and a quarter million unmarried women in Prussia at the beginning of this decade, who were 'zur Abhängigkeit erzogen'.<sup>6</sup> Fontane depicts such women in *Die Poggenpuhls* (1896), where all three sisters<sup>7</sup> seem destined for spinsterhood; Therese and Manon remain in the family home with their mother, and Sophie is sent away to be a companion for her aunt. Sophie's fate is made all the more poignant because she is viewed throughout the novella as the talented one, the 'Hauptstütze' of the family.<sup>8</sup> Amongst other accomplishments that would have been expected of a lady, she has the slightly more subversive hobby of painting. Although her action of painting the inside of a church at the end of the novella might seem to be that of a liberated woman, this task is something that is not seen as an occupation (as will be the case for Rosa Hexel's activities in *Cécile*), but as a harmless diversion to occupy her. In the sense that Sophie does not find a more productive or useful outlet for her talents, she can be described as a 'superfluous woman'. Although the Poggenpuhl sisters' plight is not just gender-based (it is related to the decline of their class, the old Prussian military), it is of note that their brothers do have opportunities, and are able to move away from the close family unit in order to follow their chosen career paths.

In a similar way to Storm, Fontane was subject to the censor that was the reading public; *Irrungen, Wirrungen* in particular was not well-received. As Rau notes, when it was serialised,

<sup>5</sup> Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919) was an activist for women's rights in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Bettina Menke, 'The Figure of Melusine in Fontane's Texts: Images, Digressions, and Lacunae', *The Germanic Review*, 2004, 79, 1, pp. 41-67 (60, n. 35).

<sup>7</sup> We may draw comparison here with Chekhov's play, *Три сестры*, written in 1901.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Fontane, in *Effi Briest und Die Poggenpuhls, Zwei Romane*, Nymphenburger Taschenbuch-Ausgabe in 15. Bänden, Band 12, Kurt Schreinert, ed., Nymphenburger Verlag, Munich, 1978, p. 309. All subsequent references to *Die Poggenpuhls* will be to this edition.

its largely middle-class readership deemed it to be a 'grässliche Hurengeschichte'.<sup>9</sup> Objections about the book spread further afield; it has been noted that *Irrungen, Wirrungen* was not particularly widely read by members of the women's movement, even though it 'offered a more realistic account of women's lives', because it 'failed to fulfil their desire for escapism or their need for role models embodying a morally defined domestic identity'.<sup>10</sup> This desire for female role models who were 'morally defined' was particularly prevalent in Prussia, where women – perhaps more so than in other parts of Germany – were expected to be faithful and dutiful wives, while their husbands were entitled to defend their honour if this were to be challenged. This point is given fictional treatment in Effi's assertion that one of her father's favourite sayings is 'Weiber weiblich, Männer männlich'.<sup>11</sup> This goes on to form the main action of the novel, in the death of Effi's lover at the hands of her husband.

One might also consider the myth-making of Germany as masculine and enemy nations as feminine, as discussed in the previous chapter on Storm. In *Effi Briest*, French women are typecast as morally flawed and coquettish; on a visit to the Guldensee household, we hear the story of Louis Napoleon's wife Eugénie, who Guldensee claims was the 'Weib von Babel' (639). He then claims that he 'weiss was ich deutschen Frauen schuldig bin' (639), which alludes to the moral standards expected of German women. Moreover, during this speech, he bows to Effi, and apologises for mentioning such things in her presence. This action directs moral pressure firmly onto Effi herself, as she starts out in married life. Fontane's omniscient narrator comments that Innstetten was 'klug genug [...], auf solche Philistereien anscheinend

<sup>9</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> R. Hartmann, cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Romane und Gedichte*, Rudolf Pechel, ed., Droemersch Verlagsgesellschaft, Munich, 1952, p. 595. All subsequent references to *Effi Briest*, *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, *Frau Jenny Treibel* and *Grete Minde* will be to this edition.

ernsthaft einzugehen' (638-639), but this episode illustrates the conflict between Innstetten's duty to his young wife, and his commitment to advancing his own career.

In both *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*, Fontane illustrates the tragic consequences of the Prussian 'code of honour', with the deaths of Gordon and Crampas respectively. As if to emphasise the futility of their deaths, these men are largely forgotten, as Fontane focuses on the suffering of Cécile and Effi. He emphasises how they are powerless to act to stop the duels taking place, and unable to control the devastating effect that the situation has upon them, paying the ultimate price of their lives. In view of this, although society in Fontane has moved on in time, the militaristic and male-dominated atmosphere of Prussia he portrays in these works has a more patriarchal feel than in Storm. However, as this chapter will later argue, in *Frau Jenny Treibel* and *Mathilde Möhring*, Fontane presents two very strong women who achieve an autonomy of sorts, in spite of the barriers which face them.

### Fontane, Women and the 'Extra-Text'

Fontane's attitudes towards women were shaped by three generations of influential females: his mother, his wife, and his daughter. In addition to this, he had many female friends, such as Henriette von Merckel and Mathilde von Rohr.<sup>12</sup> Through these close relationships with women in all aspects of his life, Fontane was able to observe their behaviour and interactions with each other, which contributed to his sympathetic and realistic portrayal of a wide range of

<sup>12</sup> Henriette von Merckel was godmother to Fontane's son Theo, and had many connections within the Prussian administrative hierarchy, which she used to promote Fontane's career. Mathilde von Rohr was a close personal friend of Emilie and Fontane. See Eda Sagarra, 'Theodor Fontane and the Petticoat Regiment', *German Life and Letters*, 2005, 58, 2, pp. 113-128 (124).

female characters in his fiction. This section will now examine the impact of this multi-layered 'extra-text' upon Fontane's 'text'.

Both of Fontane's parents were part of the French Huguenot immigrant population of Berlin. Although Fontane's creative tendencies came from his father, Louis Henri (who was a renowned storyteller, with a propensity for gambling and a habit of stretching the truth<sup>13</sup>), his self-discipline as a writer was more as a result of the influence of his mother. Emilie Fontane (née Labry) was the archetypal strong matriarch, and her relationship with Fontane's father has been described as a 'role reversal of the stereotypical nineteenth-century marriage'; 'she, not he, was the disciplinarian'.<sup>14</sup> In a similar way to Turgenev (and as the next chapter will show), Fontane was made aware from a very early age of the influence of a strong woman over a weaker, easily led man (although it must be said that Emilie Fontane was not brutal or violent, as Turgenev's mother was said to be).

In 1850, Fontane married another Emilie, a fellow French Huguenot descendant, Emilie Rouanet-Kummer. She, too, had a strong personality, but their relationship was more equal than that of Fontane's parents. Evidence of the closeness of their relationship is to be found in the extensive collection of letters between the pair (dating from 1844 to Fontane's death on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1898); as Sagarra has noted, these letters reveal how their marriage was good, but not always happy, and that the couple 'loved each other but did not hold back with detailed, at times thoroughly niggling, criticisms of one another, yet who never lost their

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<sup>13</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Sagarra, p. 119.

respect for the person and the capacity of the other'.<sup>15</sup> Emilie was frustrated by Fontane's struggle to settle in a steady job; he always wanted to write. He eventually became a 'real freelancer' in 1876, when he resigned after just a few weeks as Executive Secretary of the Berlin Academy because he disliked the 'bureaucratic routine'.<sup>16</sup> Emilie did, however, support him in this career change, and their marriage was unusual for the time in the sense that it was an equal partnership in every respect. Not only was Emilie heavily involved in assisting Fontane with his writing (she proofread his work, took manuscripts to the publisher, and painstakingly copied out Fontane's untidy manuscripts into her copperplate handwriting, amongst other things<sup>17</sup>), she also made it clear that theirs was a sexual partnership of equals<sup>18</sup> (unlike, for instance, Storm and Constanze or Storm and Dorothea, or Tolstoy and Sofya).

By the 1870s, however, Fontane's relationship with Emilie was starting to become strained, and he turned to his daughter, Mete, for support.<sup>19</sup> She was emancipated in the sense that she was one of the first women in Germany to qualify as a teacher.<sup>20</sup> Some critics have claimed that Fontane's late development as a writer had a negative impact upon his children, especially Mete. In this regard, Dieterle views her as Fontane's 'victim'; because Fontane was actively writing at a time when Mete (and her siblings) would otherwise have been 'establishing themselves in their careers and personal lives,' she had to 'relinquish her identity' as she was moving into adulthood.<sup>21</sup> This, claims Dieterle, was manifested in Mete's tendency to depressive illness later in life. In terms of extra-text's influence upon text, we should note that

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Demetz, 'Introduction', in Theodor Fontane, *Short Novels and Other Writings*, Peter Demetz, ed. and trans., Peter Gay, foreword, Continuum, New York, 1982, p. xv.

<sup>17</sup> Sagarra, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Sagarra, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 121.

Fontane depicts a significant number of women with emotional disturbances with great sympathy, as will later be examined.

Other critics have questioned the extent to which Fontane's portrayal of 'weak' and vulnerable women is sympathetic. Stephan has argued that Fontane (particularly in *Cécile*) associates femininity with weakness, thereby denying both the women's movement, and the strong female figures he had encountered in his life (his mother and his wife).<sup>22</sup> I would view this differently, for two reasons. Firstly, *Cécile* is undeniably a 'weak' female character, but the fact of her vulnerability presents her as a victim. Secondly, it is important here to consider what is meant by 'femininity'. If by this one means beauty, then *Cécile* is certainly a 'feminine' character. However, I would see this not as a denial of strong women; rather, as Fontane's suggestion that femininity itself is a barrier, and that women have to be more than just beautiful (and sometimes, they have to sacrifice their beauty) in order to achieve greater freedom and autonomy. This is particularly true of Fontane's stronger female characters, such as Jenny Treibel and Mathilde Möhring. They may not be physically attractive, like *Cécile*, but they are thereby liberated, because they are not idealised by men. As a result, they are able to be taken more seriously, and can make their way in the world.

Furthermore, we should remember that Fontane challenges the notion of Germany being representative of masculinity and order, with France (or other 'enemy' nations) as the polar opposite of femininity and 'otherness'. As Sagarra has observed, Fontane 'associated the feminine in a positive sense with subversive elements in society, and moreover, linked his critique of gender stereotyping with his own sceptical responses to the prevailing national male

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 95.

mythology'.<sup>23</sup> This presents us with the paradox of Fontane the Prussian espousing this non-Prussian idea, whereas the works of Storm – who was critical of everything that Prussia stood for – were much more in keeping with the Prussian ideal of women.

### **In the Beginning: the 'Fairy-Tale Heroines'**

*Grete Minde* and *Ellernklipp* are often referred to as belonging to the 'balladesque' period of Fontane's writing. Although early critics of Fontane felt that such works were poor in comparison with the later 'social novels', Bance has argued that far from being an 'aberration' in Fontane's development as a writer, these works are a 'stage in the development of his refined novel of society'.<sup>24</sup> To illustrate this point, Bance compares *Ellernklipp* with *Effi Briest*, and suggests that there is 'continuity within change' in the respect that balladesque features (such as the refrain-like 'Effi komm' motif which 'forms the balladesque heart of *Effi Briest*'<sup>25</sup>) are common to both texts. In this section, I present a modified assessment of this view, and aim to elucidate how Fontane's treatment of the Woman Question (more specifically, the barriers present in his works) shows this 'continuity within change'. This will be achieved by way of analysis of the textual, actual and perceived barriers facing Grete Minde and Hilde (*Ellernklipp*). I will suggest that these early Fontane heroines are unable to escape the fairy-tale world constructed for them, no matter how hard they try (especially in the case of Grete), and therefore become 'superfluous women'.

<sup>23</sup> Sagarra, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Bance, *Theodor Fontane: The Major Novels*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Loc. cit.

As I have already suggested, Fontane's textual barriers are based more upon thematic material than narrative structure. The first of these thematic textual barriers, then, is Fontane's use of the fairy-tale motif in relation to both Grete and Hilde. In *Grete Minde*, the fairy-tale theme is introduced at the text's outset, when the young Grete reveals to her childhood sweetheart, Valtin, that her favourite fairy-tale is the Grimm Brothers' *Von dem Machandelboom*. Whilst this may seem like a quite innocent and ordinary childhood conversation, this constitutes Grete's first textual barrier; in her choice of favourite story, a gruesome tale of family rivalry, Fontane foreshadows the tragedy to come in her life.

In common with fairy-tale heroines, Grete and Hilde are isolated within the text from the very outset, by way of their family backgrounds. We learn that Grete's mother was a Spanish Catholic, who is described (albeit maliciously) by Trud (the wife of Grete's half-brother, Gerdt) as 'eine fahrende Frau' (48). Hilde is the illegitimate child of her mother and the young Count of her village's estate. Both heroines are orphaned during the course of the narrative (Hilde at the very beginning, and Grete within the first few chapters), and never seem to belong in their substitute families; indeed, they are like strangers in the houses in which they live. This status is further emphasised by the way in which they are treated like servants. In what might be described as a 'Cinderella motif', both Grete and Hilde are required to undertake domestic chores which would not otherwise be expected of the young mistress of the house (Grete, for example, is expected to look after Trud's baby, and Hilde has to do laundry and milk the cows).



The worlds they inhabit are also devoid of maternal affection; in a common fairy-tale motif, the mother figure is notably absent through death. Grete's mother is already dead by the time the story begins, and Hilde's mother is pictured as a corpse in the very first chapter.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the mother's absence is not compensated for by substitute mother figures, as both Grete and Hilde are resented by the matriarchal figures in the texts, Trud Minde and Grissel respectively. Although Trud is not Grete's stepmother (she is the wife of her half-brother) and Grissel is a servant, their jealousy of the heroines leads to the main conflict within the texts. In this way, both of these women might be deemed to be representative of the 'wicked stepmother' figure.<sup>27</sup>

The second thematic textual barrier is the 'otherness' of Grete and Hilde, and a key aspect of this is their Catholicism. In the staunchly Protestant societies depicted (seventeenth and eighteenth century respectively), Catholics were viewed with suspicion. To be Catholic and female (in the case of Grete), therefore, is to be doubly Other. The performance of *Das Jüngste Gericht* at the start of *Grete Minde*, like Grete's reference to the Grimm Brothers' story, acts as a precursor of bad things to come. Moreover, the show itself illuminates Grete's 'otherness', particularly in her reaction to one scene, when a young girl in a white dress appears in front of God's throne. The narrator comments that 'ihr war, als würde sie selbst vor Gottes Thron gerufen, und ihr Herz schlug und ihre zarte Gestalt zitterte' (16). Furthermore, she is hurt in the fire that starts during the performance, which might be viewed as an augury of Grete's own 'final judgement', where she sets the town on fire.

<sup>26</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Werke, Erster Band*, Hannsludwig Geiger, ed., Tempel-Verlag, Berlin und Darmstadt, 1958, p. 814. All subsequent references to *Ellernklipp* and *L'Adultera* will be to this edition.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted here that the women who would have been stepmothers (Jakob Minde's first wife and Baltzer Bocholt's wife) are dead, which is part of the general lack of women in the texts.

After her father's death, Grete is left in the care of her half-brother, Gerdt, and his wife, Trud. As noted, Trud is especially resentful of Grete, claiming that she 'hat unser Haus behext und in den alten Aberglauben zurückfallen lassen' (24). This perception of Grete as a witch or an evil presence in the house that must be exorcised comes about mainly as a result of Trud's jealousy, but Grete also contributes to her own stigmatisation by hitting Trud in the face with a belt following a violent confrontation. After this incident, Gerdt suggests that they should send her to the nuns, as he believes that her 'katholisch Herz' (50) is to blame for her violent streak (and not the fact that Trud had insulted Grete's dead mother). However, within the text as a whole, Fontane seems to challenge this notion of Catholics as the 'enemy within';<sup>28</sup> as Sagarra has shown, the only characters who show Grete any sympathy are the nuns of Arenberg, and her mother. Sagarra has shown how, in this context, Catholic elements in Fontane can be viewed positively, as he associates them with 'positive "female" values, human warmth, care for the weak and the capacity to understand and forgive'.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, Fontane presents Catholicism as a barrier but suggests that it is wrong for it to be viewed as such.

As noted, Hilde is illegitimate, and therefore may not be an attractive proposition for any potential adoptive family. For this reason, Pastor Sörgel uses religious faith to make her seem more respectable before she meets her prospective adoptive father, Baltzer Bocholt, as he introduces her to him with a picture book Bible in her hand (812). The impression of Hilde as a pious little girl is then destroyed, when she later reveals in her scripture lessons that she does not know anything about Jesus (825) and when she is curious as to why the family are celebrating Christmas. Unlike Grete, then, it is Hilde's lack of religion that sets her apart as

<sup>28</sup> Sagarra, p. 126. She shows how enemy nations, such as France, Poland and Austria, all predominantly Catholic, were 'feminised and dehumanised' as a result of the militarization of German society.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Other at this point. However, Hilde later takes great comfort in the faith instilled in her by her relationship with the local outcast, the Catholic shepherd Melcher Harms. She also reveals a compassionate side to her nature; for example, when Baltzer shoots and kills one of their neighbours who had been threatening to kill him. Grissel takes the Old Testament view, commenting that the Bible says it should be 'Aug' um Auge und Zahn um Zahn', but Hilde replies that one should love one's enemies (838). Not long afterwards, she puts these words into action and forgives Baltzer for the murder. It is something of a paradox, then, that this attitude makes her seem all the more isolated, in a world full of those who have views like Grissel's. The only person who seems to truly understand Hilde is Melcher Harms, who is equally isolated in the community, and it is her association with him that initiates the conflict between her and Baltzer, as he sees this as a threat to his patriarchal authority.

Hilde acknowledges that her fear of Baltzer derives partly from the way that he looks at her: 'als ob ich was anderes wär' und was Apartes' (856). This clearly evokes the idea of Hilde as Other, and also forms a thematic link with another of Fontane's 'weak' female characters, Cécile. Menke's article on the Melusine motif in Fontane's texts explores what she calls the 'arabesque of the "apart"', particularly in relation to this later heroine. She notes that the word 'apart' applies to Cécile in two ways: first of all, to describe great beauty, and secondly, in its etymological sense of being separated or divided off. She writes that 'in *Cécile*, to be apart – that is, separated, off to the side, deviating from the norm – is the characteristic of femininity and its "weakness" or frailty'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Menke, p. 47.

Following on from this point, the third and final thematic textual barrier that faces the fairy-tale heroines is what may be termed the 'female malady'.<sup>31</sup> This is the seeming propensity for women to suffer from psychological disorders, which are often shown to be psychosomatic, and is characterised in literature by unidentified illness and general malaise. In *Gräte Minde* and *Ellernklipp*, however, Fontane provides two very clearly defined and highly contrastive examples of women suffering with psychological illnesses. Whereas Hilde's illness is notable for its 'feminisation' (she is passive, withdrawn and resigned to her fate), Grete is full of anger and seeks revenge.

Fontane takes care to build up Grete's illness during the course of the narrative, assigning violent, even psychopathic tendencies to some of her actions; the warning signs are there when she strikes Trud with the belt after their confrontation. Attention is drawn not so much to the violent action, but to the fact that Grete acts 'ohne zu wissen, was sie tat' (48), as if controlled by external forces. Towards the end of the novella, this is developed further; before her plea to the mayor for her inheritance, she imagines Gerdt with a little red man on his shoulder (74). Grete seems, then, to be suffering from what we would now term schizophrenia. In this way, Fontane provides justification for Grete's subsequent crime of setting the town on fire (killing herself, her child, and Trud's child in the process) on three fronts: she is frustrated at her mistreatment by society; deeply upset by the death of her husband; and perhaps most significantly, she is ill.

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<sup>31</sup> Elaine Showalter argues that 'madness' as we term it is very much a 'female malady'. See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*, Virago, London, 1987.

Hilde, in contrast, shows signs of clinical depression, but similarly to Grete, Fontane provides justification for Hilde's illness. Tragic events in her life, particularly the death of her mother, have shaped her personality. In this regard, and throughout the text, she is characterised as a dreamer. For example, when she has just moved into the Bocholt household, she tells Grissel that she is not sad about her mother because she can still see and hear her (829). Her propensity for dreaming is also a source of great frustration to Baltzer, and it later causes her to retreat even further into her inner world, as she grieves the loss of her child. Hilde's death is very much in contrast to Grete's violent end; much like Effi, she just seems to fade away.

Indeed, the deaths of Grete and Hilde are not only consistent with the psychological traits they display, they also have a great deal to say about their status in society. The inscription on Hilde's gravestone is particularly poignant; her name is not stated, 'weil sie von Geburt an keinen gehabt und den "anderen" nicht wolle' (906). Here, the 'other' name refers to her married name, and (in a return to the beginning of the novella) we are reminded of how Hilde has always been isolated due to her illegitimacy. Although Grete has a spectacular and violent end, burning to death in the church tower, the focus afterwards is not on her. The very same day, the travelling puppeteers with whom she has been performing have found a replacement for her (81); even those considered the lowest of the low in society seemingly have no sympathy for Grete, a truly 'superfluous woman'. However, as previously noted, she is granted religious salvation of sorts, in so far as the nuns in the convent are the only ones who have any sympathy for her.

If we turn now to textual barriers of narrative structure, one can claim the following. As observed in the previous chapter, although some of Storm's works foreground the heroine in the titles, these women are 'silenced' by way of the first-person male narrator's perspective. To some extent, we may contrast Fontane's treatment of Grete and Hilde with this. *Grete Minde* is, after all, Grete's story; not only is she given the title, she is also very much at the forefront of the narrative, as the plot line follows her development from child to woman. Although Hilde is not given the title of *Ellernklipp*, she is the focus of the narrative, especially in the first part of the novella. The first eight chapters focus on her development, and all have her name in their titles. However, in contrast to Fontane's dialogue-rich social novels, *Grete Minde* and *Ellernklipp* are more akin to Storm's novellas, both in terms of genre and their emphasis on action and narrator-focused text. Grete is given dialogue (Hilde to a lesser extent), but this comes in short exchanges, often in arguments. In the later Fontane works (particularly *Effi Briest* and *Frau Jenny Treibel*), the narrative structure is not so much a barrier for the heroines. This is due to both Fontane's use of a detached omniscient narrator (indeed, Fontane exclusively uses this type of narrative voice) and the generous use of dialogue, where women have the chance to speak for themselves. In this respect, the later works show a clear development.

The fairy-tale heroines Grete and Hilde are also curtailed by actual barriers. Both novellas are set in inaccessible country (*Grete Minde* in Tangermünde on the River Elbe, *Ellernklipp* in Emmerode, in the Harz Mountains), settings which enable Fontane to use images such as forests, mountains, and large hedges, which act to enclose the heroines. One example of this in

*Grete Minde* is the omnipresent image of the forest,<sup>32</sup> which is part of the fairy-tale motif previously discussed. Fontane also evokes female enclosure and limitation by way of bird imagery; unlike those of Storm and Turgenev, however, Fontane's bird is not caged.<sup>33</sup> Here, Grete is not allowed to visit her neighbour's garden, in which a nest is situated. Although Grete overcomes this particular barrier, both in the moral sense (she denies Trud's authority by going anyway) and the physical sense (she jumps 'leicht und gefällig' over the hedge [10]),<sup>34</sup> this ability is temporary, and remains a childhood attribute. Indeed, she is so restricted in her subsequent life with Trud and Gerdt that she remains enclosed in their house, treated no better than a domestic servant.

In the build-up to the conclusion of *Grete Minde*, Fontane presents the powerful barrier image of Grete, like a caged animal, pacing around in the space between the gardens and the city walls. Here, Grete's enclosure (and her frustration at this) comes to a dramatic and destructive climax, as she ascends the church tower and sets it on fire. This final scene is all reported by the omniscient narrator; there is no dialogue apart from Grete's repeated affirmation: 'Nun ist es Zeit!' (80). This scene strongly hints at the destructive effect of Grete's lifelong enclosure upon her, by explicitly revealing Grete's troubled state of mind and what have previously been termed her 'schizophrenic' tendencies.

<sup>32</sup> As we have seen in Chapter Two, Eliot also uses this image in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*. In a German literary context, this has affinities with Storm's *Immensee*, which is partly set in a forest (when Elisabeth and Reinhard go to find strawberries).

<sup>33</sup> Fontane's and Storm's choice of the same bird (linnet) has symbolic resonance. The word 'Hänfling' also means 'weakling', which hints at Elisabeth's and Grete's vulnerability.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter Five will explore how Asya's agility is depicted.

Hilde is also restricted by actual barriers. Her mother's house is set far away from the rest of the village, and separated from it by dense woodland, thereby making it difficult to access, and adding to the sense of Hilde's isolation. The turning point in her relationship with Grissel comes when Baltzer wants Hilde to have her own room, where they had previously shared. Upon being forced to move into a less comfortable room downstairs, Grissel's attitude to Hilde changes from being a supportive and loving mother substitute to being the catalyst for Baltzer's murder of his own son, as she reveals to a jealous Baltzer that Hilde and Martin are having a relationship (865).

Windows, doors and curtains also play an important role as markers of thresholds that may not be crossed. The open window motif, which recurs to a greater extent in *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*, is employed in *Ellernklipp*, as Hilde is pictured looking out of the window in the room that she shares with Grissel. She comments that she always wants to stand by it, because it is 'so weit hier' (818). The pleasure that she derives from this view (and, indeed, her freedom) is later taken away from her, after Grissel has moved out, and the open window motif then turns into something much more sinister. In the run-up to the confrontation between Martin and his father, in which Martin is murdered, Fontane uses the threshold barriers of doors and windows to build up an atmosphere of tension and signal a 'moment of crisis', as Bakhtinian theory states. We are told that they are all open because of the hot weather, but the overall impression is eerie and unpleasant, as if something dreadful is about to happen (867). The catalyst for the murder is in another barrier image, as Baltzer listens in to Hilde's and Martin's conversation from behind a curtain and learns that they are planning to run away. Significantly, Hilde is



frightened and seems to be aware of his presence; she warns Martin to take care what he is saying, commenting: 'die Wände hätten Ohren' (869).

Grete and Hilde also encounter perceived barriers. Firstly, as is the case with many of Storm's female characters, they are seen as children, with their lives being traced from beginning to end within the texts. In the same way as in Storm, Fontane's fairy-tale heroines are unable to overcome this perception, as they are denied a right to independence to the very end. From the outset, Grete is treated like a child by her family, and later (as already noted) she is treated more like a servant than another family member. Trud and Gerdt assume an identity as her parents, but they use this to their advantage by claiming money that is rightfully Grete's. At the end of the novella, when Grete appeals to the court for this inheritance, she is addressed in the second person informal as 'du', which is, at best, how one would address a child, and at worst, very insulting, especially when one considers that Gerdt is referred to as 'Sie' (76).

Hilde is characterised as a child in the way that she is subservient to men and always complies with their demands. For example, when she shows Baltzer and Pastor Sörgel into her house, she 'trat zurück, um die beiden Männer eintreten zu lassen' (813). These may be the actions of a polite child, but this deference remains a feature of Hilde's personality throughout her short life. Furthermore, she is seen almost as a possession by Pastor Sörgel and Baltzer with which they can trade. Baltzer decides: 'Ich nehme das Kind' (815) and Hilde has no choice in the matter. She reveals the fear and reverence that she feels for her adoptive father/husband on more than one occasion ('Ich fürchte mich vor ihm' [856]), and this does not go unnoticed by others. Melcher Harms says that she married him 'aus Furcht und Dankbarkeit' (886). Indeed,

Hilde never overcomes her fear of his patriarchal power; he remains for her a father, not a husband. The most explicit allusion to this follows his death, when she is referred to not as a 'Witwe', but a 'Waise' (903).

This perception of Hilde as a child takes on an unsavoury tone, and the paedophilic theme that is played out in Storm's works resurfaces, as the entire tragedy of *Ellernklipp* hinges on the love of Baltzer for Hilde, his adopted daughter. Despite only being a young child (we are not made aware of her age, but we presume she is about ten years of age), she is assigned a sexual identity from the beginning of the text. We are told that she makes herself look older than she is, as she 'stemmte, wie sie zu tun liebte, den rechten Arm in die Seite' (815). At this, Baltzer laughs and comments that he will have to keep an eye on her. Baltzer's erotic feelings for Hilde first become apparent to him when he sees her sleeping outside in the meadow. This scene, filtered through Baltzer's consciousness, is described as a 'Bild' of Hilde, a true 'Sleeping Beauty': 'Ihr Haar hatte sich gelöst und ihre Stirn war leise gerötet, und alles drückte Frieden und doch zugleich ein geheimnisvolles Erwarten aus' (842). This idealised picture affirms Pastor Sörgel's observation: 'die Hilde blüht' (842). Fontane's choice of this particular verb means that we are made fully aware of Hilde's sexual 'flowering' from the perspective of her adoptive father. Hilde, however, retains her childlike status (mainly in her fear of Baltzer), which serves to reaffirm the inappropriate nature of the relationship. The image of Hilde with her hand on her hip recurs towards the end of the text, but Fontane makes the point of mentioning that 'es war die Hilde nicht mehr, die, [...] die rechte Hand in die Seite gestemmt' (891). One of the core aspects of Hilde's tragedy, then, is that she never escapes this child-like perception in the eyes of those around her.

So then, it is the case that the fairy-tale heroines, Grete and Hilde, encounter many barriers. However, and by way of another fairy-tale motif, that of 'escape' or running away, Fontane does instil in them the idea of overcoming them. This is apparent in both texts, but more so in *Grete Minde*. Grete seems to be more capable than Hilde of escape, as she is the one who physically runs away to the 'outside' of her familiar domain, whereas Hilde seems to be content with her 'escape' within the confines of Baltzer's property, tending to the cows on the meadow. Furthermore, Grete is actually aware of the concept of escape within fairy tales, and is able to relate her reading of texts to real life. She tells Valtin that she reads about 'Kindern oder schönen Prinzessinnen, die vor einem bösen König oder einer bösen Königin geflohen sind, und es gibt viele solche Geschichten, und nicht bloss in Märchenbüchern' (45). Sadly for Grete, her attempts to break out of her fairy-tale role come to nothing and lead to destruction on a massive scale. Hilde's efforts to escape are nowhere near as dramatic, but just as futile, as her relationship with Melcher Harms leads to conflict between her and Baltzer.

Bance has argued that Fontane's fiction reveals a 'shift in the relationship of the heroine to society. Whereas in *Grete Minde* or *Ellernklipp* she represents a threat to society, in the mature novels [...] the female is now under threat *from* society'.<sup>35</sup> I would wholly endorse the latter part of this statement, but I would argue that Grete and Hilde are actually victims of society too. I would not consider Hilde to be a threat at all, and Grete becomes a threat only in response to the tragedy in her life and the way in which she has been 'enclosed'. To return to the very first point made in this chapter with regards to Fontane's sympathetic stance towards women, it would seem that in his fairy-tale heroines, he paints a rather pessimistic picture. Here, he shows women whose efforts to escape a restrictive patriarchy are entirely futile.

<sup>35</sup> Bance, 1982, pp. 33-34, his italics.

However, it must be remembered that both *Grete Minde* and *Ellernklipp* are historical novellas, which affords some distance between their fate and those of the female characters depicted in Fontane's own time. It may be that Fontane has created misogynistic texts, but that this particular view of the Woman Question was purely historical, in the sense that he portrayed the situation of women as it may have been at that time. In turn, he was able to show whether (and how) the situation of women had changed in his subsequent, contemporary works.

### Escape Method Part One: Innocent Adultery

Much of the scholarship on Theodor Fontane focuses upon his treatment of the adulteress who is presented as being led into an affair (or in the case of Cécile, a minor indiscretion) not through her own sinful nature, but through circumstance. This section will examine this figure, looking mainly at *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*, with some references to *L'Adultera*. It will suggest that the fairy-tale motif recurs in Fontane's depiction of both Cécile and Effi, but unlike Grete and Hilde, they seem to be offered an escape route out of this, which does not come to fruition. As Chambers has noted, in Fontane's later novels, the 'recurrent invalidation of fairy-tale allusions intimates the characters' suppressed or doomed dreams of an ideal existence'.<sup>36</sup>

In the same way as in *Grete Minde*, the thematic textual barrier of the fairy-tale motif is introduced within the first few pages of *Cécile*. One of Cécile's first utterances is her request to her husband (St Arnaud): 'erzähle mir etwas Hübsches'. Cécile wonders whether the

<sup>36</sup> Chambers, 1997, p. 82. Chambers differs to my interpretation of the fairy-tale heroines in the sense that she groups Cécile with Grete, and not with Effi.

particular story she has in mind is 'bloss ein Märchen'.<sup>37</sup> This not only forms a link with the fairy-tale heroines, it also instils in the reader Cécile's mindset as a fairy-tale princess from the outset. Indeed, as if in confirmation of this, St Arnaud refers to her as such on arrival at the hotel; he comments that 'der Harz empfängt dich à la Princesse' (7). The princess analogy is taken further, in the juxtaposition of Cécile with Rosa Hexel (it is surely no accident that her name means 'witch'!). Rosa is an artist, and her painting of animals (not flowers, which is deemed more suitable for a lady) is viewed as being 'an der Grenze des Unerlaubten' (24). However, she does not seem bothered by this, and is more than capable of holding her own against those people who call her 'Rosa Malheur';<sup>38</sup> indeed, we are told that she was 'eigentlich stolz auf den Spitznamen' (24). It could be argued that Rosa, the 'witch', is the fairy-tale 'princess' Cécile's alter ego, or the kind of woman she secretly longs to be. The complicating factor in this story is that the boundaries of 'good' and 'evil' have become blurred. Although Cécile assumes the role of princess, she succumbs to the moral 'evil' of transgressing her boundaries as a married woman by showing an interest in another man. Conversely, although Rosa has 'good' qualities such as her honesty and talent as an artist, she is seen as 'bad' precisely because of her career, as her talents are viewed as threatening and subversive.

As well as being a fairy-tale heroine within her own story, Cécile is a reader in her own right. Far from being positive, this constitutes a barrier, on several fronts. Firstly, St Arnaud's attitude to women's education in general is rather contradictory. He comments that 'Damen brauchen überhaupt nichts zu wissen', but then accuses Cécile of being ignorant, and criticises

<sup>37</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Cécile*, Christian Grawe, ed., Reclam, Stuttgart, 1982, p. 6. All subsequent references to *Cécile* will be to this edition.

<sup>38</sup> This is an allusion to Rosa Bonheur, the French animal painter.

the contents of her bookcase, the 'gelber französischer Roman' (33). Cécile's admirer, von Gordon, notes of her in a letter to his sister that 'was nicht in französischen Romanen und italienischen Opern vorkommt, das weiss sie nicht' (53). Cécile is aware of her lack of knowledge (especially in comparison with Rosa), which frustrates her deeply. Her almost violent (and uncharacteristic) outburst after the day in Quedlinburg illustrates this: 'Bilder und immer wieder Bilder. Wozu? Wir hatten mehr als genug davon' (48). Moreover, the notion of reading for Cécile takes on a somewhat unsavoury tone, as it is later revealed that she has inherited a large estate from a Prince after she was initially a *Vorleser* for his wife. It is hinted – but not confirmed – that she later became the Prince's, and then his nephew's, lover. All of this serves to illustrate the clash between Cécile's own genuine desire to better herself and what is expected of her (for example, by her mother, who believed that 'eine junge schöne Dame nur dazu da sei, zu gefallen' [155]).

The fairy-tale motif is taken up yet again by Fontane in relation to Effi. The first time we meet her, she is engaged in embroidery, which has been identified as a 'key theme in female lives'.<sup>39</sup> Further to this, and just before her meeting with Innstetten, Effi reassures Frau von Briest that she will get changed quickly out of her play clothes: 'in fünf Minuten ist Aschenputtel in eine Prinzessin verwandelt' (601). The fairy-tale allusions continue, and Effi is referred to as a princess again in discussion of the plans to buy her trousseau (605). Effi also has the mindset of a fairy-tale heroine; when the wedding is being planned, she imagines Cinderella waking as a princess, but she applies this to her own situation by imagining she is waking as a Countess (608). This acts as a forewarning of the root of the problem in her marriage to Innstetten; the reality of married life does not correspond to her romantic dreams.

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 37.

Frau von Briest is aware of how Effi has these expectations, noting: 'es kommt dir vor wie ein Märchen, und du möchtest eine Prinzessin sein', and she goes on to warn her that not everyone in Kessin will like her (611). This has the effect of heightening the disappointment of Effi's loveless marriage to Innstetten all the more, and prompts her to seek her own 'Prince Charming'. However, the affair with Crampas rapidly turns Effi's world into a nightmarish existence, far from her fairy-tale dreams.

Effi too is a reader, but unlike Cécile, she does not seem to feel the need to better herself and is quite open about the fact that she is not interested in 'serious' things.<sup>40</sup> She is driven to read by the boredom of her existence in Kessin, but this mainly takes the form of the magazines that Gieshübler brings for her. Significantly, Effi's reading takes on negative connotations, as she frightens herself with the story of the 'White Lady', who was purported to have haunted Napoleon one night in the Hermitage castle by stepping out of her portrait (641-2). This example serves to illustrate both how women are mythologised (a theme which unites all of the authors to be discussed in this thesis), and how women may be 'framed', which was a key concept in the previous chapter on Storm.

The second thematic textual barrier, that is, the 'otherness' of female characters, takes on another dimension in the character of Cécile. In a similar way to women in Storm's works, such as Jenni in *Von jenseits des Meeres* and Margret in *Draussen im Heidedorf*, Cécile is set apart by her exotic beauty, which stems from her Slavic background. She is introduced to the reader largely through the observations of Gordon, who speculates that she is 'polnisches

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<sup>40</sup> We might contrast Effi's attitude with the mistaken desire of both Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina to read in order to educate themselves.

Halbblut' (12). Breggin has shown how Fontane cultivates the perception of Slavic people as 'seductive and passionate',<sup>41</sup> which adds to Cécile's allure for Gordon (and, by implication, the reader). Moreover, Cécile becomes a difficult character to interpret, as Gordon's own (flawed) judgements on her obscure her true self. It may seem that she is more like a sketch than a fully-formed character, as she is viewed in a series of images, myths and clichés, perhaps most importantly, as 'eine Fee in Trauer' (155).

In a similar way to Grete, another aspect of Cécile's 'otherness' is her Roman Catholicism. This is both discouraged by her husband (who presumably supports Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*), and viewed by Gordon as yet another challenge; he imagines that she was 'in einem festen Kloster erzogen' (12). It is notable that she seems to return to her Catholic roots just before her death (paradoxically, she commits suicide<sup>42</sup>), as she is pictured as a corpse, with a crucifix in her hand and a prayer book by her side (190).

Effi's 'otherness' mainly arises from her isolation in Kessin. She is uncomfortable in Innstetten's house, with only the servants for company. As Osborne has observed: 'Johanna is covertly hostile, the mad Frau Kruse communes only with her black hen, and Christel scarcely appears'.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Effi does not get on with the people around her. The people of Kessin are set in their ways, and do not want to accommodate 'strangers'. In a similar way to Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, and as observed in Chapter Two, there is a real sense that Effi is subject to 'society's judgement', in everything from the way she speaks to what she is wearing. This

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Breggin, 'Fontane's Aesthetics of the Slavic Race', *German Life and Letters*, 2003, 56, 3, pp. 213-222 (216).

<sup>42</sup> This seems to call Cécile's faith into question, as suicide was considered to be a mortal sin at the time.

<sup>43</sup> Suzanne Osborne, 'When a House Is Not a Home: The Alien Residences of *Effi Briest* and *Anna Karenina*', *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 1992, 5, pp. 67-77 (70).



becomes apparent on the many visits that she has to make with her husband. On one occasion, we are told that her dress was 'von einigen als zu präntiös für eine so jugendliche Dame, von andern als zu wenig dezent für eine Dame von gesellschaftlicher Stellung befunden' (638).

Although Effi does not have any formal religion herself, the Catholic element is present in the novel through the character of Roswitha, who is Effi's only genuine friend. It may be contended that Effi adopts some of Roswitha's faith in her final moments, as she reconciles herself with God in peace, and forgives Innstetten, an action which in its melancholic resignation ties in with the prevailing tone of the novel: 'Ich sterbe mit Gott und Menschen versöhnt, auch versöhnt mit ihm' (813).

Cécile and Effi are also victims of the third textual barrier, psychological illness, which Fontane depicts with great sensitivity (especially in the case of Effi). In the same way as the fairy-tale motif, Cécile's illnesses are introduced to us from the very outset. We are never made entirely aware of what her illness entails, but it is presumed that it is some kind of psychosomatic condition. She is seen wrapping herself up in travelling rugs (5), and St Arnaud makes reference to the fact that she needs to gain weight ('denn Zunehmen heisst Gesundwerden' (6)). However, far from being the concerned husband, St Arnaud uses Cécile's 'illness' as a means of controlling her, as he takes it upon himself to decide what activities she should or should not undertake. Bearing in mind that she is presented throughout as a vulnerable victim, Cécile's suicide comes as no great surprise; this, however, is related not directly, but in a letter from the court chaplain to St Arnaud. This reaffirms the control her

husband exerts over her, and presents a strong argument for Cécile to be considered a 'superfluous woman'.

Effi's illness takes hold much later in the novel, after she has been married for a while, and it is possibly related to the birth of her daughter. Indeed, Effi does not bond with her baby. She goes out walking quite aimlessly, usually on her own; when the baby goes with her, she does not want to proudly display her new child in the pram. She always walks ahead or behind Roswitha (who is pushing the pram), thereby seeming to want to distance herself from motherhood. The warning signs are there before she gives birth to Annie,<sup>44</sup> in some of her comments in a letter to her mother. Here, Effi reveals that she has been upset by Innstetten's use of the phrase 'ein liebes Spielzeug' to describe the baby: 'Mit diesem Wort wird er wohl recht haben, aber er sollte es lieber nicht gebrauchen, weil es mir immer einen kleinen Stich gibt und mich daran erinnert, wie jung ich bin, und dass ich noch halb in die Kinderstube gehöre' (663). Although this was the practice at the time, Effi is most keen to pass Annie on to Roswitha, and does not seem interested in her care. Effi's condition gradually worsens over time, and is exacerbated by the guilt surrounding her affair with Crampas and Innstetten's discovery of their love letters, which results in the worst fate to befall a mother: alienation from one's own child.

Although Effi's death is depicted as a tragic waste of a young life (she falls victim to her unexplained illness), it has been described as a 'return to peace in nature'.<sup>45</sup> In this way, it

<sup>44</sup> It is also of note that this is another baby Annie, which forms a link with another novel of adultery, *Анна Каренина*. Anna is unable to form a strong maternal bond with Annie, who is the child of her lover, Vronsky. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>45</sup> H. Ohl, cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 77.

might be viewed as the middle ground between Cécile's suicide and the happy ending of *L'Adultera*. The conclusion of this work has been subject to much critical debate; Demetz views it as 'sentimental clichés'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, one should perhaps question whether the remarkably progressive nature of the text is realistic. Not only does Fontane portray an equal partnership between Melanie and Rubehn, he also suggests the possibility of women working, in Melanie's desire to become a teacher. Mittelman emphasises the positive nature of the ending, and shows how Fontane has created a new, more equal role in marriage for women. She goes on to suggest that Fontane dispenses with the happy ending in the later works because an unhappy ending 'makes a greater appeal to the reader's sense of discomfort and so calls forth a stronger conviction that change is necessary'.<sup>47</sup> This, to my mind, would most certainly seem to be the case in *Effi Briest* in particular.

The titles of all of these works prompt much debate about the role of the heroine. Fontane himself had doubts about the title for what was eventually *L'Adultera*, as his correspondence to Wilhelm Friedrich (17<sup>th</sup> February 1881) shows. The work was initially meant to be called *Adultera*, but Fontane felt that this was 'zu schreiig',<sup>48</sup> as this seemed to imply that the title referred to Melanie herself, and this was not what Fontane intended. Indeed, he writes that 'der Titel 'L'Adultera' bezieht sich nicht auf meine Heldin, sondern auf einen berühmten Tintoretto dieses Namens'.<sup>49</sup> In another letter of this period, to his publishers, Fontane raises the question of the difference between the 'L'Adultera-Bild' and the 'L'Adultera-Figur'.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Peter Demetz, cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> H. Mittelman, cited in loc. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Wilhelm Friedrich, in *Theodor Fontane: Der Dichter über sein Werk, Band 2*, Richard Brinkmann and Waltraud Wiethölter, eds., Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich, 1977, p. 264.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Julius Grosser, 4/5th April 1880, in *ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Verlag Salo Schottländer, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1881, in *ibid.*, p. 266.

Fontane's awareness of the Bild-Figur dichotomy illustrates a keen sensitivity to the idea previously explored in Chapter Two (in Ladislav's comments to Naumann); that is, the difference between how women are immortalised in art and how they truly *are*.

Both Cécile and Effi are given the titles of the works in which they appear, so it is therefore important to consider whether these are their own stories to relate. This would seem not to be the case with Cécile, as key information about her, such as her past with her family, is revealed in a letter from a character that does not even appear in person in the novel (Gordon's sister). Bowman shows how Gordon can be conceived of as another narrator within the text, and that the entire novel can be viewed as an 'allegory of reading'.<sup>51</sup> Using the work of Roland Barthes on the 'hermeneutic code' (which formulates an enigma and then allows it to eventually be solved), he argues that *Cécile* displays one of the essential features of the code, which is 'the arbitrary and highly selective way in which the narrator allows information about the couple to reach the reader [...] which fully exercised narratorial omniscience would immediately make redundant'.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the omniscient narrator in *Cécile* himself becomes 'superfluous', and the authority in the text comes from Gordon, whose observations of Cécile are tainted by his passion for her. As Bowman has observed in this regard, Gordon 'robs her of her originality and specificity as a person'.<sup>53</sup>

In terms of 'voice' and narrative structure, Effi is much more 'vocal' than Cécile. The omniscient narrator here is much more detached, and is not supplemented by what might be

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<sup>51</sup> Peter James Bowman, 'Theodor Fontane's *Cécile*: An Allegory of Reading', *German Life and Letters*, 2000, 53, pp. 17-36.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

called a 'second narrator' like Gordon. Zimmermann has noted that because the authority of the narrator's voice is 'largely excluded, the structure of the novel is dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense of the word'.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, not only is Effi given more dialogue than Cécile, the reader also has access to her letters (to her parents, to Innstetten, and crucially, to Crampas), which affords a greater insight into her character. Effi is enigmatic and endearing, but she is not an enigma to the same extent as Cécile. Her death is delineated in much more sensitive terms than that of her predecessor; not only does she die peacefully, her degeneration is traced over a longer period, and we are aware that she has died at the time of the event. All of this means that *Effi Briest* is much more of a 'woman's story' than *Cécile*.

In a similar way to the balladesque novellas, actual barriers exist as metaphors for the restricted existences of Cécile and Effi; this is especially true of the former. On the visit to Quedlinburg, the red damask walls in the throne-room of the abbesses have distinct echoes of both the Red Room in *Jane Eyre* and the tiny nuns' cells in *Villette*. The reference to the nuns links back to Gordon's initial assertion about Cécile that she came from a convent, and reaffirms Cécile's lack of freedom. Furthermore, Cécile's struggle with her self-identity is elucidated through the story of the stolen mirror that follows. We are told that Cécile 'hätte sich gern in dem Kristallspiegel gesehen' (44), and then 'ohne zu wissen, was sie tat, an die Wandstelle klopfte, wo der Kristallspiegel seinen Platz gehabt hatte' (45). Here we are reminded of Gilbert's and Gubar's assertion that the looking glass is a symbol of women's oppression, because 'to be caught and trapped in a mirror is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self'.<sup>55</sup> That Cécile longs to view herself in the

<sup>54</sup> Zimmermann, p. 818.

<sup>55</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 37.

mirror is important, as it raises the question of whether she is genuinely able to see her true self or whether she is capable only of seeing the identity constructed for her by society. This 'framing' technique was also taken up by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in his famous film adaptation of *Effi Briest*; as Plater notes, the 'confining framing shots [...] help express the pervasive atmosphere of oppression and constraint that characterises the society into which Effi was born'.<sup>56</sup>

Effi is defined by the limitations of space only once she has become Baroness Innstetten. At Hohen-Cremmen, she is associated with the 'outside', as she plays with her companions and enjoys the fresh air of the Mark countryside. This is reinforced in her dislike of inherently feminine 'inside' tasks, such as her sewing ('diese langweilige Stickerei' [595]). However, upon her arrival in Kessin, she is immediately shut in; she has to go on visits with Innstetten to people whom she does not get on with and who do not seem to want to know her. Moreover, Effi's living space is controlled by Innstetten. Firstly, he tells her that her room has been done 'nach *meinen* Anordnungen' (626);<sup>57</sup> secondly, and perhaps more significantly, it is separated from his room by a large, heavy curtain. From the very beginning of their marriage, they lead almost separate lives, both inside the bedroom and out. Effi is not only 'was Apartes', she is also in purdah,<sup>58</sup> as Innstetten seeks to conceal his young beautiful wife away from the rest of the world.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Plater, 'Sets, Props and the "Havanaise" in Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest*', *German Life and Letters*, 1999, 52, 1, pp. 28-42 (28).

<sup>57</sup> My italics.

<sup>58</sup> 'Purdah', the practice of shielding women from men in Hindu and Islamic cultures, comes from the Persian and Urdu words for curtains.

The curtains upstairs that frighten Effi with the noise they make are a key example of an actual barrier, as they are a metaphor for the control that Innstetten exerts over her. First of all, although he knows that it is the curtains that make the noise above Effi's bedroom, by telling her the story of the wedding and the missing bride, he allows her to cultivate the idea that it is in fact the noise of ghostly shoes that she can hear. This frightens Effi, the child of nature, into being less spirited and lively. When she appears to have come up with a rational solution (to shorten the curtains), Innstetten stalls, and this never gets done. Furthermore, when Effi suggests that they convert the empty rooms upstairs into guest suites, Innstetten refuses. This demonstrates his inability to listen to his wife's suggestions, his desire to control her, and the way in which he is stuck in the past.

Like the 'fairy-tale heroines' Grete and Hilde, both Cécile and Effi are given the chance to overcome actual barriers, as the constraints of houses, walls and doors are balanced with the motif of the open window. Yet Cécile does not always take the opportunity of fresh air; she is constantly complaining about being cold, and Gordon refers to her as the woman 'wer hinter den herabgelassenen Rouleaux seine Tage vertrauert' (168). Effi, on the other hand, has a longing for fresh air. After her marriage, this is manifested in two aspects. Firstly, and as noted, she finds comfort in walking outside; secondly, she seems to enjoy travelling. Indeed, many modes of transport are alluded to in the novel; we hear about journeys on the train, tram, boat, carriage and sleigh, and Effi also rides a horse. The most important mode of transport in the novel is the sleigh, and it is during the sleigh ride back from the woodcutter's house that Effi's affair with Crampas begins. As previously explored in Chapter Two, travel imagery is a common feature of mid- to late-nineteenth century novels of adultery. It is used to signify the

moment of no return, when characters commit the initial act of adultery, and may indicate loss of control.<sup>59</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, it would certainly appear that, far from Effi's affair helping her to overcome the barrier of her stifling marriage to Innstetten, this loss of control erects yet more barriers, and guarantees that she will never achieve true happiness. In fact, and just before her liaison with Crampas begins in the sleigh, Effi is comforted by the idea of being snowed in. To this end, she thinks about Pastor Niemeyer's story of 'God's wall', the old widow who 'betete zu Gott, er möge doch "eine Mauer um sie bauen"', um sie vor dem Landesfeinde zu schützen' (704). In this sense, a barrier can protect and shield as well as stifle. At this point, when Effi's identity is being challenged (and she becomes an adulteress and lover as opposed to wife and mother), she seeks the security of a barrier. However, once she has committed adultery, she reverts to being averse to controlling influences. She claims that she 'kann die Schutzleder nicht leiden' (708), and, in a particularly moving scene, she is pictured next to Annie's cot in floods of tears at her status 'wie eine Gefangene' (718).

The first perceived barrier for Cécile and Effi is that they are both seen as children. Cécile is a grown woman (we do not see her during her childhood, but we are made aware of it, when she relates the story of how she came to leave home to Gordon towards the end of the novel), but she is treated like a child who has to rely on others, especially her husband, for everything. He decides how she should sit on the train (5) and what activities she can undertake without straining herself. It seems that this parental-like control even extends to being given permission to speak; she asks St Arnaud in the very first chapter 'aber ich darf sprechen?' (6).

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<sup>59</sup> Tanner, p. 68. The image of the train takes on particularly negative connotations in Tolstoy, especially in *Анна Каренина* and *Крейцеров соната*. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.



All of this is somewhat ironic when one considers that it is she, not he, who is in possession of a large estate.

Effi is also immediately established as being 'childlike', but this is quite understandable; at the beginning of the novel, she is little more than a child. This motif is taken up throughout the novel, as Effi repeatedly affirms her status as child in her actions and words. When we are introduced to her, she is playing games with her young friends, and she is just seventeen years old when she has Annie. In this sense, her marriage to Innstetten is made to seem all the more inappropriate. Krause describes Effi as a 'child-bride standing at the side of her mother's spurned lover who in turn could be her father',<sup>60</sup> which clearly invokes the paedophilic theme. Moreover, this constitutes another barrier to any happiness in Effi's marriage even before it begins, as she is always considered to be a substitute for her mother. On a broader contextual level, Zimmermann points out that Innstetten's tendency to teach his child-bride 'has its mirror image in the patriarchal relationship between the State and the people that was typical of nineteenth-century Prussia'.<sup>61</sup> It may also be the case that Effi's child-like nature sets her apart as Other, as she inhabits a world full of adults before she has grown up herself, and the fact that she dies back at her childhood home is a fitting end.

The second perceived barrier, that of class, status and the Prussian code of honour, is highly limiting to Cécile and Effi. Both women do not choose their own husbands, and although they are not short of money, they are under pressure to marry men with power and status. Although this pressure for Effi to marry Innstetten is subtle (her mother comments that 'wenn du nicht

<sup>60</sup> Edith H. Krause, 'Effi's Endgame', *Oxford German Studies*, 2003, 32, pp. 155-184 (180).

<sup>61</sup> Zimmermann, p. 817.

nein sagst [...], wirst du deine Mama weit überholen' [601]), this is accompanied by the expectation among her peers that they will all marry, and marry well. On this subject, Effi comments that Hulda 'wird sich ärgern. Nun bin ich ihr doch zuvorgekommen' (602). The conversation between Effi and Hulda about being an 'alte Jungfer' (596) elucidates the fear about a fate as a spinster that is shared by the young women.

As this chapter has already noted, the Prussian 'code of honour' plays a hugely important role in shaping the plot of *Effi Briest* and *Cécile*. Gordon's death is just as pointless as that of Crampas; possibly more so because he did not actually have an affair with Cécile at all. Furthermore, St Arnaud is more concerned about how the situation will affect his position in society than the fact that Cécile 'das uralte Frau-Eva-Spiel [...] gespielt haben [kann]' (182). In this respect, Innstetten is different; he is hurt because he does actually love Effi. In his discussions with Wüllersdorf before he decides to shoot Crampas, he says: 'ich liebe meine Frau, ja, seltsam zu sagen, ich liebe sie noch' (768).<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Fontane did not intend Innstetten to be a 'bad' character, describing him as 'ein ganz ausgezeichnetes Menschenexemplar'.<sup>63</sup> It has also been noted that Innstetten could not have acted in any other way, as he was 'firmly bound by the honour code of the Prussian officer corps to challenge Crampas'.<sup>64</sup> From this perspective, he too is a victim of the Prussian moral code, and is a good example of how Fontane's characters are not always painted in purely black and white terms.

What might be described as 'society's judgement' also induces Effi's parents to disown their daughter for a time. Even though they send her money, they are unable to bring themselves to

<sup>62</sup> Chapter Six will consider the implications of Karenin's reaction to Anna's affair.

<sup>63</sup> Letter to Clara Kühnast, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1895, *Der Dichter über sein Werk*, p. 452.

<sup>64</sup> Zimmermann, 1995, p. 823, n. 12.

take her in because of the disgrace that she has brought upon their family. Even after she goes back to Hohen-Cremmen towards the end of the novel, her mother still has her doubts as to what people will think. She comments that 'es ist sehr schwer, sich ohne Gesellschaft zu behelfen' and 'ein leichter Schritt ist es nicht' (801). However, for all the concern over Effi's morality within the text, the reader tends to sympathise with her plight. Fontane himself commented upon this in a letter to Clara Kühnast: 'das amüsiert mich natürlich, gibt mir aber auch zu denken, weil es wieder beweist, wie wenig den Menschen an der sogenannten "Moral" liegt und wie die liebenswürdigen Naturen dem Menschenherzen sympathischer sind'.<sup>65</sup>

It has become apparent that the 'innocent adulteresses', Cécile and Effi, are not able to fulfil their potential within the confines of the text. They are both snatched from childhood before they have a chance to fully develop into women. Indeed, whilst Cécile laments her lost childhood ('ich war noch ein halbes Kind, wurd' ich aus dieser Welt herausgerissen, um in die grosse Welt gestellt zu werden' [164]), Effi's tragic lost childhood is played out during the course of the novel. In this way, they may both be deemed 'superfluous women'. Indeed, Krause has observed that 'Effi's life amounts to little more than a string of meaningless episodes that cause her progressive suffering'.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, with their superfluity comes a passive resignation; as Rau has noted, 'when caught, they never rebel but always resign themselves to their fate'.<sup>67</sup> Cécile and Effi assume a traditional role for a woman in society (marriage) even though this is not necessarily what they want, as they do not have the

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Clara Kühnast, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1895, *Der Dichter über sein Werk*, p. 452.

<sup>66</sup> Krause, p. 180.

<sup>67</sup> Rau, 2004, p. 3. We might note that this resignation is similar to that of some of Storm's heroines, especially Anne-Lene.

confidence to break out of this mould and overcome the barriers that are placed in front of them. Moreover, their method of 'escape' from the artificially created world in which they find themselves is having an affair. This is not a viable alternative, as it represents transgression and the violation of a contract.<sup>68</sup> However, the final category of women to be discussed here – the social climbers – have both the strength of character and the viable option of marrying well and being faithful. It is to these characters that I shall now turn.

### Escape Method Part Two: Social Climbing

Fontane began writing *Frau Jenny Treibel* and *Mathilde Möhring* at about the same time, in the early 1890s. However, whereas *Frau Jenny Treibel* was published in 1892, *Mathilde Möhring* was not published until 1906, eight years after Fontane's death, and is usually viewed as being unfinished (by Fontane's standards, in any event, as he redrafted it just three times; he was normally painstaking in his revisions of texts<sup>69</sup>). Bance argues that it is not (as Norbert Frei has suggested) 'a different Fontane', but a 'demonstration of the unity of Fontane's artistic interests'.<sup>70</sup> I would agree with this positive assessment of the text, and would, furthermore, suggest that *Mathilde* represents the culmination of Fontane's sympathetic treatment of the Woman Question: not only is she an endearing (if a little forthright) character, certainly by the end of the novel, she also manages to make something of her life and have a career. Bance has concluded that *Mathilde* – unlike another social climber, *Jenny Treibel* – has the redeeming feature of realising that 'eternal calculating' is not the way to self-fulfilment.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Tanner, p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> Bance, 1974, p. 121.

<sup>70</sup> Bance, 1982, p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

This final section will explore the significance of the barriers that are put in front of these women and show how Mathilde in particular manages to overcome them.

It should first of all be noted that there are nowhere near as many textual barriers as in the previous Fontane works discussed. Jenny and Mathilde are most certainly not fairy-tale princesses. Indeed, Mathilde seems almost to be a parody of this, with her unattractive 'Gemmengesicht',<sup>72</sup> and Jenny is in her late fifties. Neither woman suffers from psychological illness nor has a tragic (nor even dramatic) ending. Jenny's is almost triumphant, as she sees the double wedding of Hildegard to Leopold, and Corinna to Marcell. Mathilde's ending might even be described as happy; although she is now a widow, we are told that she is going to become a teacher, thereby fulfilling her life's ambition.

On the other hand, both Jenny Treibel and Mathilde are isolated within the text, but in different ways. Similar to Fontane's women previously discussed, Mathilde is isolated because she is 'different'. According to her landlord, she is 'ein sehr gebildetes Mädchen' (306), which is viewed with suspicion, and she is unattractive. The narrator comments that she is 'hager' and that she has 'einen etwas griesen Teint' (306). However, Mathilde does have good relationships with other women, particularly her mother. They do everything together, from visits to the theatre to going to parties, and they even share a bed (although this is more out of necessity; their apartment is small and they rent their spare room out). Mathilde seems to even take on a pseudo-masculine role in the absence of her father, who died seven years before the story begins, by taking charge of her mother in all areas. She deals with their finances (she has

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<sup>72</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Gesammelte Werke, Dritter Band (Effi Briest, Mathilde Möhring)*, Peter Bramböck, ed., Nymphenburger Verlag, Munich, 1979, p. 307. All subsequent references to *Mathilde Möhring* will be to this edition.

savings, and she comes up with the idea of taking in a lodger), and she also takes care of her mother's personal needs. Even though Frau Möhring is not the most endearing character, Mathilde looks after her to the very end, and does not forget about her even though she has improved her social position (unlike Jenny, who longs to forget her lowly origins as Jenny Bürstenbinder, the shopkeeper's daughter).

Jenny's isolation seems to be almost self-imposed. Although she is the controlling figure in her family life, she does not have close relationships with many people, and those she does have are strained, especially with other women. She does not get on with Helene (her daughter-in-law) at all, but they are united in their snobbery against Corinna when Leopold announces their engagement. We are told that 'Jenny fühlte das Eis hinschmelzen, das acht Jahre lang ihre Schwiegermutterherz umgürtet hatte' (565). This process is reversed with Corinna; at the beginning of the novel, Jenny is almost like a substitute mother figure to her, but their relationship sours once she realises that Corinna wants to be involved with Leopold. She comments: 'in meinem Hause existiert keine Verlobung und keine Corinna [...] ich muss erkennen, dass man unklug daran tut, Personen zu verwöhnen und gesellschaftlich zu sich heraufzuziehen' (558). This statement seems to form the crux of Jenny's problem with Corinna; in this denial of her, Jenny reflects her own self-disgust about the way in which she has climbed the social ladder. Indeed, they are two very similar characters, and it may be that Jenny sees herself (albeit a younger version) in her. In the character of Corinna, Fontane suggests how it could have been for Jenny had she not been so ambitious. Conversely, in the character of Jenny, he shows how Corinna might be twenty years hence. Furthermore, although Corinna's ending has a resignatory tone about it, marriage to Marcell is not

necessarily a bad thing. Corinna tells him that although she did want to marry Leopold 'ganz ernsthaft', she did not love him (587).

The titles of both of these social novels imply that the plot will centre on the heroine. However, early Fontane critics suggested that *Frau Jenny Treibel* would be better named 'Herr Kommerzienrat Treibel', as the story is more about him than her.<sup>73</sup> Undeniably, Jenny is not the focal point in the same way as, for example, Effi (who experiences great tragedy), but she is positioned firmly at the centre of the narrative in terms of plot. It is, after all, her objections to Corinna's advances towards Leopold that form the main thrust of the storyline. Moreover, by its very nature as a social novel, *Frau Jenny Treibel* is rich in dialogue, and the eponymous heroine has more than her fair share, displaying a forthright opinion on most topics. Therefore it may be suggested that she tells her own story. However, she is only the centre of her world by virtue of the fact that everyone is afraid of her, even her own son. Corinna notes that 'der arme Leopold hat eigentlich eine grosse Furcht vor ihr' (555). This is, therefore, a very superficial and shallow existence, and it is of note that she does not achieve true happiness in the same way that Mathilde does. Although it cannot be denied that Fontane's treatment of her is satirical at times, there is simultaneously a real sense that his criticism, filtered through the somewhat detached omniscient narrator, is directed more towards Berlin society than at Jenny.

The title of the novel was a rich source of debate for Fontane and his publisher, Julius Rodenberg. Fontane originally intended to call it 'Frau Kommerzienrätin', with another

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<sup>73</sup> The view of Joseph Ettliger, writing in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1909. Cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 9.

alternative being 'Frau Kommerzienrat Treibel'.<sup>74</sup> The final choice for the title was between this latter title and the title that the novel eventually took. Both Fontane's wife and daughter preferred 'Frau Kommerzienrat Treibel', but Fontane and Rodenberg felt that 'Frau Jenny Treibel' was the best choice.<sup>75</sup> One might observe that Jenny is the only one of Fontane's heroines who is defined in the title by her marital status; all of his other eponymous heroines are addressed by either their first name alone (Cécile, Stine [1890]) or by their first name and surname (Effi Briest, Grete Minde, Mathilde Möhring). As the novel progresses, it is clear that the emphasis on the 'Frau' in the title is there for very good reason; Jenny would not occupy her current position in society had she not married the Kommerzienrat. However, the other two alternative titles, with no mention of any part of a name that is unique to Jenny herself, would have further defined her in terms of her role. Therefore, it may be mooted that Fontane allows Jenny to maintain a part of her original identity in assigning the novel this particular title, whilst conceding that marriage is her 'escape' from her origins, and that this would not have been possible without it. The use of her Christian name in the title also draws the reader in to feel more sympathy for Jenny.

Mathilde's path to self-improvement is also at the heart of the plot, and it is very much her story. One might note that the title is that of her maiden name (admittedly, she is not married for long); unlike Jenny, she is not defined by her marriage, but she is able to use it to climb the social ladder. Mathilde does not abandon her social origins entirely, but she does wish to move on. This is best illustrated in the irritation that she feels upon receiving a letter from her mother which is marked 'Frau Bürgermeister Grossmann, geborene Möhring'; she comments

<sup>74</sup> Fontane's letter to his son, also Theodor, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1888, *Der Dichter über sein Werk*, p. 425.

<sup>75</sup> Letter to Julius Rodenberg, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1891, *ibid.*, p. 430.



that 'Möhring ist doch das wenigste' (389). Mathilde chooses to retain her married name (although her mother wants her to change it back to Möhring), saying that she is proud to be Hugo's widow (402). Mathilde is also a 'vocal' female character; her forthright opinions provide a great many humorous moments, especially in conversations with her mother (Bance has commented on her 'mother's objections to Mathilde's too direct and unladylike manner of expressing herself'<sup>76</sup>), and reveal a woman not afraid to say what she thinks.

Both Jenny and Mathilde seem to be able to overcome the actual barriers present in their stories. Jenny's opening scene sees her huffing and puffing her way up the stairs to Professor Schmidt's flat: 'von diesem aus stieg sie, so schnell ihre Korpulenz es zuliess, eine Holzstiege mit abgelaufenen Stufen hinauf' (454). Jenny is far from the beautiful, enigmatic heroines such as Cécile, but what should be highlighted here is that despite her struggle to ascend the stairs, she is successful in the end. Here, it can be argued that the actual barrier of the stairs is representative of Jenny's struggle in life to get to the top of the social ladder.

Mathilde also has actual barriers to overcome, and two striking examples serve to illustrate how she gradually transcends her social origins. The first instance is after the visit to the theatre when she is waiting for Hugo by a barrier. He does not show up, but Mathilde does not let this worry her. We are told that 'sie war aber von einem unverilgbaren Optimismus der Hoffnungsseligkeit [...], und sagte sich: Er muss natürlich seinen Freund glückwünschen, und er kann nicht an zwei Stellen zugleich sein' (329). She hereby demonstrates that she is not deterred by setbacks, and is eminently practical and sensible. The second example indicates how Mathilde has made progress up the social ladder, and is the most notable barrier image in

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<sup>76</sup> Bance, 1974, p. 129.

the novel. Here, she sits and reads to Hugo at the end of his bed, which is the chaise longue that she has worked so hard to attain; Bance notes that it 'represents the element in Mathilde's character that makes her stand out from her milieu, the element of ambition or aspiration'.<sup>77</sup> This action forms part of Mathilde's plan to get Hugo to view her as a suitable match. In this way, Mathilde is able to use the 'feminine' job of *Vorleser* to achieve her social aspirations; unlike Cécile (the other female character to assume this role), this is not viewed as being immoral in any way.

The barriers of external adornment, such as hair and clothing, are a greater challenge to Jenny and Mathilde. In broader terms, they are both influenced by the importance society places upon being attractive. As observed, Jenny is not only an older woman, she is also overweight. In this regard, she uses both her jewellery and clothing as 'masks' to hide behind. Furthermore, these external trappings of wealth aim at removing all trace of her more humble beginnings: 'ihre Herkunft aus dem kleinen Laden in der Adlerstrasse war in ihrer Erscheinung bis auf den letzten Rest getilgt. Alles wirkte reich und elegant' (468). Jenny is also concerned with how she looks in comparison to other women, especially Helene: 'und so kehrte sie [...], den Spiegel zu befragen, ob sie sich neben ihrer Hamburger Schwiegertochter auch werde behaupten können. Helene war freilich nur halb so alt' (462). By emphasising Jenny's preoccupation with her self-image, Fontane hints at a lack of true confidence, which constitutes a barrier to Jenny's happiness. One might also enquire as to whom Jenny's question about her appearance is directed; it may be the 'patriarchal voice of judgement' that resounds from behind a mirror, as if to affirm a woman's identity.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>78</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 38.

In contrast, Mathilde overcomes the barrier of her unattractive physical appearance during the course of the text. On her seventeenth birthday, she positions herself away from social activity: 'sie hatte sich in einiger Entfernung von der Kegelbahn aufgestellt' (307), thus isolating herself because she is embarrassed about her appearance. Whilst on the sidelines, she overhears two men making unflattering comments on her looks (her 'Gemmengesicht'). She subsequently looks in a mirror, and confirms to herself that this is true (again, one should note the mirror motif). However, Mathilde very quickly realises that her physical appearance need not be an obstacle, and is quite good humoured about it. The next time the mirror motif is used, Mathilde has overcome her need to conform by being beautiful. Whilst her mother laments Mathilde's ugliness (specifically because it is an obstacle to finding a husband) Mathilde replies to her comment that 'wie du da vorhin vor dem Spiegel standest, von der Seite bist du doch beinah hübsch' (316) with the witty riposte, 'ich kann doch nun mal nicht immer von der Seite stehen' (317). Mathilde continues to reveal a lack of concern with physical appearance; later on in the novel, she comments to her sister-in-law that she is 'auch für ein hübsches Kleid und für Vergnügen, aber mit Arbeit muss es anfangen' (359).

In this sense, one might contend that both characters, especially Mathilde, are denied their beauty and femininity in order to get by in a 'masculine' world. However, and as previously noted of Cécile, being 'feminine' (that is, beautiful) can form a barrier to autonomy. In contrast, neither Jenny nor Mathilde are distracting to men by being bewitching or alluring, and they thereby overcome the barrier of beauty hiding their true selves. Furthermore, in Mathilde's acceptance of her appearance, Fontane depicts a truly 'emancipated' woman, who is unaffected by society's perception of how a woman should look.

The perceived barriers that face Jenny and Mathilde mainly take the form of concerns about class. In this regard, one may view an earlier Fontane heroine, Lene from *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, as a precursor to Mathilde. She falls in love with an upper-class man, but accepts that she is not destined to be of a higher social class. Mathilde, however, overcomes this barrier in two ways. Firstly, she does not accept that she is not entitled to be upwardly mobile; secondly, she does not actually fall in love with Hugo. Mathilde is able to 'play the system' like a man; this reverses the roles in comparison with other Fontane heroines, because it is she who stands to gain from making a 'good match'. Jenny has also used her husband's status to achieve social mobility, but (as observed) she remains unhappy with her self-identity. In this way, one can view Jenny as a transitional character to Mathilde, who is, to my mind, Fontane's most emancipated female character. Harrigan has noted that Mathilde is different to other Fontane heroines in 'seeking independence in the end without a male prop'.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, and to return to Bance's point, Jenny never comes to realise that 'eternal calculating' is not the way to self-fulfilment. Indeed, she remains 'calculating' to the very end. Mathilde, on the other hand, seems to have total control of her life. She uses the weaker male figure of Hugo to achieve her own social aspirations, but is subsequently able to be happy because she remains true to herself. This shows real development in Fontane's 'feminism' from both the balladesque novellas and the novels of adultery.

The Prussian code of honour, the devastating effect of which is seen in *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*, is not evident in either *Mathilde Möhring* or *Frau Jenny Treibel*, even though they are set in the same era. The setting, however, does differ; whereas the social novels are set in the city of Berlin itself, the main action of *Cécile* and *Effi Briest* (and significantly, the affairs) takes

<sup>79</sup> R. Harrigan, cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 49.

place in the country. Here, then, one may apply Tanner's notion of the 'city' and the 'field' (or alternatively, Lotman's binary opposition of 'inside' and 'outside'), where the 'outside' or 'field' is where transgression takes place, because within the 'inside' or 'city', things can be heard so are therefore subject to the rule of law.<sup>80</sup> However, one may also consider how Jenny in particular is in fact subject to a 'code of honour' of sorts; the one that she has constructed for herself, which manifests itself as snobbery. That she is almost always referred to as 'Kommerzienrätin' (as opposed to her Christian name, unlike all other main female characters in Fontane) suggests both a detachment from the personal, and her own emphasis on her status. Indeed, she seems almost to hide behind her title, as if it is a mask, a self-imposed barrier. Mathilde too has her own, wholly positive 'code of honour', epitomised by her father's dying words to her, 'Halte dich propper!' (305). Mathilde seeks throughout her life to carry out this mantra, and, far from being a barrier, this affords her greater autonomy, as she never allows her own standards to slip, and is unfailing in her pursuit of self-advancement.

Some critics have condemned this part of Mathilde's personality, deeming her to be 'hard-hearted, mercenary and ruthless'.<sup>81</sup> However, this does not take into account the fact that Mathilde displays a real sense of loyalty, and love, towards her mother; they are very close, and they remain so to the very end. Moreover, she plans to become a teacher, by its very nature a caring profession, and one carried out by independently-minded women in texts that this thesis has considered (Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and Mary Garth's mother in *Middlemarch*). In this way, Mathilde's plans to follow this career path allies Fontane with female authors, and may be conceived of as 'feminism'. Furthermore, and unlike female

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<sup>80</sup> Tanner, pp. 19 and 23.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Bance, 1974, p. 127. No reference given.

characters in Russian literature, such as Turgenev's Elena or Khvoshchinskaya's Lolenka, Mathilde does not end up alone,<sup>82</sup> and (perhaps more importantly from a feminist perspective) she is able to form and maintain a close relationship with her mother.

Neither Jenny nor Mathilde uses the unviable 'escape route' of adultery, as they both remain faithful to their husbands. In this way, they are less 'threatening' to society, as they are not seen to subvert order. However, they do use society to their own advantage and challenge the status quo (in the sense that they do not allow themselves to be constrained by their class). Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, they do not face as many barriers as the 'fairy-tale heroines', or the 'innocent adulteresses'. This suggests a movement towards tangible freedom and autonomy for Fontane's female characters, as opposed to the sympathy afforded to the likes of Effi and Cécile. Although Jenny and Mathilde are not necessarily as 'likeable' as characters such as Effi, they are able to emancipate themselves because they accept the social norm of marrying well and staying faithful. As Chambers has it, *Frau Jenny Treibel* 'answers the woman's desire for autonomy with the freedom to choose what the prevailing patriarchal order requires her to want'.<sup>83</sup> Although this 'freedom' has a somewhat resignatory quality, it is freedom all the same within the context of late-nineteenth-century Prussia.

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<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of this point in Khvoshchinskaya, see Andrew, 2007, pp. 105-127.

<sup>83</sup> Chambers, 1997, p. 94.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has not been to repudiate Fontane's deserved reputation as a champion of women's rights in his depiction of late-nineteenth-century Prussia. Rather, it has been to shed new light on this issue, and to show how, paradoxically, in presenting women with barriers, Fontane gradually affords his heroines the ability to overcome them. There is a clear movement in Fontane from passivity to activity in the roles afforded to women, which culminates in Mathilde Möhring, the most emancipated woman in his works.<sup>84</sup> The 'fairy-tale heroines' Grete and Hilde are, in the end, passive, because they are both unable to escape from the fairy-tale worlds constructed for them. Cécile and Effi attempt to escape through their 'innocent adultery', but social and moral codes dictate that this is not allowed. The 'social climbers', on the other hand, are able to escape *and* gain their freedom through the socially acceptable medium of marriage and a husband to whom they remain faithful. As Fontane's heroines make this transition from passivity (fairy tales) through to activity (social climbing), they are faced with fewer textual, actual and perceived barriers. On a final note, Bance's observations on 'continuity within change' may equally be applied to Fontane's exposition of the Woman Question from the balladesque works to the social novels. 'Continuity' is represented by the presence of female-gendered barriers throughout Fontane's works, and 'change' is manifested in his later heroines' ability to overcome them. In this way, the transition from passivity to activity is complete.

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<sup>84</sup> This movement is also realistic in historical terms, as women had moved on from the restricted roles they were assigned in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany depicted in *Grete Minde* and *Ellernklipp*.

## Chapter Five

### Turgenev and the Woman Question: Layering Barriers

Turgenev is, perhaps more than any author, the writer of Russia's women.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Ivan Turgenev has traditionally been viewed as one of the nineteenth-century Russian male writers most sympathetic towards the position of women, particularly in his depiction of positive heroines such as Elena Stakhova of *Накануне*. However, in what is almost a direct inversion of work that has identified Tolstoy as 'crypto-feminist',<sup>2</sup> Turgenev has come to occupy an uneasy position amongst feminist literary critics. In her observation that 'the role of many female characters in male-authored Russian literature is to act as the Other', Marsh has noted that 'this phenomenon finds its most widespread expression in the novels of Turgenev'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, not only does he depict enigmatic heroines such as Asya and Zinaida from *Первая любовь*, it might be argued that Turgenev's long line of 'strong women', such as Natalya (*Рудин*), Liza (*Дворянское гнездо*), Elena, and later incarnations such as Marianna (*Новь*, 1877) are also Other, because they act as a foil to the superfluous man, with whom they fall in love.<sup>4</sup> Heldt has deemed Turgenev's idealisation of these positive heroines to be 'terrible

<sup>1</sup> Costlow, 1991, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> See Barbara Heldt's *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Marsh, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gheith refers to this type of heroine as the 'necessary woman'. Gheith, p. 226.



perfection', which was 'frightening to men who could not match it in "manly" action and inhibiting to women who were supposed to incarnate it, or else'.<sup>5</sup>

It was against this background that my previous work sought to clarify Turgenev's position in the debate on the Woman Question.<sup>6</sup> This earlier study, which adopted the Neo-Formalist approach used by Michael O'Toole and Joe Andrew,<sup>7</sup> looked at the degree of Turgenev's 'feminism' in the many different female character 'types' to be found in his fiction. In its analysis of the 'Strong Woman',<sup>8</sup> the *femme fatale*, the 'mysterious heroine' and the 'innocent heroine'<sup>9</sup> types, it argued for a re-evaluation of the way in which many of Turgenev's women were labelled, not least because his more interesting female characters<sup>10</sup> are an amalgamation of more than one type. The present study will build upon my previous work, by applying the concept of textual, actual and perceived barriers to provide a re-vision of Turgenev and the Woman Question.

My previous work sought to place Turgenev in a Russian context, by way of comparisons with his contemporaries, especially Chernyshevsky, Khvoshchinskaya and Tolstoy. Within this context, it was concluded – perhaps unsurprisingly – that Turgenev represented the 'middle way'. Although Turgenev's place in Russian discussions of the Woman Question will be

<sup>5</sup> Heldt, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Ambrose, 'The Woman Question in Russian Literature, 1830-1900', Masters Dissertation, Keele, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> This approach considers works in terms of plot, narrative structure, point of view, theme, characterisation, setting and symbol. For an example with a feminist perspective, see Andrew, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'Strong Woman' was first coined by Vera Dunham Sandomirsky. See her 'The Strong-Woman Motif', in Black, Cyril, ed., *The Transformation of Russian Society: Aspects of Social Change Since 1861*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and Massachusetts, 1960, pp. 459-483. Variations of this type are the 'New Woman', the 'radical heroine', the 'emancipated woman' and the 'necessary woman', as discussed by Gheith (see note 4, above).

<sup>9</sup> Marsh has identified how the 'innocent heroine' may be seen as a Russian variant of the 'Angel in the House' in nineteenth-century English literature. See Marsh, 1998, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Irina in *Дым* (1866) and Mariya Polozova in *Вешние воды*.

considered, this chapter will aim to broaden the focus, by considering Turgenev as part of a wider European context. This is a particularly useful approach to Turgenev, a truly 'European' writer, who travelled extensively throughout Europe and lived in both France and Germany for extended periods. Furthermore, and as observed in the Introduction, he was personally acquainted with both Eliot and Storm. The current chapter, therefore, is vital in linking this thesis together as a whole.

Although most of Turgenev's works (which include novels, short stories, poems and plays) have scope for discussion of the Woman Question, it is not possible to go into the analytical detail required by looking at such a large number and variety of texts. To this end, this chapter will focus upon those generally considered to be Turgenev's finest: *Ася*, *Дворянское гнездо*, *Первая любовь*, *Накануне* and *Отцы и дети*. Future work may be required on Turgenev's later works, particularly with reference to his depiction of more complex *femme fatale* types such as Irina and Mariya Polozova, and his final 'New Woman', Marianna.

Before the semiotics of barriers in Turgenev's fiction are analysed, this chapter will first of all explore aspects of Turgenev's relationships with women and aim to contextualise his contribution to the Woman Question.

## Turgenev, Women and The 'Extra-Text'

Perhaps there weren't any women such as he described, but after he had written about them, they appeared. That's true; I myself later observed Turgenev's women in real life.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their numerous quarrels, Tolstoy was complimentary about Turgenev's presentation of authentic female characters. Although Tolstoy's comments above hint at an almost prophetic ability to do so, one might more accurately locate the source of Turgenev's considerable talent to depict many varied types of female characters in his fiction in his relationships with (and experience of) women in many areas of his life. Furthermore, in another context, Turgenev has famously been credited with an ability to present sociological observations of character 'types' who are authentic, without necessarily identifying with their beliefs.<sup>12</sup> To this end, this chapter will consider the possibility that this 'negative capability' is evident in his depiction of female characters. Here, Lotman's theory that *context* (the 'extra-text') is in opposition to *text* will be applied to a reading of Turgenev and the Woman Question.<sup>13</sup>

If we turn first of all to Turgenev's relationship with his mother, Varvara Petrovna Turgeneva (née Lutovinova), he learned from a very early age that a woman could be just as cruel and brutal as any man. His mother's tyranny is well-documented in biographies of his life,<sup>14</sup> and the more unsavoury aspects of her personality find expression in such figures as the unnamed mistress who orders the killing of the eponymous dog in *Муму* (1854). However, what has

<sup>11</sup> Tolstoy's comments in a letter to Fet (23<sup>rd</sup> January 1860). Cited in April Fitzlyon, 'I.S. Turgenev and the "woman" question', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1983, pp. 161-173 (168).

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'Fathers and Children: Turgenev and the Liberal Predicament', The Romanes Lecture 1970, in Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, Rosemary Edmonds, trans., Penguin, London, 1975, pp. 7-62 (9).

<sup>13</sup> See Shukman, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> For examples, see David Magarshack, *Turgenev: A Life*, Faber and Faber, London, 1954 and Leonard Schapiro, *Turgenev: His Life and Times*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978.

been described as her 'bestial cruelty'<sup>15</sup> was accompanied by considerable enlightenment; she was well educated herself and believed in education for girls, as well as for the serf children on her estate, for whom she founded schools. Moreover, in the relationship between his parents, Turgenev became familiar with the dichotomy of the 'weak man' and the 'strong woman', as his father was an 'amiable and weak philanderer' who had married Turgenev's mother for her substantial fortune.<sup>16</sup>

Turgenev's long-standing companionship with the singer Pauline Viardot – both a talented and emancipated woman – is also important for a consideration of the female influences upon him. Indeed, most of the time he spent abroad came about just as much as a result of following Pauline between France and Germany as of his admiration of the West. The kind of 'love triangle' that resulted between Turgenev, Pauline and her husband, Louis Viardot, was not uncommon amongst the intelligentsia of nineteenth-century Russia, and such an arrangement is depicted directly in Chernyshevsky's *Что делать?*. However, Turgenev's relationship with the Viardots was less to do with women's sexual freedom (as was the case in Chernyshevsky's novel, and the real life *ménages à trois* such as the Panayevs and Nekrasov) and more about 'thralldom' for Turgenev.<sup>17</sup> Pauline remained his long-standing fascination; he is reported to have said how he 'belonged to her entirely, just as a dog belongs to his master'.<sup>18</sup> His claim that she kept him at her feet by 'witchcraft'<sup>19</sup> encapsulates the notion of being 'bewitched' by an enigmatic woman, which is given literary treatment in the effect of characters such as

<sup>15</sup> Fitzlyon, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Edmund Wilson, 'Turgenev and the Life-Giving Drop', in David Magarshack, ed., *Turgenev's Literary Reminiscences and Autobiographical Fragments*, Faber and Faber, London, 1958, pp. 9-59 (23).

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Marina Ledkovsky, *The Other Turgenev: From Romanticism to Symbolism*, Jal-Verlag, Würzburg, 1973, p. 56.

Zinaida and Mariya Polozova on the male protagonists Volodya and Sanin. Yet for all the time Turgenev devoted to Pauline, there is some doubt as to whether their relationship was ever consummated. Turgenev remained, as he often described it, 'on the edge of someone else's nest'.<sup>20</sup>

A more positive aspect of his relationship with Pauline Viardot was that it brought Turgenev into contact with other talented and emancipated women. The most notable of these was the French novelist and publicist George Sand, who was both one of the key figures in the literary discussions of the Woman Question in Russia and an important influence on Turgenev's developing *œuvre*. Her novels became popular in Russia from the mid-1830s, and had as their central concern the idea of freedom in love.<sup>21</sup> Her work prompted varied reactions from different sections of Russian society: whereas some critics (Bulgarin, Grech) accused her of 'loveless promiscuity', Belinsky, Herzen and Bakunin viewed Sand as a 'new kind of socialist Christian saviour'.<sup>22</sup> Turgenev was influenced by Sand's work and he read her novels avidly.<sup>23</sup> He also admired Elena Gan, who was known as 'the Russian George Sand';<sup>24</sup> following in the path of his much-valued friend, the radical critic Belinsky, he praised her work highly.<sup>25</sup> Turgenev did not, however, see Sand as a 'feminist'; rather, as a 'masterly writer and stimulating thinker on a variety of subjects'.<sup>26</sup> He was also quick to defend her in the face of

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Leonard Schapiro, 'Critical Essay – Spring Torrents', in Ivan Turgenev, *Spring Torrents*, Leonard Schapiro, ed. and trans., Penguin, London, 1972, pp. 183-239 (201).

<sup>21</sup> Stites, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev and George Sand: an Improbable Entente*, Macmillan, London, 1981, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Smyrniw, 'Turgenev's Emancipated Women', *The Modern Language Review*, 1985, 80, pp. 97-105 (97).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzlyon, p. 165.

'banal and vulgar remarks'<sup>27</sup> by Tolstoy, which related to her position as a woman writer, the idea of which Tolstoy found abhorrent. Here, then, it would seem that Turgenev based his judgement of someone upon their talent and not their gender.

However, this was most certainly not always the case. In his review of Evgeniya Tur's 1851 novel *Племянница*, which Costlow has described as 'a manifesto of his own ambitions in the novel and a discourse on art and "objectivity" phrased in strongly gendered language',<sup>28</sup> Turgenev attacks Tur's novel for being 'long-winded and personal'.<sup>29</sup> He cites its subjectivity, a quality that he assigns specifically to women writers, as being 'unliterary'. For all he admired Sand and Gan, Turgenev includes them as his examples of 'subjective talent' alongside Tur. As Costlow summarises Turgenev's argument: 'Pride of place is given to those works that live independently of their creators. Works that retain their immediate, felt link with the writer hold a secondary, lower honour'.<sup>30</sup> Costlow goes on to explore the wider significance of Turgenev's use of part of *Племянница* as the basis for his 1868 story, *Несчастливая*, and argues convincingly that his criticism of the novel acts as a justification for his subsequent 'appropriation' of Tur's text.<sup>31</sup>

If we are to consider Turgenev in a broader European context, we might note how this subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy has implications for his relationship with George Eliot, a writer renowned for her objectivity. Rather curiously, then, it was *The Mill on the Floss* that

<sup>27</sup> Letter to V. P. Botkin, February 8/20th, 1856, in *Turgenev's Letters* (two volumes), David Lowe, ed., Ardis, Michigan, 1983, Volume 1, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Costlow, 1991, p. 330.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>30</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

Turgenev admired the most, because he felt it was her 'most natural work'.<sup>32</sup> As Chapter Two has argued, this novel was Eliot's most autobiographical, and might therefore also be described as 'subjective', a quality which Turgenev previously denounced! This highlights Turgenev's ambivalence just as much as his diverging opinions on Sand and Gan, and also calls the arguments of his earlier review into question.

Turgenev's connections with Eliot, both biographical and literary, should also be mentioned here. Although they did not meet in person until 1871, Turgenev knew George Henry Lewes, whom he met in Berlin in 1838-1839, and Lewes's *Life of Goethe* was one of Pauline Viardot's favourite books. Both Eliot and Turgenev were also acquainted with William Ralston and Alexander Herzen.<sup>33</sup> Although there is no direct evidence that they read each other's books before they met, parallels have been drawn between Turgenev's Liza and Eliot's Romola and Dinah Morris (*Adam Bede*); in October 1869, a review in the *Spectator* compared these three heroines, praising them for their truthfulness and spiritual nobility.<sup>34</sup> We may also consider Liza alongside Dorothea Brooke in terms of their self-sacrificing natures and religious fervour. Commenting that Eliot's and Turgenev's 'compatibility' was hardly surprising, Waddington cites numerous reasons for this; perhaps most importantly, that the 'notorious masculinity of one was matched in the other by an elusive femininity'.<sup>35</sup> In the light of these remarks, one may conceive of Turgenev's 'femininity' as an extra-textual barrier, in a similar way to Eliot's 'masculinity' (as discussed in Chapter Two). As has been suggested,

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<sup>32</sup> Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev and England*, Macmillan, London, 1980, p. 231.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>34</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

although Turgenev was held up as a champion of women's rights, this was not always the case.

### **Turgenev and the Woman Question**

Catriona Kelly has shown how early Russian feminism had two major concerns: firstly, the inequality of women within the family, and secondly, women's inequality of opportunity in society, which encompassed both the assertion of their right to work and their right to an education.<sup>36</sup> In the period that Turgenev began to produce his most important works, and within the Russian context, the Woman Question came to refer to public discussion of social and economic changes in women's lives, and was first raised explicitly in the period immediately following the Crimean War and the death of Nicholas I in 1855.<sup>37</sup> The Woman Question was one of the many 'accursed questions' which arose under the less reactionary regime of Alexander II, and one with which Turgenev engaged. The aim of this section is to explore both Turgenev's contribution to the debate within Russia itself and to compare his contribution to that of other European writers, especially George Eliot. Two key areas will be dealt with here: women's education and the question of what role a woman should play in society.

Before this, however, this section will now examine the literary context of the debate on the Woman Question, and how Turgenev played an important part in this. Although it was mainly women writers such as Elena Gan and Mariya Zhukova who began engaging with the question

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<sup>36</sup> Kelly, 1994b, p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> Costlow, 1994, p. 61.



of women's rights and freedoms in the 1830s and 1840s,<sup>38</sup> the polemic that arose between Turgenev, Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya and Nikolai Chernyshevsky (in *Накануне*, *Пансионерка* and *Что делать?* respectively) had more impact upon the development of the Woman Question in Russian literature. This was partly because it was preceded by important social developments in the late 1850s, particularly, the work of Mikhail Mikhailov, who refuted the anti-feminist writings of Jules Michelet and Proudhon,<sup>39</sup> but also because of the relaxed censorship laws under Alexander II, which meant that writers were better able to debate such 'accursed questions' more freely.

Although it is probably the case that Elena remains "on the eve" of the real day<sup>40</sup> (that is, it was not her time to advance the 'cause' of women), one might argue that her question at the end of *Накануне*, 'Что делать в России?'<sup>41</sup> prompted the emphatically positive responses of both Khvoshchinskaya and Chernyshevsky in their 'New Women', Lolenka and Vera Pavlovna. We should also make the distinction between the 'New Woman' in the Turgenevan context and the 'New Woman' type depicted by these later writers. The first factor in this is that, although they were written just over a year apart, society was beginning to change rapidly between the publication of *Накануне* in 1860 and the appearance of *Пансионерка* in 1861, following the emancipation of the serfs. By the time *Что делать?* appeared in 1863, the 'New Women' for whom this novel became a 'bible' were much more advanced than Elena.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, we must consider that Turgenev's novel is set in the past, just before the

<sup>38</sup> Examples from male writers were Alexander Herzen's *Кто виноват?* and Aleksandr Druzhinin's *Полинька Сакс* (1846 and 1847 respectively).

<sup>39</sup> Fitzlyon, p. 167.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> Ivan Turgenev, *Накануне*, in I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh. Sochineniia v piadnadtsati tomakh*, M. P. Alekseev et al., eds, Nauka, Moscow-Leningrad, 1961-8, 1964, pp. 7-192 (165). All subsequent references to Turgenev's artistic works will be to this edition.

<sup>42</sup> Fitzlyon, p. 169.

Crimean War; the society depicted (pre-Alexander II) is quite different from that shown at the conclusion of *Пансионерка* and in *Что делать?*. In this context, Elena's action of choosing Insarov, and thus rejecting her parents' choice of suitor in Kurnatovsky, is certainly that of a 'new' woman.

### **Что делать в России?: Education, career and self-sacrifice**

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the only women who were educated were the daughters of the nobility. The main aim of this education was to produce young ladies with 'accomplishments' (for example, playing the piano and speaking French). This remained the case until the beginning of the Crimean War, when Nikolai Pirogov (who was a surgeon and educator) was asked by Elena Pavlovna (the sister-in-law of Nicholas I) about the possibility of sending female nurses to the front. Pirogov agreed, identifying that 'women must take a role in society more nearly corresponding to their human worth and their mental capabilities'.<sup>43</sup> In this way, the previous notion of education was challenged, and women were able to do something more 'useful'.

It is this view of education that is central to an understanding of Turgenev's engagement with the Woman Question. Indeed, whilst presenting positive heroines such as Elena who do something 'useful', he is critical of an education that makes a woman 'accomplished'. This section will now explore some examples from Turgenev's fiction, beginning with *Ася*.

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<sup>43</sup> Cited in Stites, p. 30.

This short story details the attempts of the unnamed male narrator, N.N., to solve the enigma that is Asya. One of his answers to her 'strange' behaviour is that she has received an unconventional education: 'Она довольно хорошо говорила по-французски и по-немецки; но по всему было заметно, что она с детства не была в женских руках и воспитание получила странное' (87). Asya also rebels against the more conventional aspects of her education. Gagin reveals how, when he placed her 'в один из лучших пансионов', she 'дичится' and 'продолжала идти своей дорогой' (96). In this way, Asya's poor behaviour at school seems to anticipate another 'boarding-school girl', Khvoshchinskaya's Lolenka. In another aspect of her education, Asya may be compared to heroines from English literature. Like Jane Eyre and Maggie Tulliver, Asya turns to books. However, this is not as a means of escape from her everyday reality as is the case with these English heroines. Gagin claims that it is because 'она хотела быть не хуже других барышен [...]. Что тут могло выйти путного? Неправильно начатая жизнь слагалась неправильно, но сердце в ней не испортилось, ум уцелел' (94, 96). Gagin's view that Asya's reading has had an adverse effect on her personality introduces this theme, one that was common in Russian literature of the period.<sup>44</sup> Asya herself later reinforces the idea; first of all, she reveals to N.N. that she wanted to be Tatyana from Pushkin's *Евгений Онегин* (100), the first example of a Russian literary heroine whose reading is presented as having a detrimental effect upon her character. Secondly, Asya asks N.N.: 'Правда ли, что женщинам не следует читать много? [...] Скажите мне, что я должна читать?' (104). Asya's request for N.N. to advise her on her reading has echoes of Gwendolen Harleth and Dorothea Brooke (as discussed in Chapter Two). We should also point out Asya's criticism of her own education. She declares that she has been 'очень дурно воспитана. Я не умею играть на фортепиано, не умею рисовать, я

<sup>44</sup> This theme will also be crucial to a discussion of *Анна Каренина* in the next chapter.

даже шью плохо' (103). However, these attributes that Asya views as essential to a good education as a 'lady' (accomplishments, as opposed to positive qualities as a person) are precisely what Turgenev criticises in his next major work following *Ася, Дворянское гнездо*. In this sense, thinking 'outside' the text of *Ася* (that is, the viewpoints of N.N. and Gagin) reveals Turgenev's depiction of her sense of educational inferiority to be a critique of a society that encourages women to think in this way.

Indeed, in *Дворянское гнездо*, Turgenev presents two diverging views of women's education, in the contrast between Varvara and Liza. Varvara, on the one hand, is 'accomplished'; she is able to use her musical talents in particular to 'ensnare' Lavretsky, in her performance of several Chopin mazurkas, 'тогда только-что входивших в моду' (170). Later in the novel, Varvara's accomplishments form a crucial aspect of her unpleasant nature; this is echoed in her choice of musical partner, the equally superficial and abhorrent Panshin.

Liza, on the other hand, is not naturally talented. We are told that 'без труда ей ничего не давалось [...] Читала она немного; у ней не было "своих слов", но были свои мысли, и шла она своей дорогой' (243). This ability to go 'her own way' is presented as more integral to Liza's goodness than any 'accomplishments' she might acquire. This, we are told, is founded upon the spiritual education provided by her nurse Agafya, a deeply religious woman, whose teachings instilled in Liza moral integrity and deep humility: 'вся эта смесь запрещенного, странного, святого, потрясала девочку, проникала в самую глубь ее существа' (242). Liza's education, then, is vital to an understanding of her character, and to her final destiny within the text, which is to become a nun.

In contrast, Elena's formal education is not as integral to an understanding of her role and destiny in *Накануне*. It would seem that Elena is good despite her education, at the hands of a governess who is an 'очень чувствительное, доброе и лживое существо' (33). Although her governess inspires a love of reading in Elena, we are told that 'чтение одно не удовлетворяло; она с детства жаждала деятельности, деятельного добра' (33). Like Liza, Elena is far from being 'accomplished', but she demonstrates 'active goodness' throughout her life, beginning with her relationship with the beggar girl Katya. Furthermore, in response to Shubin's claim that they would 'лучше говорить о соловьях, о розах, о молодых глазах и улыбках' (as opposed to philosophy), Elena ironically retorts: 'Да; и о французских романах, о женских тряпках' (24). This is both a direct criticism of Shubin's fondness for artifice, and more broadly, an attack on a culture that encourages women to be more concerned with appearance than substance. In this way, Elena is able to be directly critical of something that Liza could only hint at in her actions and behaviour.

The second aspect of the Woman Question that will be dealt with here is the question of women's role. In contrast to Tolstoy, Turgenev does not seem to attempt to ascribe any particular role to his female characters. One might suggest that through his 'strong heroines' (such as Elena), Turgenev presents the case for women leading fulfilling lives outside of marriage and motherhood.

A unifying feature of Turgenev's most inspirational heroines is genuine commitment to a 'cause'; for example, Liza's religious beliefs or Elena's (albeit adopted) humanitarian

activities.<sup>45</sup> However, in the sense that this most often involves some kind of self-sacrifice, Turgenev raises the question of whether it is possible to love *and* have a career. More often than not, this is not the case. Liza, for example, rejects Lavretsky's love and 'seek[s] out her own destiny as a bride of Christ'.<sup>46</sup> Within the wider European context, Liza's self-sacrificing tendency allies her with the tragic Maggie Tulliver, another fervently religious heroine. It should be noted, however, that Liza's fate of joining a convent – whether we view this as Turgenev 'silencing' his heroine or as a statement of 'feminism' – is wholly more positive than Maggie's death.

Elena, on the other hand, takes the more conventional route of marriage. Paradoxically, this indirectly results in fulfilment of her aspirations to a 'career'; once Insarov has died, Elena is able to fully engage with the cause that she has adopted as her own (although this is not seen directly). So, yet again, Turgenev's heroine is forced to choose between love and career: she cannot have both. We might also consider how Elena's indefinite end has parallels with that of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, written some seven years previously. Both women are emancipated by way of their relationships with men, yet both end the text uncertain and alone. In the terms of this analysis, Turgenev's 'New Woman' is perhaps not so 'new' after all.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> We might contrast this, for instance, with the caricature of a '*femme emancipée*', Kukshina in *Отцы и дети*, who is seen as insincere in her commitment to the 'cause' of the radicals.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> It is not certain whether Turgenev would have known *Villette*, although *Jane Eyre* was translated into Russian and was widely admired. Interestingly, the aforementioned Evgeniya Tur wrote an article on Charlotte Brontë and the Gaskell biography in 1858.

## Narrative Otherness: Textual Barriers

The semiotics of textual barriers, which are narrative or textual devices that can influence the reader's perception of female characters, provide a rewarding reading of Turgenev's fiction. This section will illustrate how Turgenev's use of textual barriers is highly complex, and may be sub-divided into two types. The first type relates to the progression of the actual narrative. These include narrative frames, narrative voice (specifically, his use of first-person male narrators), narrative digressions (either by the narrator, or letters and diary extracts), and finally, endings. The second sub-type of textual barrier relates to 'otherness' in Turgenev's fiction, which operates on two levels. The first one has been explored at length by recent critics, and relates to the language used to describe women, which is 'littered with allusions to other women', either 'real' or 'symbolic, such as the Madonna or the Lorelei'.<sup>48</sup> Whilst it is not proposed to add to this literature specifically, I will argue that Turgenev's use of these pre-determined images is tempered by the fact that it is done through an overtly male gaze. Furthermore, and on another level, I will explore how Turgenev's use of foreign language and settings forms an integral part of this 'otherness', and also operates as an 'extra-textual' barrier for Turgenev himself.

To begin with the very beginning of any text, we might consider the titles of some Turgenev works as barriers in themselves. The title of *Ася* is an important example; although the story is given her name as the title, it is not her story to tell. As Andrew has noted: 'Despite its title, the story does not concern her as such, but is an extended meditation on male images of the

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew, 2008, p. 39.

unobtainable feminine'.<sup>49</sup> Although Elena is not given the title of her story, which is short for 'on the eve of reform', we might apply the title to a reading of Elena as a woman 'on the eve' (as noted previously). Although the Russian title of *Дворянское гнездо* alludes to the setting of the novel, the 1869 English translation by William Ralston is entitled 'Liza': Turgenev claimed that he preferred this title, and alleged that he was instructed by his publisher to use *Дворянское гнездо*, which is usually translated as *Home of the Gentry* or *A Nest of Gentlefolk*.<sup>50</sup> Considering Liza within a wider European context, then, highlights her importance to the novel as a whole.

Another type of textual barrier to be found in Turgenev's fiction is the narrative frame. Like Theodor Storm, with whom Turgenev communicated a series of letters from 1865 onwards,<sup>51</sup> Turgenev employs the narrative frame technique. The three stories in which this is the case – *Ася*, *Первая любовь* and *Вешние воды* – have a 'Novelle' feel about them and undoubtedly owe a debt to the German tradition. The first two works use as their frame a man telling a story to other men; Andrew, for example, describes the text of *Ася* as 'a middle-aged man recounting his tale of love found and lost'.<sup>52</sup> However, the 'frame' of the text is hidden; the only indicator of this is the phrase 'начал Н.Н.'. The frame of *Первая любовь*, however, is more fixed, not least because the story is not 'told', it is written down by Vladimir Petrovich in an exercise book and then recounted two weeks later. This allows Vladimir Petrovich more control over the narrative, because it gives him chance to think about what he will say and how he will justify his story (most notably, how he reconciles himself to the fact that his 'first

<sup>49</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Freeborn, 'Introduction', in Ivan Turgenev, *Home of the Gentry*, Richard Freeborn, ed. and trans., Penguin, London, 1970, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> This was when they met in Baden-Baden. See *Turgenev's Letters*, Knowles, ed. and trans., pp. 132-133.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew, 2008, p. 28.



love' has an affair with his father). This writing down and subsequent recounting of a story has affinities with Storm's *Aquis submersus*, in which the manuscript of Johannes' confession is discovered many years after the events took place.

Another textual barrier that influences the perception of women is Turgenev's use of first-person male narrators. In *Ася* and *Первая любовь* (two works considered to be 'thinly disguised forms of autobiography'<sup>53</sup>), this has the effect of designating Asya and Zinaida as objects of the male 'quest'. Zinaida in particular is highly sexualised, which is emphasised by way of the focus on her physical assets. As the young Vladimir Petrovich, known as Volodya, gazes upon her 'покатые плечи и нежную, спокойную грудь' (17) his thoughts are far from innocent: 'Я, кажется, охотно поласкал бы каждую складку этого платья и этого передника' and 'Я бы с обожанием преклонился к этим ботинкам' (17). The idealisation of Zinaida's physical beauty may be said to be even more denigrating than when Tolstoy dwells on the (negative) sexual nature of women's bodies (such as Anna or Hélène Bezukhov).<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the descriptions of Zinaida are much more intimate because she is viewed not through the omniscient narrator, but as the object of an overtly sexual male gaze. In *Ася*, it is not just N.N.'s narrative that influences the way in which Asya is viewed as 'strange'; as Andrew has noted, Gagin's opinion is also integral to her characterisation, as it is he who recounts her biography. In this way, 'a collective male point of view is established as regards female irrationality',<sup>55</sup> which gives it greater credibility.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Freeborn, 'Introduction', in Ivan Turgenev, *First Love and Other Stories*, Richard Freeborn, ed. and trans., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> This will be explored in the next chapter.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 121, his italics. Andrew notes the similarity in technique to earlier works, particularly Lermontov's *Герой нашего времени*.

Digressions in the narrative, where Turgenev seeks to put his characters (both male and female) in context, are a key component of his narrative method. Lengthier digressions, such as those giving details about Liza's and Elena's background, serve to highlight Turgenev's sympathy towards these female characters. Although the narrative digression giving background about Liza is not as extensive as for Lavretsky's background, it is still one whole chapter (Chapter 35), as is Elena's (Chapter 6). Again, two notable exceptions are *Ася* and *Первая любовь*. There is very little background given on Zinaida, which all adds to the sense of mystery surrounding her, and the story of Asya's background, as we have already noted, is related by Gagin.

Letters and diaries, two other devices used by Turgenev to digress from the narrative, also play an important role. Elena's diaries, to which an entire chapter (Chapter 16) is devoted, give a unique insight into her thoughts, which no other female character in Turgenev is granted. Hence *Накануне* has been viewed as 'an early attempt by a man in Russian literature to write from a female point of view, if only in part'.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Elena's diaries are given a separate chapter and do not run entirely alongside the plot, which has the effect of highlighting and foregrounding her emotions. The conclusion of the extracts serves a vital plot function, as Elena declares her love for Insarov (84). Elena's letter is another key textual device, and one that serves to provide a conclusion to her story (albeit an incomplete one). It also stimulated wider literary debate in its inclusion of the famous statement 'что делать в России?' (165), which Chernyshevsky used in part for the title of his proto-feminist novel.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Other letters in Turgenev's works, however, have the opposite effect; that of 'silencing' women. In *Ася*, for example, N.N. makes the point of telling us that the letter he receives at the end is written not by Asya, but by Gagin: 'Ко мне писал Гагин; от Ася не было ни строчки' (118). At the conclusion of *Дворянское гнездо*, too, we are told that Liza has not written to her family at all since leaving to join the convent: 'к нам через людей вести доходят' (291). A possible interpretation of this is that it is not because she does not want to, but because she is not *allowed* to write.

The unhappy endings of a considerable number of Turgenev's works may also be viewed as textual barriers, in the sense that they often hint at women's superfluity. Indeed, it is the fate of several female characters to simply disappear. Asya is one such example. Moreover, N.N. declares 'я не слишком долго грустил по ней' (120), which is perhaps bravado, but all the same, has the effect of making Asya an insignificant part of *his* life story. Other women, such as Zinaida and Mariya Polozova, disappear, only for it to be later revealed that they have died.

The destiny of Turgenev's 'strong women', however, is more open to debate. Although Liza's decision to become a nun is an extreme form of self-repression and denial,<sup>57</sup> it is possible to view this positively; after all, it is her decision and it is also a natural progression for her, based upon her actions in the text (as previously noted in the discussion of her education). However, the ending of the novel negates a positive reading. It is only because of the wishes of the 'неудовлетворенный читатель' that the narrator reveals the rumour of Lavretsky's visit to Liza in the convent:

<sup>57</sup> We might note the parallels between Liza's destiny and that of Katharina in Storm's *Aquis submersus*, who marries a much older, austere and fanatically devout clergyman. As previously noted, we may also see affinities with Dorothea Brooke.

Перебираясь с клироса на клирос, она прошла близко мимо него, прошла ровной, торопливо-смиренной походкой монахини – и не взглянула на него; только ресницы обращенного к нему глаза чуть-чуть дрогнули, только еще ниже наклонила она свое исхудалое лицо – и пальцы сжатых рук, перевитые четками, еще крепче прижались друг к другу (294).

Not only does it paint a rather sad picture of her fate, Liza's final scene also introduces other barriers of sorts. The lashes which flutter towards Lavretsky hide the expression in her eyes, and her hands, joined in prayer, are metaphorically bound by her commitment to God. Moreover, the entwining with the rosary also gives the appearance of her hands being physically tied.

Elena's 'disappearance' following Insarov's death has been viewed negatively by some critics, as it seems to reinforce her 'insignificance' when she is without a man. Rosenholm has described the conclusion of the novel as Elena's 'obscure ending' which 'makes her into a legend'.<sup>58</sup> Certainly, Elena is never directly seen again after she leaves Venice, but – and this is vital in a Turgenevan context – her fate lacks the finality of death. In this way, the ending can be viewed more positively than Liza's lifelong celibacy, as Turgenev leaves Elena's destiny open to speculation. Moreover, Elena is shown to be preparing to work for the 'cause' that she has adopted, in learning both Bulgarian and Serbian, and this comes after she has taken the step of leaving her family and country behind.

The second type of textual barrier relates to 'otherness' within Turgenev's texts. The first aspect of this is the language used to describe women, which often invokes the stereotypically 'female' images of animals, or mythical creatures, particularly mermaids. It is upon these two

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<sup>58</sup> Rosenholm, 1999, p. 54.

particular images that this section will now focus. First of all, and as has been noted of the works discussed in previous chapters, the technique of 'structural doubling' of women as either Other or Angel is also prevalent in Turgenev's works. This contrast is most obvious in *Дворянское гнездо*, in the characterisation of Liza and Varvara.<sup>59</sup> Varvara is, to a large extent, a misogynistic caricature, which is reinforced by Turgenev's frequent use of animal imagery to describe her. For example, she is referred to as 'точно львица' (267), a 'сорока' (271), and perhaps most offensively, a 'собака' (271).

Liza, on the other hand, is one of Turgenev's most developed 'angel in the house' types, whose 'purity' is emphasised above all. When she meets Varvara for the first time, Turgenev emphasises the contrast, signalled by the one line paragraph, 'В это мгновение вошла Лиза' (257). The contrast between the two women is also acknowledged by Lavretsky, as he proclaims to Liza: 'Вы слишком чисты, вы не в состоянии даже понять такое существо' (199). Indeed, much of Lavretsky's attraction to her stems from her moral purity, precisely because she is so different to Varvara: 'в течение этих двух недель я узнал, что значит чистая женская душа' (220). Although the reason that Liza gives for breaking off their relationship is the somewhat vain hope that he may be reconciled with Varvara, it is perhaps more to do with her guilt at their relationship: 'мы скоро были наказаны' (272). This develops an earlier comment by the narrator when Liza thinks about her developing relationship with Lavretsky: 'она сама верит ему и чувствует к нему влечение; но все-таки

<sup>59</sup> This role is reversed in the later novels. Although both Irina (*Дым*) and Mariya Polozova (*Вешние воды*) seem to be set up as Other in contrast to Tatyana and Gemma respectively, they are much more convincing characters than their virginal opposites. Tatyana hardly speaks and Gemma is still an immature young girl, which is symbolized in her name (Peace notes that in Italian, 'gemma', apart from its meaning of 'jewel', also means 'bud'). See Richard Peace, *The Novels of Turgenev: Symbols and Emblems*, available from <http://mail.bris.ac.uk/~rurap/novels/htm>, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

ей стыдно стало, точно чужой вошел в ее девическую, чистую комнату' (224). Paradoxically, then, Liza's moral purity, which is viewed by Lavretsky as an ideal to which he can aspire, both initiates and then finishes their relationship.

Although Liza is idealised, it is clear that this is done through Lavretsky's (male) eyes. The novel has an omniscient narrator, but certain passages of description pertaining to Liza are similar to the first-person narratives of *Ася* and *Первая любовь* in intensity. In this example, we might note how Lavretsky has started to use the informal address to Liza, in contrast to the prior example (199) in which he was speaking to her of Varvara.

Лаврецкий глядел на ее чистый, несколько строгий профиль, на закинутые за уши волосы, на нежные щеки, которые загорели у ней, как у ребёнка, – и думал: 'о, как мило стоишь ты над моим прудом!' (208)

With its reference to Liza's cheeks, like those of a child, this passage has echoes of N.N.'s description of Asya's cheeks when he first meets her (75). The sense of Asya as a child, however, is much more fully developed. Moreover, it forms one of the many stereotypes that N.N. ascribes to her, along with those already mentioned (woman as animal or mermaid). Andrew has argued that this 'narratological overdetermination' has 'serious consequences for our understanding of her'.<sup>60</sup> In a similar way to Varvara, Asya is characterised as a wild animal, and this is an integral part of her association with nature (in opposition to the cultured world of the males who control her). She is said to 'лазит как коза' (82), after she climbs up on to the wall of the ruin, directly above a precipice. In this way, not only is Asya Other, she is also 'on the edge'; both literally, as her daring antics evoke a sense of danger, and metaphorically, on the edge of culture.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew, 2008, p. 33.

However, it is Asya herself who first mentions the second predetermined image, that of the mermaid figure. Moreover, her alternative interpretation of the Lorelei legend might be viewed positively.

‘Ах, кстати, что это за сказка о Лорелее! Ведь это её скала виднеется? Говорят, она прежде всех топила, а как полюбила, сама бросилась в воду. Мне нравится эта сказка’ (99).

Asya’s sympathetic reading of another woman’s story shows both her creativity and ‘feminism’. It is perhaps even more ironic, then, that she is not permitted to tell her own. In this sense, Turgenev subverts a stereotype; when Asya, a woman usually viewed as ‘silenced’, is allowed to speak about ‘Other’ women, she offers a positive alternative reading to the one that is presented by men.

The mermaid figure appears again in *Накануне*, and is first mentioned right at the beginning of the novel in Shubin’s comment to Bersyenev: ‘Посмотри на реку: она словно нас манит. Древние греки в ней признали бы нимфу’ (16). Yet it is not a Greek nymph who comes to claim the life of the hero, Insarov. It is cold, damp Venice; in his words, ‘смертью пахнет’ (154). In a similar way to Asya and Zinaida, Insarov takes ill after he falls in love. Elena’s blossoming as a character, on the other hand, coincides with Insarov’s decline; on more than one occasion, her vitality is contrasted with his ill look:

Все её тело расцвело, и волосы, казалось, пышнее и гуще лежали вдоль белого лба и свежих щек [...]. У Инсарова, напротив, [...] но черты его жестоко изменились. Он похудел, постарел, побледнел, сгорбился (149).

In the light of this contrast between Elena and Insarov, Turgenev hints that she is partly to blame for his death. This is further compounded if one considers that Insarov initially tries to reject Elena's advances because he knows that falling in love will distract him from his 'cause'. Furthermore, Elena's ending, in which she is seen to transport Insarov's coffin from Venice in a rowing boat, identifies her simultaneously with water and death (a connection which is highlighted in both Eliot's and Storm's works). One might even conceive of Elena as a kind of 'angel of death' in her mourning clothes, 'черный с головы до ног' (166). However, it is probably more the case that Elena's true 'otherness' stems from the way that she stands apart from her social milieu; she is one of the 'real people' to whom Shubin alludes at the end of the novel (142). Her independent spirit has meant that 'она зажила своею жизнью, но жизнью одинокою' (35).

It is perhaps also fitting that Insarov, who is Other in the sense of his 'foreignness', dies abroad. Indeed, Venice is just one example of a foreign setting in Turgenev's works. The main one is Germany (Baden-Baden in *Дым*, Frankfurt in *Вешние воды*, the small town of Z- in *Ася*), but Turgenev also uses the implied locales of the Balkans and Bulgaria in *Накануне*, and the United States in *Вешние воды*. Although these settings give his works a cosmopolitan flavour, they hint at instability, or perhaps even, a longing for home and the identity that is associated with this home. This is alluded to in *Ася* in particular. Although N.N. initially claims, 'я неохотно знакомился с русскими за границей' (75), his acquaintance with Asya and her brother means that he 'ночью и утром много размышлял о России' (85). This nostalgic view of Russia might be viewed as an extra-textual barrier for Turgenev himself; although it was partly a conscious decision to spend much of the latter part of his life abroad,



either in France or in Germany (following Pauline Viardot), Turgenev did, to some extent, feel unwanted in his own country in the wake of the critical reaction following the publication of *Отцы и дети* in 1862. This sense of a barrier becomes even more apparent if one is to consider the widely-established critical notion that none of his work after he left Russia was as good.<sup>61</sup>

In line with his use of foreign settings, Turgenev also uses languages apart from Russian in his fiction. French, which was often the first language for many of the Russian gentry in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, is frequently used, along with (to a lesser extent) German; in *Вешние воды* and *Накануне*, Italian is heard too. It is not often the case that we might compare Turgenev with Tolstoy, but it does seem that both writers depict the French language (and the culture associated with this) as a predatory force.<sup>62</sup> In *Дворянское гнездо*, for example, which is considered to be Turgenev's most 'Slavophile' work, the characters who speak French and are associated with France (Varvara and Panshin in particular) are the ones who are the most negative. We may also contrast the use of French with Russian and/or German in the opposing notions of noise and quiet. The French-speaking Varvara and Panshin are associated with noise; for example, the rustle of Varvara's silk dress when she is first introduced (175), and her singing with Panshin (which Marfa refers to as being like 'настоящие сороки' [271]), whereas Liza, Lavretsky and Lemm are associated with stillness

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<sup>61</sup> Gilbert Gardiner, 'Introduction', in Ivan Turgenev, *On the Eve*, Gilbert Gardiner, ed. and trans., Penguin, London, 1950, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Tolstoy's use of French will be considered in the next chapter.

and calm.<sup>63</sup> Language is also used to highlight Liza's thoughtful nature, as she speaks German to Lemm when she is apologising for Panshin's behaviour (143).

Other texts use the French language to signal the socially unmentionable. In this regard, Zinaida and Volodya's father converse in French ('Разговор у них шел по-французски' [22]). When Volodya's mother confronts his father about his relationship with Zinaida, French is also used.

От него я узнал, что между отцом и матушкой произошла страшная сцена (а в девичьей все было слышно до единого слова; многое было сказано по-французски — да горничная Маша пять лет жила у швеи из Парижа и все понимала) (64).

The multi-layering technique (filtered through Volodya, via the waiter, Phillip, who has heard about it from the other servants) adds to this textual barrier and the fact that it is heard through servants highlights the sense of sordidness even more. Finally, we should note that in *Отцы и дети*, Nikolai Kirsanov switches from Russian to tell Arkady about his relationship with Fenichka, the daughter of his ex-housekeeper: 'Он запнулся на мгновение и продолжал уже по-французски' (203).

Textual barriers are of great significance to an understanding of Turgenev's craft as a writer. From start to finish — from the very titles of the works to the endings — women are 'framed' by a series of devices which, for the most part, hints very strongly at their curtailment. However, the 'otherness'/'foreignness' that is evoked in Turgenev's works can restrict men as well as women.

<sup>63</sup> We might also note how Turgenev emphasises Varvara's smell even before Lavretsky sees her: the 'запах пачули, весьма ему противный' (149).

### Veils, Hills and the Heroine on the Threshold: Actual Barriers

Actual barriers that suggest female curtailment are to be found in abundance in Turgenev's works. The first sub-type of these barriers is the barrier of external adornment, or 'vestimentary marker', a term that Boris Christa used specifically in relation to Turgenev's fiction.<sup>64</sup> This chapter will now go on to explore these markers from a gender perspective.

It might be viewed as a cliché, but the morally 'pure' Liza is often pictured wearing white. Furthermore, these scenes are filtered through Lavretsky and play a crucial part in developing the love plot. The first example of this is the pond scene in Chapter 26, just before Lavretsky realises how he feels about Liza; here, she wears a 'белое платье, перехваченное вокруг пояса широкой, тоже белой лентой' (208). The second key scene in which Liza wears white is when Lavretsky professes his love for her. She appears 'в белом платье, с нерасплетенными косами по плечам' (236). More broadly speaking, and as Costlow has pointed out, Liza's white clothing represents her 'virgin spirit and light', and forms an obvious contrast to 'black-clad Varvara';<sup>65</sup> this, then, is another example of 'structural doubling'. One might also consider how Varvara uses her fashionable clothing as a means of charming Liza's mother, Mariya Dmitrievna, when she arrives unannounced at their home. Her offer – 'Весь мой туалет к вашим услугам, любезнейшая тетушка' – softens Mariya Dmitrievna, and prompts her to insist upon Varvara's removal of the formal 'vestimentary markers' of her hat and gloves, thereby signalling her acceptance in the household (256).

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Christa, pp. 127-134.

<sup>65</sup> Jane Costlow, *Worlds Within Worlds*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990, p. 68.

Elena's clothes are a key aspect of her characterisation, which is in opposition to the social norms of her world. This is first illustrated in her father's comment that she is a 'замарашкой, крестьянкой', because she has been out in the rain with Katya and made her dress muddy.<sup>66</sup> Elena, however, responds positively to this criticism: 'Она вспыхнула вся – и страшно, и чудно стало ей на сердце' (34). Later in the novel, Elena uses clothes as a kind of 'code' between her and Insarov, on the day that he visits her home: 'Она его ждала; она для него надела то самое платье, которое было на ней в день их первого свидания в часовне' (115). Finally, the 'vestimentary markers' of Elena's hat, gloves and cape are pivotal in affirming her role as initiator of her relationship with Insarov: 'Она развязала ленты шляпы, сбросила её, спустила с плеч мантилью, поправила волосы' (110-111). The kiss that ensues is followed by Elena's declaration, 'Ведь, я здесь хозяйка' (111), thus affirming her independence and (sexual) liberation.

However, the image of the veil (and similar articles that cover the female form, such as hats and shawls) is most often used by Turgenev to signify concealment. As such, it is intrinsically linked with the notion of the female enigma. Asya, for example, is introduced for the very first time 'в соломенной шляпе, закрывавшей всю верхнюю часть её лица' (74). Her eyes, the part of the face that reveals thoughts and feelings perhaps more than any other, are therefore hidden from the outset of the narrative. This establishes Asya's inability to define herself, which continues throughout the text. The veil motif returns towards the end of the tale; in the near seduction moment, she is described as a 'испуганная птичка', and is wearing a 'длинную шаль' (111). Here, a 'double barrier' is created; it is both textual (language,

<sup>66</sup> This has echoes of Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* when she goes to visit her elder sister, who is convalescing at Mr Bingley's house.

describing Asya as a bird) and actual (the shawl), which highlights both Asya's vulnerability and her 'otherness'.

The veil motif is also associated with female submissiveness and self-sacrifice: The most pertinent example in this regard is Liza, who quite literally 'takes the veil' by becoming a nun. After she has decided to enter the convent, it is revealed that Lavretsky 'не узнавал девушки, им некогда любимой, в том смутном, бледном призраке, облаченном в монашескую одежду, окруженном дымными волнами ладана' (292). Viewed from this perspective, Liza's fate seems to be quite tragic.

The veil motif is also associated with male sexual curiosity. In *Первая любовь*, for example, the first time Volodya sees Zinaida, she is surrounded by young men, 'с белым платочком на голове' (11). Here, the white scarf acts almost as a mockery of the conventional association of the white veil with purity, as Zinaida is far from virginal. Indeed, at this point, she is courting the attention of four different men. In a later scene, when party games are played, one of Volodya's forfeits is to be covered, with Zinaida, underneath a silk scarf:

Помню я, как наши обе головы вдруг очутились в душной, полупрозрачной, пахучей мгле, как в этой мгле близко и мягко светились её глаза и горячо дышали раскрытые губы, и зубы виднелись, и концы её волос меня щекотали и жгли (26).

The short clauses (linked by a series of 'ands') in the latter part of this extract are suggestive of Volodya's almost breathless excitement and rapture in the face of such titillation. Another (much more innocent!) example of male sexual curiosity is to be found in *Отцы и дети*,

when Arkady catches a glimpse of Katya; her 'розовое женское платье мелькнуло в темной зелени, молодое лицо выглянуло из-под легкой бахромы зонтика' (339).

Turning our attention now to the second type of actual barrier, this section will highlight how Turgenev subtly exploits the difference between natural (hedges, hills) and constructed barriers (houses and rooms in houses) in relation to his female characters. It will also consider the significance of threshold barriers such as doors and windows and will apply Bakhtinian theory to an interpretation of these barriers.

A natural actual barrier often used in Turgenev's works is that of the hill. This image can evoke the sense that a particular woman is unobtainable, enigmatic or even dangerous. In *Ася*, for example, the little cottage that Asya shares with Gagin is on top of a hill. The walk to this cottage is also full of barrier imagery, such as the 'каменной ограды' that they walk beside, the 'узенькой калиткой' that Gagin opens, the 'крутой тропинке' that they ascend and even the vines that grow 'с обеих сторон, на уступах' (76). N.N. also emphasises the location of the town of Z-, 'у подошвы двух высоких холмов' (72). This particular barrier image suggests that the town and its 'culture' are protected by the hills, whereas on top of the hill, wild 'nature' prevails.<sup>67</sup> The natural barrier of the river also has this effect; in this regard, O'Toole has described it as a 'gateway' between the two worlds of Asya and N.N.,<sup>68</sup> where his world is that of culture and rational thought, and hers is that of nature and irrational behaviour.

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<sup>67</sup> This interpretation may also be applied to the houses in *Wuthering Heights*; Thrushcross Grange is at the bottom of the hill and Wuthering Heights is at the top.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Andrew, 2008, p. 29.

Odintsova's country house is also perceived to be difficult to access; it is situated 'на пологом, открытом холме' (273). The location of this house, therefore, alludes to her status as 'unobtainable' (as Bazarov declares, 'как она себя заморозила!' [272]) and signals her isolation (in the latter regard, Costlow has described the house as both a 'domestic enclosure' and a 'model of absolute order, established by the dead husband whose spirit still presides'<sup>69</sup>). Indeed, Odintsova's clearly marked spaces denote her inability to escape the restrictive existence that she leads. Furthermore, Turgenev cleverly manipulates setting (specifically, the rooms in her house) to highlight her ever-changing relationship with Bazarov. The first room in which they converse alone is her sitting room (Chapter 17), but Bazarov's confession of love (in the next chapter) happens in her bedroom. Her action of receiving Bazarov in this room is sexually suggestive, but the next time they speak, Odintsova has backed off, and Bazarov's apology for his behaviour takes place outside, in the garden (300). When he returns to her house, she receives both him and Arkady in the neutral location of the drawing room (335).<sup>70</sup>

Fenichka's room, on the other hand, is a marker not of her isolation, but one of her increasing acceptance in the Kirsanov household. Described in detail through the eyes of Pavel Kirsanov, it is 'очень чиста и уютна', with a 'недавно выкрашенным полом, ромашкой и мелиссой' (229). With its pictures on the walls and the jars of homemade jam (gooseberry – Nikolai Kirsanov's favourite) on the shelves, it is the very portrait of domestic bliss. However, we are told that this is somewhere new for Fenichka; she was previously in a little side-wing, where the laundry maids are now living. Fenichka's change in space, therefore, signifies her change

<sup>69</sup> Costlow, 1990, pp. 119 and 123.

<sup>70</sup> This has links with *Middlemarch*, in the way that Dorothea chooses to receive Ladislaw in the drawing room, instead of the 'masculine' domain of Casaubon's study.

in social status; she is no longer a servant, but the lady of the house. This may be compared to Asya's situation; she too moves from servants' quarters following the death of her mother, but she is never comfortable with her new identity as daughter of the house.

Natural outdoor enclosures are also integral to an understanding of *Отцы и дети* in particular. Fenichka's arbour, for example, plays a 'crucial, dramatic role'.<sup>71</sup> It is here that Bazarov introduces himself to her for the first time, showing his softer side by holding her baby (234). Later in the novel, this is where he kisses Fenichka. We read that she 'закусив губы, глянула на вход беседки, потом приникла ухом' (345); this suggests that she seems to be aware that they are being watched (but is also perhaps, looking for a means of escape). It is subsequently revealed that Pavel Petrovich has witnessed the whole scene (346), which leads to the duel between himself and Bazarov. The arbour, then, is perhaps more important to an understanding of Bazarov's role as a 'stranger' who appropriates the space of others than to how Fenichka's freedom is curtailed by a barrier. This is not always an appropriation of female space either; Bazarov is more than happy to be an unwelcome guest in the Kirsanov household.

The portico in *Отцы и дети* is an important example of a barrier that is both constructed *and* natural. It is a construction (built by Odintsova's late husband), which has been taken over by nature ('Передняя сторона портика давно заросла густым кустарником' [205]). Its significance to the position of women in the novel is intimated by the preamble to its introduction, in which the narrator relates the story of the statue of the Goddess of Silence, who has the effect of arousing alarm amongst the superstitious peasant women (374). Katya

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<sup>71</sup> Costlow, 1990, p. 119.



often seeks 'silence' here; in the quiet and solitude that this space provides, she is free to be herself: 'Окруженная свежестью и тенью, она читала, работала, или предавалась тому ощущению полной тишины' (374). Furthermore, the portico is a crucial motif to an understanding of Katya's relationship with her sister, as Katya's love of nature is contrasted with Odintsova's 'indifference' towards it. Indeed, the portico is somewhere that Odintsova does not go, because she once saw grass-snakes there. Costlow suggests that this is a phallic image and it is indicative of Odintsova's fear of sexual contact: "Odintsova's fear of nature, of sexuality, will extend to Bazarov; it is her fear that erects all the barriers of her life".<sup>72</sup> Turgenev therefore emphasises the difference between natural and constructed barriers. In his association of Katya with the 'natural' and Odintsova with the 'constructed', he uses barrier semiotics to reveal Katya's liberation and Odintsova's restriction.

The semiotic role of the portico even extends to encompass broader, socio-political concerns that are at the heart of *Отцы и дети*. In the events that immediately follow Arkady's proposal to Katya, Turgenev uses barrier semiotics to highlight the contrast between this 'middle way' couple and the doomed pairing of Bazarov and Odintsova:

Мимо самых кустов, заслонявших портик, пролегла дорожка. Анна Сергеевна шла по ней в сопровождении Базарова. Катя с Аркадием не могли их видеть, но слышали каждое слово [...]. Они сделали несколько шагов и как нарочно остановились прямо перед портиком (376).

In this way, this scene, with its emphasis upon how Katya and Arkady are protected by the shelter of the portico (whilst Bazarov and Odintsova remain on the 'outside' of its walls), seems to encapsulate the situations of these two couples in the novel as a whole.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

Lavretsky is also enclosed by physical barriers, both natural and constructed. The locked garden gate that he encounters immediately following his confession of love to Liza in Chapter 34 has been viewed by Costlow as a 'symbolic reiteration of the hero's containment',<sup>73</sup> and it is also the turning point in Lavretsky's and Liza's relationship. However, in the scene just before this, where Lavretsky finds himself in Liza's garden, he *is* able to open the gate: 'узкая тропинка попалась ему; он пошел по ней. Она привела его к длинному забору, к калитке; он попытался, сам не зная зачем, толкнуть её: она слабо скрипнула и отворилась, словно ждала прикосновения его руки' (235). This may be interpreted as a sexual reference, with the gate representing the virginal Liza. Indeed, although no sexual act takes place, the events which follow this scene hint at both Liza's guilt and Lavretsky's transgression. We are told that she 'опустила глаза', and 'голова её упала к нему на плечо' (237), whilst Lavretsky has to jump over the locked gate (237), an action that is incompatible with his behaviour to date. Furthermore, once he has access to Liza's inner world, events conspire against the couple. In this respect, it may be suggested that Turgenev uses actual barriers to protect Liza by preserving her, ready to fulfil her spiritual destiny.

Later on in the text, the semiotics of Liza's space (or, rather, the lack thereof) point to her subsequent confinement in a convent. In the scene at church, Liza is concealed from Lavretsky's view because she has positioned herself 'в промежутке между стеной и клиросом' (281). Just a few pages later, the reader is taken into Liza's room. Although it is a 'room of her own', so to speak, it is deemed by Marfa to be a 'келейка' (284). We are then told of Liza's move to the convent, which might be deemed a 'double barrier'; not only is this

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

an enclosed female space, it is also far away, 'в одном из отдаленнейших краев России' (287).

Threshold barriers form an important part of Turgenev's use of semiotics. Here we might remind ourselves of Bakhtin's structuring principles of chronotopes in the novel, where he notes of the threshold that it 'may combine with the motif of meeting, but its most substantial fulfilment is the chronotopos of *crisis* and of *a turning point in life*'.<sup>74</sup> Two examples of threshold barriers that will now be considered here in the light of Bakhtinian theory: the doorway, which is where many of Turgenev's heroines make their first appearance, and windows, which suggest an alternative to the limiting world that they inhabit.

In Liza's case, both Bakhtinian conditions of meeting and crisis are fulfilled. Her first appearance is in a doorway: 'в то же время на пороге другой двери показалась стройная, высокая, черноволосая девушка лет девятнадцати' (132). Liza's turning point, or crisis, is the key garden scene, in which the doorway motif is repeated. First of all: 'она приблизилась к раскрытой двери, и вся белая, легкая, стройная, остановилась на пороге' (236). Moments later, 'он назвал её в третий раз и протянул к ней руки. Она отделилась от двери и вступила в сад' (236). Significantly, it is after this point of *crossing* the threshold that Liza's behaviour changes to 'that of the traditional demure heroine',<sup>75</sup> as she becomes ill and withdrawn.

<sup>74</sup> Bakhtin, p. 520, his italics.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 142.

In *Отцы и дети*, the doorway motif is used on two key occasions (one of meeting and one of crisis) to define a woman's role. Our first encounter with Fenichka is before she is even introduced; she is the young woman who appears from behind a door in this example: 'Николай Петрович с сыном и с Базаровым отправились через темную и почти пустую залу, из-за двери которой мелькнуло молодое женское лицо' (207). We soon learn that she is unwilling to make her appearance in front of the guests, because she is aware of her uncertain status as the unmarried mother of Nikolai Kirsanov's baby. However, because Arkady accepts this situation and is delighted that he has a half-brother, Fenichka is able to move across this threshold and become an established part of the family. The second extract is at the most poignant and tragic moment in the novel, when Bazarov is on his deathbed. In a noble gesture on her part, (in the sense that she could contract typhus from him), Odintsova goes to see him. Here, however, Turgenev uses the image of the doorway to hint at her coldness; we are told that she 'остановилась у двери' (395).

Again in relation to *Отцы и дети*, Costlow has explored the significance of the window, the second type of 'threshold barrier'. When Odintsova asks Bazarov to open the window in her sitting room, it 'разом со стуком распахнулось' (291). Costlow notes the wider political implications of this action,<sup>76</sup> but what is more important for the purposes of this chapter is her observation of Odintsova; that the 'veiled window [...] stands as an emblem of herself, of natural longing problematically hidden'.<sup>77</sup> This 'hidden longing' recurs in the behaviour of other Turgenevan heroines who are associated with windows, as will now be explored.

<sup>76</sup> She claims that this is a both a metaphor of his desire to rape her and also for his political desires; a 'longing to break into the kingdom of order, that paternal realm over which Odintsova presides'. See Costlow, 1990, p. 135.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Asya, for example, is very much defined by her role as a heroine by or in windows. The first example of this is when she appears through the window at Frau Louise's house: 'Освещенное окошко в третьем этаже стукнуло и отворилось, и мы увидели темную головку Аси. Из-за нее выглядывало беззубое и подслеповатое лицо старой немки' (84). This incident, with the grotesque 'Brothers Grimm' character of Frau Louise in the background,<sup>78</sup> firmly identifies Asya as part of the fairy-tale motif which is prevalent in the text. The very next time we see Asya, she is again near a window, but this time she is sitting by it, doing her embroidery. This prompts N.N. to describe her as 'совершенно русской девушкой' (85), yet another pre-determined image that is ascribed to her.

Zinaida's relation to the window is more extensively developed through the course of the text. She begins by being defined as a kind of angel by Volodya: 'Она сидела спиной к окну, завешанному белой шторой; солнечный луч, пробиваясь сквозь эту штору, обливал мягким светом её пушистые, золотистые волосы, её невинную шею' (17). The white blind here creates another 'veiled window' (much like Odintsova's) and acts as a precursor to later scenes, in which Zinaida reveals a 'hidden longing', by becoming the demure and thoughtful heroine in her actions. For example, in Chapter 11, she looks out of the window and describes the clouds (42); in Chapter 15, Volodya observes her at the window, and it seems that she is unwell: 'её лицо, плечи, руки – были бледны до белизны. Она долго осталась неподвижной и долго глядела неподвижно и прямо' (50). Zinaida's final window scene is the one in which she is most 'framed'; here, Volodya observes her through the window, being struck by his father with his riding-crop (70). We might contrast all of this to her first

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<sup>78</sup> Andrew describes Frau Louise's house in these terms. See Andrew, 2008, p. 30.

appearance on the other threshold barrier of the doorway, where she enters dramatically and confidently: 'В это мгновенье другая дверь гостиной быстро распахнулась' (15).

Elena has three key window scenes, the first of which comes in Chapter 6, in the introduction to the digression giving her background. We are told that she 'села перед раскрытым окном и оперлась головой на руку', and that this has become a habit, something she does 'каждый вечер' (32). For Elena, then, the window represents her sense of longing for a better life, which is further highlighted in the second window scene:

Медлительно прошел этот день для Елены; еще медлительнее протянулась долгая, долгая ночь. Елена то сидела на кровати, обняв колени руками и положив на них голову, то подходила к окну, прикладывалась горячим лбом к холодному стеклу, и думала; думала, до изнурения думала все одни и те же думы (88).

This is an important turning point in the novel too, as it is just after her diary extracts and her confession that she loves Insarov. The final time is a point of crisis, just before Insarov's death, when she looks out across the night sky of Venice and prays to God that he 'дай нам обоим умереть по крайней мере честной, славной смертью – там, на родных его полях, а не здесь, не в этой глухой комнате' (157). Insarov, of course, is not granted his 'heroic' death, but Elena may be – this we never find out.

The complex layering effect of actual barriers used by Turgenev is suggestive of a confinement that is all-encompassing. However, it should be noted that this is not reserved exclusively for female characters; men, particularly those considered to be 'superfluous' (Lavretsky, Insarov, Bazarov) are also restricted. This reading, therefore, has implications for an interpretation of the socio-political themes in Turgenev's novels as well as those of gender.

## Perceived Barriers

As has been discussed in the first four chapters, perceived barriers relate to the perception of women within society. In Turgenev's works, these barriers include social expectation, class and female identity. On the last point, this section will now consider Turgenev's presentation of vulnerable heroines in comparison with the childlike heroines of Storm and Fontane.

The two female characters most restricted by perceived barriers in Turgenev's works are arguably Asya and Zinaida. The first aspect of this is their status as 'marginal women',<sup>79</sup> due largely to their uncertain social backgrounds. Asya is the illegitimate child of a serf mother and a landowner father, and Zinaida is also of mixed class origins (her father was a prince who gambled away his entire fortune, and her mother is the daughter of 'какого-то приказного' [20]). However, Zinaida's marginality seems to add to her air of mystery in Volodya's eyes, as he is drawn to the dilapidated house that she inhabits (10). The plot trajectory of *Первая любовь* adds to Zinaida's social isolation, as not only does she have an affair (hence she is the 'other woman'), there are also strong hints that she becomes mother to Volodya's father's illegitimate child. Indeed, the timings following the conclusion of the story proper are precise and would fit in with this interpretation. Volodya tells the reader that 'Два месяца спустя, я поступил в университет, а через полгода отец мой скончался' (72). Following his father's death (just a few days after receiving a letter, 'которое его чрезвычайно взволновало'), Volodya's mother sends a large sum of money to Moscow. Here, one might consider the affinities between Turgenev and Storm in terms of their reticence. In this regard, Turgenev's

<sup>79</sup> Asya might also be seen as a variation of the 'воспитанницы' depicted by Tolstoy; Sonya in *Война и мир* and Varenka in *Анна Каренина*. For a discussion of this, see Grenier, pp. 87-106.

evasive commentary of reported events may be compared with Storm's 'characteristically oblique way'<sup>80</sup> of delineating relationships between members of the opposite sex, particularly in *Immensee* and *Der Schimmelreiter*.

Other Turgenevan heroines are not marginal because they are socially disgraced; rather, they operate in social isolation in the sense that they do not have female friends. It has been pointed out that Elena is isolated from other women in the plot line of *Накануне*, so she is 'forced to operate entirely within the structures of patriarchy'.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Zoya is meant to be there as a companion for Elena, but 'она решительно не знала, о чем ей говорить с Зоей, когда ей случалось остаться с ней наедине' (21). We need not view this negatively, however, as we might consider this to be a sign of Elena's rebellion against an established social norm. This might also be applied to an interpretation of Liza's relationships with other women, as although she is not close to her mother, there is a great deal of mutual respect between her and Marfa, and also her nurse, Agafya.

Another perceived barrier encountered by Turgenev's women is that of class and the question of social mobility. Although Lavretsky loves his mother (a serf) deeply, their relationship is not allowed to develop because of her status. We are told, 'но он смутно понимал её положение в доме; он чувствовал, что между ним и нею существовала преграда, которую она не смела и не могла разрушить' (161). However, later depictions of women of lower-class origin are more positive and show an ability to achieve a higher social status. Fenichka, for example, is able to transcend class barriers; as previously observed, her

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<sup>80</sup> Rogers, p. 75.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew, 1988, p. 152.



movement from the servants' quarters to the main part of the house is a clear signifier of this change. From demure shy young woman she becomes very much the gentry matriarch by the end of the novel, one who enjoys the company of her now step-daughter-in-law, Katya (398). Even Pavel Kirsanov, the most conservative representative of the 'fathers' actively encourages the union of his brother and Fenichka, asking 'Да и действительно, что за касты au dix-neuvième siècle?' (363). It should also be noted that from being 'Fenichka' for much of the novel, by the end, she is referred to by her name and patronymic, Fedosya Nikolayevna.<sup>82</sup>

However, the *expectation* to be 'upwardly mobile'; that is, to marry for money and/or status instead of for love, should be viewed as a perceived barrier. Interestingly, in *Дворянское гнездо*, the conventional roles are reversed; it is Lavretsky who is more the victim of social expectations (in his 'entrapment' in marriage to Varvara) than Liza, who rejects her mother's choice of suitor, Panshin. Elena also asserts her right to make her own choice by marrying Insarov, thereby turning down the man preferred by her father, the civil servant Kurnatovsky. *Отцы и дети* is also positive in its depiction of women who choose their own husbands. Although Odintsova marries for convenience, this is not because she is under pressure from her parents to aspire to greater wealth or status; rather, it is as a means of supporting herself and 'her Katya' (just twelve years old) after the deaths of both their mother and father (271). Furthermore, Odintsova is seen to rise above the gossip that is proliferated about her after her marriage; the narrator tells us that 'все эти толки доходили до нее; но она пропускала их мимо ушей: характер у нее был свободный и довольно решительный' (271). Katya, though (albeit with the benefit of a relatively stable background), tells Arkady that she would

<sup>82</sup> Mariya Polozova, the *femme fatale* of *Вешние воды* is another example of a woman from a lower-class background that attains a higher social status.

not marry a rich man even if she loved him. This is influenced by her relationship with her sister, as she goes on to explain: 'А уважать себя и покоряться, это я понимаю; это счастье; но подчиненное существование... Нет, довольно и так' (367).

The final perceived barrier is the sense of female vulnerability which was highlighted in particular in the previous chapter on Fontane. As noted, this is usually expressed in two ways: firstly, the tendency of female characters to illness, and secondly, their characterisation as childlike. Turgenev also seeks to emphasise this vulnerability, which most commonly arises when his heroines fall in love. Zinaida, previously a confident and outgoing woman, becomes withdrawn, spending hours sitting in her room and taking very long walks (Volodya assumes that this is on her own, but we know that it is probably not!) (38). Even heroic Elena submits to paleness, and Insarov observes, 'ты похудела' (127). In the depiction of Asya and, to a lesser extent, Liza, Turgenev hints at a childlike status alongside their pale appearance and the headaches which they suffer.

Indeed, although Lavretsky introduces himself to Liza by telling her how he last saw her as a child (144), he is able to recognise her maturation into the young woman with whom he falls in love. Asya, on the other hand, does not manage to escape this perception; one of N.N.'s first impressions of her is that she is 'но как будто не вполне еще развита' (75). Her behaviour is also like that of a child, as N.N. describes: 'Ни одно мгновение она не сидела смирно; вставала, убегала в дом и прибежала снова' (77). However, we later learn that Asya is seventeen (just two years younger than Liza), and therefore not really a child. So, then, whereas paedophilic undertones may be identified in Storm and Fontane, this is less the case

of Turgenev; although he does emphasise Asya's childlike tendencies, this is more a part of the wider justification for why she is controlled by men. However, there are certainly hints of incest in *Ася*. In this regard, N.N. observes of Gagin: 'Он обходился с нею не по-братски: слишком ласково, слишком снисходительно и в то же время несколько принужденно' (88). This is followed by the scene in the arbour of acacias, witnessed by N.N., in which Asya proclaims passionately to Gagin: 'Нет, я никого не хочу любить, кроме тебя, нет, нет, одного тебя я хочу любить – и навсегда' (88). Although Gagin later clarifies the situation to N.N. and affirms the brother-sister nature of his relationship with Asya, this scene has deep and meaningful significance for a reading of Asya, and barrier semiotics in Turgenev's fiction as a whole. This scene is, after all, an example of a truly multi-layered barrier; it encompasses not only this perceived barrier, but also an actual barrier (the arbour) within a textual barrier (the scene is observed from outside by N.N.). This reading, then, identifies Asya as the most confined heroine to be depicted by Turgenev.

### **Layering Barriers: Conclusion**

As observed at the outset of this chapter, Lotman's theory of the artistic text states that 'text' is considered in opposition to 'extra-text'. This reading of textual, actual and perceived barriers has aimed to elucidate how this can be applied to Turgenev; although he was acquainted with many emancipated women in his personal life, this appears to be contradicted by most of the women he depicts in his literature.

Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this chapter has revealed that in many ways, Turgenev erects barriers for his female characters just as much as Tolstoy does (as will be discussed in the next chapter). However, Turgenev's works have a sense that barriers are equally applicable to male characters, particularly the 'superfluous men'. As has been observed, characters such as Bazarov, Insarov and Lavretsky are destined never to fulfil their true potential, and this is signified in Turgenev's use of barrier semiotics. In this regard, one may consider what might be deemed Turgenev's own extra-textual barrier: that he 'could not quite bring himself to grant his characters a sense of accomplishment which he himself seems never to have tasted fully'.<sup>83</sup> However, it is in the complex layering of many types of barrier that Turgenev expresses the absolute curtailment which affects only women.

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<sup>83</sup> Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Turgenev: The Man, His Art and His Age*, Orion Press, New York, 1959, p. 209.

## Chapter Six

### Tolstoy, Women and Barriers: Inflexible Closedness?

#### Introduction

Within the context of this study and more generally, Lev Tolstoy is regarded as one of the writers least sympathetic to discussion of the Woman Question in the mid to late nineteenth century. *Анна Каренина* was written almost twenty years after the Woman Question first began to be openly discussed in Russia, but the novel does not show any development in the representation of alternative roles for women (such as those depicted in the 1860s' literary polemic between Turgenev, Khvoshchinskaya and Chernyshevsky). To this end, Helena Goscilo has noted that 'the problem with *Anna Karenina* is not the wayward heroine's doom but the novel's inflexible closedness from the very outset to alternative plot developments and resolutions'.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers facing women, this 'inflexible closedness'. Furthermore, it will illustrate how textual and actual barriers are constructed to emphasise the perceived barrier of women's limited role not only as wives, but perhaps more importantly for Tolstoy, also as mothers.

In a similar way to the previous chapter on Turgenev, this chapter will seek to provide a revision of Tolstoy. It will achieve this by placing his depiction of women in the wider European context, by way of comparisons with the other writers considered in this thesis. In light of this

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<sup>1</sup> Goscilo, p. 89.

broader context, the chapter will also re-evaluate relatively recent work in the field of feminist criticism which has identified 'crypto-feminism' in Tolstoy's fiction.<sup>2</sup> In order to manage the vast amount of material produced both by and about Tolstoy, the main focus will be on *Анна Каренина*, but examples from a cross-section of his works will also be included: *Семейное счастье*; *Война и мир*; and *Крейцерова соната* (1889) one of the most important works to appear following his spiritual crisis in the late 1870s.

Firstly, though, this chapter will explore some of the sources for Tolstoy's 'extra-text': his key relationships with women. This is particularly important here because Tolstoy often used autobiographical details in his fiction (this is especially the case in *Анна Каренина*). The chapter will then consider the implications of Tolstoy's problematisation of the Woman Question in his works.

### **Tolstoy and Women**

Some feminist criticism has highlighted the importance of Tolstoy's mother for an understanding of his idealisation of the mother figure in his works, and it is here that this chapter will also begin.<sup>3</sup> Princess Marya Nikolayevna Tolstoya (Volkonskaya) was devout and a devoted wife, one who was 'always obeying but not getting on too well with her indolent and worldly husband'.<sup>4</sup> It is well-documented that her death (five months after giving birth to a daughter, Masha, in 1830) had a profound effect on Tolstoy, particularly as regards his

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Barbara Heldt (1987) and Amy Mandelker (1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Ruth Crego Benson, *Women in Tolstoy: The Ideal and the Erotic*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1973, and Judith Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> John Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, Northcote House, Plymouth, 1997, p. 3.

attitudes towards women. Benson has suggested that she was a model for Tolstoy's 'ideal type',<sup>5</sup> that is, a self-sacrificing wife and mother. Yet this idea of perfection was based upon a woman who, in truth, he could not really have known; he was just two years of age when she died, and the 'vivid image' that he had of her was based upon recollections of relatives and mementoes, such as portraits.<sup>6</sup> This search for what was surely an unattainable ideal has its literary parallel in Levin's views on family life in *Анна Каренина*:

Они жили тою жизнью, которая для Левина казалась идеалом всякого совершенства и которую он мечтал возобновить с своею женой, с своею семьей. Левин едва помнил свою мать. Понятие о ней было для него священным воспоминанием, и будущая жена его должна была быть в его воображении повторением того прелестного, святого идеала женщины, каким была для него мать.<sup>7</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that no woman – real or fictitious – ever measured up to the standards Tolstoy had in mind. Furthermore, and as Mandelker has argued, it is probably the case that he was more enamoured of the idea of this 'holy ideal' than of any particular living human being.<sup>8</sup>

The first entry in Tolstoy's diary for 1859 was his statement that he 'must get married this year – or not at all'.<sup>9</sup> However, it was not until three years later, in 1862, that he married Sofya (Sonya) Andreyevna Bers, daughter of the Kremlin court physician Andrey Evstafevich Bers, when he was thirty-four and she was eighteen. Although the early years of their marriage were

<sup>5</sup> Benson, p. x.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Tolstoy, *Анна Каренина*, Volume One, p. 109. All subsequent references to Tolstoy's artistic works will be to Л. Н. Толстой – *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, Moscow, 1958. If the work was published in more than one volume, the volume number is also stated in parentheses, following the page number.

<sup>8</sup> Amy Mandelker, 'Feminist Criticism and *Anna Karenina*. A Review Article', *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 1990, pp. 82-103 (100).

<sup>9</sup> Cited in A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy*, Penguin, London, 1988, p. 184.

reasonably happy, things became gradually more difficult to the extent that their marriage has been described as ‘one of the most miserable marriages in history’.<sup>10</sup> Sofya, a ‘Europeanised city girl’, felt limited by her new role as a ‘country wife’,<sup>11</sup> and longed for ‘intellectual development and contact with people’.<sup>12</sup> This longing often found expression in her diaries, and one entry reads as follows:

I try to convince myself that true happiness comes from fulfilling one’s duty, and I force myself to copy out all his writings and do all my other duties, but sometimes I weaken, and yearn for some personal happiness, a private life and work of my own.<sup>13</sup>

In her role as Tolstoy’s copyist, Sofya transcribed the often barely legible drafts of novels that he had written. Briggs has noted that she ‘may have been responsible for much serious editing of his manuscripts that has never been fully explored or acknowledged’.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of the difficulties that Sofya faced lay in the fact that between 1863 and 1888, she gave birth to thirteen children, five of whom died in childhood. She tried to persuade her husband to use birth control, but he refused. Increasingly desperate, and exhausted by pregnancy and motherhood, she tried unsuccessfully to abort her twelfth pregnancy by jumping off a chest of drawers.<sup>15</sup> As observed in Chapter Three, a comparison may be drawn

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Doris Lessing, ‘The Private Torment of Mrs. Tolstoy’, *The Times*, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2009: [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/nonfiction/article6866071.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/nonfiction/article6866071.ece).

<sup>13</sup> Sofya’s diary, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1897. Cited in Leah Bendavid-Val, *The Photographs and Diaries of Countess Sophia Tolstoy*, National Geographic, Washington, 2007, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> A. D. P. Briggs, ‘Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi’, *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2004, accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009, pp. 1-6 (2). See: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4413>.

<sup>15</sup> Bendavid-Val, p. 92.



between Tolstoy and Theodor Storm, in terms of their sexual desire and refusal to protect the physical and emotional health of their wives.<sup>16</sup>

Much of what is known about the Tolstoy marriage has been gleaned from the extensive diaries that both husband and wife kept, in which they both complained about each other. Wilson describes this as their 'diary-rivalry, developing into a diary-war, with prolix accounts of each other's misdemeanours'.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that Tolstoy's diary entries during the writing of *Анна Каренина* are relatively few; in this sense, it is helpful to view the novel as a pseudo-diary. Autobiographical elements of the most difficult times in the Tolstoy marriage are played out in the novel, particularly in the guilt that Tolstoy felt about his own sexual urges. Kitty's and Levin's honeymoon period, for example, is referred to not as a period of happiness; rather, it is something sordid that should be erased from memory: 'Они оба одинаково старались в последующей жизни вычеркнуть из своей памяти все уродливые, постыдные обстоятельства этого нездорового времени' (57, 2). Levin also gives his young bride his diary to read, just as Tolstoy did, thereby confessing not only his sordid sexual past to Sofya, but also that he had fathered a child by a serf woman. Wilson argues that Tolstoy took this callous course of action because he had a 'need for absolution through the written word' and that Sofya was 'his reader'.<sup>18</sup>

Although Tolstoy was keen to absolve himself of his sexual misdemeanours, he was unwilling in later years to share his increasingly radical religious beliefs with his wife. Under the

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<sup>16</sup> As was noted in Chapter Three, Storm's first wife, Constanze, suffered from physical ill health following the birth of seven children in seventeen years (along with another seven miscarriages), and died of puerperal fever in 1865.

<sup>17</sup> A. N. Wilson, pp. 206-207.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

influence of V.G. Chertkov (his 'disciple'), whom Sofya hated, Tolstoy underwent his religious 'crisis' which led to his renouncement of artistic fiction. Again, in another parallel with *Анна Каренина*, Levin does not share his 'epiphany' with Kitty. The final paragraph of the novel adds to this sense of a barrier between husband and wife, as Levin reveals by way of his interior monologue: 'так же будет стена между святой святых моей души и другими, даже женой моей' (421, 2).

In the years following his spiritual crisis, Tolstoy became ever more difficult to live with. He sought to renounce the copyright on his earlier works, due to his belief that owning private property was immoral.<sup>19</sup> Sergei Tolstoy recalled how this was particularly stressful for Sofya from a financial point of view, because there were so many young children to support.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, although Tolstoy preached celibacy, he still had sex with his wife. A diary entry from 1884 illustrates this conflict: 'She's beginning to tempt me carnally. I'd like to refrain, but I feel I won't in present conditions. But cohabitation with a woman alien in spirit – i.e. with her – is terribly vile'.<sup>21</sup> Benson has linked this aspect of the Tolstoy marriage with Tolstoy's depiction of Anna's and Vronsky's sexual activity, noting that for Anna, it 'initiates a painful schizophrenia – the same split that tortured Tolstoy when he indulged himself sexually while feeling the moral demand for restraint and self-denial'.<sup>22</sup> It may be argued that Tolstoy could only express the shame that he felt about his own feelings by assigning them to female sexuality, which he found utterly abhorrent.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine Shonk, 'What Mrs. Tolstoy saw', *The St. Petersburg Times*, Issue 1334, December 21<sup>st</sup> 2007, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Available from: [http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=24572](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=24572)

<sup>20</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, Moura Budberg, trans., Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1961, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Tolstoy's diary 7<sup>th</sup> July 1884, in *Tolstoy's Diaries*, Christian, ed. and trans., p. 193.

<sup>22</sup> Benson, p. 89.

Wilson has argued that Tolstoy's love-hate relationship with women was one of the three 'uneasy and irresolvable relationships' from which the art of his 'great genius' grew.<sup>23</sup> To this end, one should note the influence of the 'extra-text' upon Tolstoy's fiction. The fact of Tolstoy's ambivalence towards women in life *and* literature, therefore, conflicts with Lotmanian theory; in Tolstoy's case, 'text' and 'extra-text' are in agreement.

### Tolstoy and the Woman Question

The woman question! How can there not be a woman question? But it should have nothing to do with how women should begin to direct life, but how they should stop ruining it.<sup>24</sup>

As detailed in Chapter Five, discussions of the Woman Question in Russia from the late 1850s onwards focused upon three key areas: women's education, women's position in the family, and their right to work. Tolstoy's position on all three of these points is unequivocal: women should work, but within the family,<sup>25</sup> and education relating to anything other than this role was unnecessary. To illustrate this point, one might consider his comments in a letter to Strakhov (19<sup>th</sup> March 1870): 'I don't know why it is more worthwhile for a woman as a person to transmit other people's messages or write reports than to look after the welfare of a family and the health of its members'.<sup>26</sup> And secondly:

Imagine a woman without the help of other unattached women – sisters, mothers, aunts and nannies. And where is the woman to be found who could cope alone during this period (that is, bringing up young children – KA)? So what need is there for other professions for unattached women?<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A. N. Wilson, 1988, p. 187. The other two relationships are those with God and Russia.

<sup>24</sup> From Tolstoy's diary in 1898, following the marriage of his daughter Tanya. Cited in Benson, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> The exception to this is peasant women.

<sup>26</sup> Tolstoy, Letter to Strakhov, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1870, in *I Cannot Be Silent: Writings on Politics, Art and Religion*, W. Gareth Jones, ed., Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Tolstoy was also critical of the feminist cause in general. As Benson has it, he 'despised the movement for women's emancipation', and attacked it directly in his 1864 play *Зараженное семейство*, which has been described as a 'caricature of feminism'.<sup>28</sup> His opinions on George Sand, a key figure for the Russian women's movement, were unequivocally derogatory; he claimed that she should be tied to a wagon and drawn through the streets.<sup>29</sup> Eikhenbaum suggested of Tolstoy in more general terms that he was an 'archaist', who 'advocated old traditional values';<sup>30</sup> this reading may certainly be applied to Tolstoy's views on the Woman Question.

Relatively speaking, direct discussions of the Woman Question in Tolstoy's works are few and far between; the debate in *Анна Каренина* is given just a few of the eight hundred pages of the novel (in contrast, there are long passages dealing with another contemporary debate, the 'peasant question'; even something as tedious as local government reform is dealt with at greater length). However, the content of these few pages is extremely important and should be mentioned here.<sup>31</sup>

The conversation in Part Four of the novel touches upon two aspects of the Woman Question – education, and the rights of women in marriage – and is illuminating for both plot and character. For instance, Karenin's opinion that women's education is 'вредным' (427, 1) is vindicated by his own wife's reading (as this chapter will later examine). Stiva's fickle nature, and his preoccupation with members of the opposite sex is demonstrated in his agreement with

<sup>28</sup> Benson, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 24. These were amongst the remarks that so offended Turgenev.

<sup>30</sup> Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Sixties*, Duffield White, trans., Ardis, Michigan, 1982a, p. xxi.

<sup>31</sup> Another example of this comes in the first few pages of *Крейцерово соната*. Here, however, the discussions in *Анна Каренина* will be the sole focus.

the hot-headed Pestsov, whilst simultaneously 'вспоминая о Чибисовой' (428, 1). Dolly expresses the view closest to Tolstoy's own (as apparent in his comments to Strakhov above). She says: 'Если хорошенько разобрать историю этой девушки, то вы найдете, что эта девушка бросила семью, или свою, или сестрину, где бы она могла иметь женское дело' (428-429, 1). Levin concurs with this view, but also appreciates Kitty's viewpoint that it would be humiliating for a woman to remain unmarried. Grenier has viewed this as a 'dramatic growth in Tolstoy's dialogism and feminism between *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*'.<sup>32</sup> However, a more simple interpretation of this passage would be that Levin attempts to understand Kitty's point of view because he is in love with her. Kitty's beliefs are therefore more important to the development of the love plot than the Woman Question per se. Indeed, the omniscient narrator notes that Kitty had worried about her future role (before her relationship with Levin had developed beyond that of a family friend), 'но теперь это нисколько не интересовало её' (429, 1).

The brief discussion which then ensues (concerning the rights of women in marriage) also plays a pivotal role in plot development and character, and is revealing for the way in which women are excluded from the conversation. The narrator tells us that 'в затяжном разговоре о правах женщин были щекотливые при дамах вопросы о неравенстве прав в браке' (431, 1), and it is only once the ladies have retired to the drawing-room that the discussion begins in earnest. However, the topic in question is probably more relevant to women than men, as Pestsov believes: 'Неравенство супругов, по его мнению, состояло в том, что неверность жены и неверность мужа казнятся неравно и законом и общественным мнением' (431, 1). Turovtsyn attempts to draw Karenin into discussion on this topic which is

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<sup>32</sup> Grenier, p. 100.

directly and painfully relevant to him (Anna is having an affair with Vronsky by this point), by alluding to the story of Pryatchnikov, who killed his wife's lover in a duel. Although Karenin reacts 'равнодушно' to this, he is clearly upset about Anna's affair. He tells Dolly: 'Я очень несчастлив' (433, 1). Thinking about Tolstoy in a wider European context, one might compare Karenin's ambiguous response to Anna's affair with Innstetten's response to Effi's affair in *Effi Briest*. In different ways, both men are seen to do what is considered to be 'right' within the context of their social norms (although Innstetten in particular deeply regrets his action of killing Crampas). The Prussian 'code of honour' which dictates that Innstetten should kill his love rival (albeit some years after the event) has its parallel in the judgement of 'society' in *Анна Каренина*, which dictates that Karenin may not forgive Anna even if he wanted to.

From all this, it may be concluded that although the text of *Анна Каренина* does include direct discussions of the Woman Question, the fact of women's exclusion from these debates shows in no uncertain terms how they are denied a voice in mapping out their own destiny.

### **Women's Role: Marriage, Motherhood and Tolstoy's Ideal Type**

A woman's chief calling is still to bear, bring up and feed children.<sup>33</sup>

This traditional (some might say misogynistic) view is given validity in Tolstoy's fiction by characters such as Natasha, Dolly and Kitty, who lead fulfilling, if not happy lives, surrounded by their children. Helena Goscilo has pointed to the limited scope of this perfect type, who:

<sup>33</sup> Tolstoy, in his letter to Strakhov (19<sup>th</sup> March 1870), in *I Cannot Be Silent*, p. 41.

Ultimately realises her true self through maternity and family life, composed of breast-feeding and raising children, sorting linens, making jam, nursing the sick, listening to her husband's doubts and diatribes, coping with his jealousies or infidelities, supervising meals and accommodation for guests.<sup>34</sup>

Other critics, however, have viewed Tolstoy's tender depiction of Dolly's struggles in particular as 'feminist', and point to the fact that he does not always present domesticity in the best light. On this point, Amy Mandelker argues that although Dolly is 'unquestionably one of the most positive characters in the book, she does not succeed in creating a desirable moral atmosphere for her children [...] Dolly is strikingly emaciated and worn [...] surrounded not by plump cherubs, but by dirty, misbehaving urchins'.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps more to the point, however, Dolly seems to be idealised precisely *because* she struggles, and remains true to her duty as a mother (unlike Anna). Indeed, despite all of her marital problems, Dolly is a loving and caring mother. Her daily cares all relate to her children's wellbeing, whether they are ill, misbehaving or inadequately attired. She expresses joy at her 'преlestные дети', and the 'хлопоты и беспокойства' provide a welcome distraction from the fact that she is married to someone who does not love her (290, 1). She also deals well with the practicalities of motherhood (such as childbirth and weaning), and she particularly enjoys speaking with the peasant women on these matters: 'И разговор стал самый интересный для Дарьи Александровны: как рожала? Чем был болен?' (294, 1). However, the strain of enduring one pregnancy after another has taken its toll on Dolly. When we are first introduced to her, Tolstoy draws attention to her 'когда-то густых и прекрасных волос, с осунувшимся, худым лицом и большими, выдававшимися от худобы лица, испуганными глазами' (17, 1). This is, arguably, both an idealisation of sorts because she has sacrificed her looks for her children,

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<sup>34</sup> Goscilo, p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> Mandelker, 1990, p. 99.

and denigration, because it is humiliating for a once-beautiful woman to end up this way. This also reinforces Tolstoy's belief in the '*functionality* of a woman's body over its *beauty*'.<sup>36</sup>

An aspect of Tolstoy's portrayal of the female role that may be deemed unusual is his attention to detail with regards to the biological reality of being a woman. Childbirth and breast-feeding in particular are described in a way that goes much further than other writers of the period (and, indeed, beyond). One plausible explanation for this is the fact of Tolstoy's own knowledge of family life, which saw him father thirteen children with his wife. However, far from seeking to put across the female point of view, Tolstoy's depiction of such detail comes across as a male appropriation of a female domain. It is, after all, *Levin's* search for the 'holy ideal' that forms the focal point of Tolstoy's concern with the mother role in *Анна Каренина*; to this end, it should be noted that the most important scenes to do with motherhood are filtered through Levin's consciousness, which has the effect of distancing the reader from the event. Kitty's entire labour, for example, is not seen; rather, it is heard through her husband. There is also no mention whatsoever of Kitty's experience and feelings. After the birth, the focus again comes back to Levin, in his feelings of 'гадливости и жалости' towards his first-born son (314, 2). One of the final images of the novel is baby Mitya in the bath, as Levin begins to overcome his initial feeling of disappointment at becoming a father. His comments on the importance of breast-feeding, and how his mother's milk was imbued with 'духовными истинами' (400, 2) can also be related back to Tolstoy's attitude towards his own wife. One of Sofya's diary entries from August 1863 recounts how he was 'angry' with

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<sup>36</sup> Olga Karpushina, 'The Idea of the Family in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: The Moral Hierarchy of Families', *Studies in Slavic Cultures*, 2001, 2, pp. 63-92 (80), her italics.



her when she could not breast-feed their first son, Serezha, due to mastitis.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Tolstoy's belief in the importance of breast-feeding was fanatical to the extent that he refused to allow Sofya to use a wet nurse, even though she had developed open sores which could potentially have led to a life-threatening infection.<sup>38</sup>

Generally speaking, Tolstoy's most important female characters are not given the opportunity to experience a role outside of motherhood that is depicted positively. However, two minor characters – Sonya from *Война и мир* and Varenka from *Анна Каренина* (the unmarried *воспитанницы*) – add another dimension to the debate on Tolstoy's attitude towards occupations for women other than marriage. Grenier demonstrates how Varenka is an evolved, more positive ward than Sonya, who is insincere in her conditional attachment to the Rostov family (the condition being her love for Nikolai).<sup>39</sup> Unlike Sonya, Varenka is able to function in society as an unmarried woman. Moreover, the fact that Varenka is seen (at least to begin with) through the filter of Kitty means that she is perceived as a positive character; furthermore, she is the very epitome of fulfilment for Kitty: 'Что дает ей эту силу пренебрегать всем, БЫТЬ НЕЗАВИСИМО СПОКОЙНОЮ? Как бы я желала это знать и научиться от нее этому' (246, 1). Mandelker has argued that Varenka's 'independence' is the starting point of Tolstoy's later view that it is acceptable (preferable, even) not to marry. She notes that the heroines of Tolstoy's post-conversion works, such as Maslova in *Воскресение* (1899), are 'idealized' and 'single'.<sup>40</sup> Goscilo, on the other hand, has dismissed Varenka's role as 'compensation', noting that 'Tolstoy deems anything outside married maternity synonymous

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Karpushina, p. 88, n. 25.

<sup>38</sup> He did, however, reluctantly agree to the use of a wet nurse after Sofya's family called a doctor. See Bendavid-Val, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> Grenier, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Mandelker, 1993, p. 178.

with compromise or failure in a woman's life'.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the limited role that Tolstoy affords Varenka cannot be compared with the more extensively developed 'New Women' types depicted by Russian writers in the previous decade. There are no Elenas in Tolstoy's fiction.

### Women's Education and Anna's Reading

Глупости от образования.<sup>42</sup>

Tolstoy's attitude towards women's education – the second aspect of the Woman Question upon which this chapter will focus – is even more negative. 'Accomplishments' are viewed as being part of a woman's initiation into society, something that Tolstoy is generally disparaging of. Indeed, the narrator passes ironic comments upon the Scherbatsky sisters' educational regime: 'для чего этим трем барышням нужно было говорить через день по французски и по английски [...] и играли по переменкам на фортепиано' (30, 1). However, Tolstoy saves his true contempt for more serious attempts at women's education (such as Anna's reading); such activities are viewed as a threat to what Tolstoy considered to be a woman's true vocation of motherhood.

The notion of woman as reader is an important motif in the Russian literary tradition, beginning with Pushkin's Tatyana in *Евгений Онегин*. As Andrew (amongst others) has argued, Tatyana's choice of books, and her admiration of literary heroines (Rousseau's Julie,

<sup>41</sup> Goscilo, p. 88.

<sup>42</sup> The opinion of the merchant at the beginning of *Крейцерова соната* (270).

Richardson's *Clarissa* and Madame de Staël's *Delphine*) engenders 'a false view of life'.<sup>43</sup> Tolstoy takes this one step further; in his emphasis on how Anna's 'false view of life' has been exacerbated by her reading, he associates her self-education with her rejection of her wife/mother role. To this end, one might consider how Anna begins her affair with Vronsky after she is seen to read an English novel on the train. As Lönnqvist has observed, Anna and Vronsky 'live in a *fictive* world, playing at marriage, thus acting out the *English novel* that Anna was reading on the train just before Vronsky declared his love for her'.<sup>44</sup> While at this time, Anna's reading is a form of escapism from the reality of her loveless marriage to Karenin, it later becomes a kind of self-delusion. Once Anna has become Vronsky's lover, her self-education becomes bolder; she progresses from reading novels to reading journals, and finally, to attempting to manage an estate. One might also consider how Anna's political ambitions (expressed in her journal reading) and her smoking habit associates her with the negatively stereotyped 'New Woman' figures such as Turgenev's Kukshina (*Отцы и дети*) and Mashurina (*Нобль*). All of the above would seem to underline Tolstoy's belief that women should not be educated to do anything other than to bring up children.<sup>45</sup>

However, although Tolstoy champions the role of wife and mother, this does not extend to women being educators of their own children. Citing the examples of fathers who are responsible for their children's education (Karenin, Lvov and Levin with Dolly's children), Goscilo points out that 'even intelligent women cannot be entrusted with something as

<sup>43</sup> Joe Andrew, '[She] was brought up on French novels and, consequently, was in love': Russian Writers Reading and Writing Pushkin', in Andrew, Joe and Robert Reid, eds, *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin. Volume 1: 'Pushkin's Secret': Russian Writers Reread and Rewrite Pushkin*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, pp. 15-36 (17).

<sup>44</sup> Barbara Lönnqvist, 'The Pushkin Text in *Anna Karenina*', in Andrew and Reid, eds, pp. 67-76 (73), italics in original.

<sup>45</sup> As observed in Chapter Two, this may be contrasted with the narrator's sense of disappointment at Dorothea Brooke's fate: 'Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother' (779).

rudimentary as children's home lessons'.<sup>46</sup> Levin is keen to take an active role in family life in theory, and even goes so far as to be critical of the way Dolly is bringing up her children (if only in his mind): 'но у меня будут не такие дети; надо только не портить, не уродовать детей, и они будут не такие дети' (301). As this chapter has already discussed, his own disappointment in becoming a father has the effect of shattering this illusion.

This brief exploration of some of the sources for Tolstoy's views on women and the context of the Woman Question in his fiction has revealed an 'inflexible closedness' to alternative pathways for women other than marriage and motherhood. It is against this background, therefore, that textual, actual and perceived barriers in Tolstoy's works will be analysed.

### **Tolstoy's Patriarchal Voice: Textual Barriers**

All chapters thus far have considered how textual barriers may be divided into two types, the narrative and the linguistic. This section will now discuss Tolstoy's works in the light of this, and will argue that the foremost textual barriers are to be found in the narrative technique. In this regard, narrative voice, narrative frames, and what one might term Tolstoy's manipulation of genre will be considered.

The first (and perhaps most obvious) Tolstoyan textual barrier is what may be deemed his 'thundering' polemics.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Tolstoy's use of a 'monolithically monologic'<sup>48</sup> narrative

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<sup>46</sup> Goscilo, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> In the Romanes Lecture of 1970, Isaiah Berlin contrasted Turgenev's more liberal observations of society with Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's 'preaching', noting that Turgenev 'did not wish to thunder at his generation' (p. 9).

<sup>48</sup> Bakhtin contrasts this with Dostoevsky's 'dialogism'. Cited in Grenier, p. 87.

voice means that many of his characters are defined solely through the omniscient narrator. However, both *Война и мир* and *Анна Каренина* are notable for Tolstoy's use of long passages of interior monologue, which enable the male protagonists' 'voices' to be heard (particularly Levin and Pierre Bezukhov).

In contrast, Tolstoy's use of female interior monologue<sup>49</sup> does not engender a feminine perspective to the same extent. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the thoughts of Dolly, his 'moral compass',<sup>50</sup> are aimed at passing Tolstoy's own moral judgements upon other women, particularly Anna. Indeed, the clash between 'несчастливая Долли' and 'бесовская' Anna is at its most latent when Anna's behaviour is viewed through Dolly's eyes; her innocent (naïve, even) *Weltanschauung* has its polar opposite in Anna's world of adultery, contraception and opium. To this end, and following Anna's revelation that she has decided not to have any more children, Dolly's feelings are unequivocal: 'Она вдруг почувствовала, что стала уж так далека от Анны, что между ними существуют вопросы, в которых они никогда не сойдутся' (229, 2).

A further textual barrier that should be taken into account is Tolstoy's use of the first-person narrative voice, in the two novellas *Семейное счастье* and *Крейцерова соната*. Although these texts are not usually mentioned alongside each other (they were composed some thirty years apart and are vastly different in character), a comparison between them highlights

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<sup>49</sup> One might consider Grenier's discussion of Sonya (*Война и мир*) alongside this point. She has observed how Sonya is given passages of interior monologue up until the point that she is exposed as a 'self-sacrificing martyr'. Following her letter to Nikolai (in which the 'reader sees her deceiving herself'), Sonya has her 'voice' taken away, and she becomes 'solely the object of other people's perceptions and discourse' (which are mostly negative). Grenier, pp. 93-94.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Mandelker, 1990, p. 99.

Tolstoy's manipulation of the effect of the first-person narrative voice, to the extent that the reader is invited to feel sympathy for Pozdnyshchev, who brutally murders his wife. Masha, on the other hand, is condemned, even though her 'crime' is not even to have a full-blown, passionate affair, but to allow herself to be kissed by another man. This section will now explore how this effect is achieved.

Firstly, one might note of *Семейное счастье* that it is an unusual text within the context of Russian literature of this period, as a first-person female narrator is created by a male author.<sup>51</sup> Chapter One of this thesis considered how the use of the first-person female narrative voice may be seen as empowering. However, Masha's privileged position as narrator of her own story has the paradoxical effect of making her seem more to blame for the course of events.<sup>52</sup> Masha is portrayed throughout as selfish and antipathetic; for example, the tale begins just after the death of her mother, but what saddens Masha at least as much is the fact that the period of mourning has delayed her debut in society (72). The story that follows of Masha's courtship and early married life with an older man, Sergei, dramatises her inability to find fulfilment in marriage; instead, she focuses on establishing herself as a society lady, not least because she enjoys the attention: 'На бале еще больше, чем прежде, мне казалось, что я центр, около которого все движется' (124). Although all of the events leading up to Masha's 'affair' are constructed to emphasise her culpability, she seeks to shift the blame onto her husband: "'Зачем не употребил ты свою власть,'" продолжала я, "не связал, не убил меня?"' (148)

<sup>51</sup> The only other example within this context is Dostoevsky's *Неточка Незванова* (1849).

<sup>52</sup> Irina Reyfman, 'Female Voice and Male Gaze in Leo Tolstoy's *Family Happiness*', *Mapping the Feminine: Russian Women and Cultural Difference*, Festschrift for Marina Ledkovsky, Slavica, Bloomington, Indiana, 2008, pp. 29-50 (29).

The first-person narrative in *Крейцерова соната*, on the other hand, has the opposite effect; the reader is invited to feel sympathy for Pozdnyshev. Not only does his tragic tale of lust and subsequent violence act as a kind of religious confession, Tolstoy allows Pozdnyshev the narrative authority to 'silence' the main female character in the text, his wife. She is never referred to by her name and her actions are seen entirely through Pozdnyshev's eyes. Furthermore, there is no conclusive evidence that her affair with the musician Trukhachevsky is anything but a figment of Pozdnyshev's imagination. It is only once he realises that she is about to die that he is brought to repentance, when he sees her 'с подтеками разбитое лицо' (340). However, he is unable to ask for her forgiveness: 'я хотел припасть лицом к её руке и сказать: "Прости!" – но не смел' (340). Instead, he seeks absolution from the person to whom he is telling his story; the tale ends with Pozdnyshev's repentance and farewell.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, all of the events leading up to her murder and Pozdnyshev's views on society and marriage serve as a justification for his actions. It is society's expectation of marriage – not Pozdnyshev's tendency to jealous, violent rage – that he believes is to blame for his crime. He comments: 'У нас люди женятся, не видя в браке ничего, кроме совокупления, и выходит или обман, или насилие' (275).

A further textual barrier in *Крейцерова соната* is its 'frame', which has three discernible aspects. First of all, events are reported through another male passenger to whom Pozdnyshev tells his story. Secondly, the beginning of the tale contains a rather mechanical introductory conversation between people from a broadly representative cross-section of society, which acts as an exposition of the main theme of the story: 'Да брак-то в наше время один обман!'

<sup>53</sup> The narrator says 'Прощайте' to Pozdnyshev, which is the customary Russian form of farewell. Прощать (простить) also means 'to forgive'. See David McDuff's note, in Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, David McDuff, trans., Penguin, London, 1985, p. 287.

(275). The final ‘framing device’ is the Postface, which Tolstoy wrote in response to the controversy surrounding the tale. Here, Tolstoy lays bare the device of the artistic text, by clearly spelling out his own views and clarifying what he meant to say. He argues, amongst other things, for complete celibacy in view of the immorality of sexual passion. It may be suggested that Tolstoy’s use of this narrative framework – particularly the Postface – seeks to authenticate (and thereby give greater credence to) Pozdnyshev’s views.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, Tolstoy’s narrative framing technique has the opposite effect to that used by Emily Brontë and Theodor Storm; as Chapters One and Three have argued, these authors seek to question what is accepted as truth, not validate it.

Another feature of *Крейцерова соната* – and one that it has in common with *Анна Каренина* – is the use of biblical epigraphs.<sup>55</sup> The epigraph to *Анна Каренина* – ‘Мне отмщение, и аз воздам’ – has been the subject of much critical debate in terms of its meaning to the novel as a whole. It would appear that the epigraph elucidates very clearly the judgement/punishment dichotomy that is acted out upon Anna. However, Eikhenbaum believed that the epigraph becomes ‘enigmatic’ by the end of the novel. He argued that ‘Anna was changed from a criminal into a victim, and the natural question arose: what does “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” have to do with it?’<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> We should perhaps question why Tolstoy chose to put his own beliefs in the mouth of a murderer. One possible interpretation might be that it reflects the disgust that he felt with himself at the time the text was written.

<sup>55</sup> *Крейцерова соната* has two epigraphs, both taken from St. Matthew’s gospel (5:28 and 19:10-12). The first one (‘But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart’) is also used in *Дьявол* (published posthumously in 1911) and *Власть тьмы* (1886).

<sup>56</sup> Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Seventies*, Albert Kaspin, trans., Ardis, Michigan, 1982b, p. 145.



Holland makes two key points pertaining to the epigraph, which contribute to its status as a textual barrier. First of all, the fact that this quotation is taken from a biblical source begs the question of who is speaking: is it Tolstoy, or God himself? Holland asks: 'Is he imitating God, laying claim to the role of judge over his fictional universe?'<sup>57</sup> If it is God's voice, then the judgement on his characters – particularly Anna – becomes even more damning. Holland also suggests that Tolstoy uses the epigraph to 'comment on his own [text]'.<sup>58</sup> This (in a similar way to *Крейцерова соната*, as noted) might be interpreted as Tolstoy's justification of the novel's moral framework. On this point, the question of the epigraph's exact source should also be taken into account. It appears in both the Old Testament (in Deuteronomy 32:35: 'To me belongeth vengeance and recompence...') and the New Testament (Romans 12: 19-21), where the original quotation is reworked: 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord"'. If Tolstoy took the epigraph from the New Testament, he has created a multi-layered textual barrier, by way of quoting a quotation from a quotation.

Another textual barrier which relates particularly to *Анна Каренина* is Tolstoy's use of multiple genres. The novel draws upon elements of the society tale, the *Bildungsroman* and the European novel of adultery.<sup>59</sup> Evdokimova has suggested that this 'generic ambiguity', and the ambivalent ending of the novel, express Tolstoy's 'anxiety about literary genres'.<sup>60</sup> One can also argue that Tolstoy uses multiple genres quite deliberately; this section will now aim

<sup>57</sup> Kate Holland, 'The Opening of *Anna Karenina*', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, pp. 144-149 (145).

<sup>58</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Eikhenbaum has also identified elements of what he calls the 'English family novel'. See Eikhenbaum, 1982b, p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> Svetlana Evdokimova, 'The Wedding Bell, the Death Knell, and Philosophy's Spell: Tolstoy's Sense of an Ending', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, pp. 137-143 (141).

to illustrate how he takes elements of each of these genres and manipulates them to suit his own 'archaicising' agenda.

Critics<sup>61</sup> have established that *Анна Каренина* takes many of its stylistic features (such as the depiction of lavish balls and the spa town) from the 'society tale', which first became a popular mode of writing some forty years previously. The catalyst for Tolstoy's first draft of the novel is said to be his reading of Pushkin's sketch for a society tale, 'Гости съезжались на дачу...' (1828-1830). Tolstoy famously commented of this fragment that 'Pushkin goes straight down to business', taking the reader immediately into the action.<sup>62</sup> *Анна Каренина* has even been described as an 'alternative society tale'.<sup>63</sup> However, Tolstoy was not just influenced by Pushkin; there are also echoes of the work of a later female writer, Mariya Zhukova, in *Анна Каренина*.<sup>64</sup> Her society tale *Барон Рейхман*, taken from the cycle *Вечера на карповке* also depicts a young, vibrant mother trapped in a marriage of convenience to an older man. The parallels do not end there: the heroine of Zhukova's tale, Natalya Vasilevna, also seeks solace in the arms of a younger, more dynamic man (ironically named Levin). In *Барон Рейхман*, as in Tolstoy's novel, it is clear that the traditional patriarchal order is retained; Natalya and Levin are forced to end their liaison, and Natalya's husband gains custody of their son.

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<sup>61</sup> See for example W. Gareth Jones, 'Tolstoy's Alternative Society Tales', in Cornwell, Neil, ed., *The Society Tale in Russian Literature. From Odoevskii to Tolstoy*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 99-114.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-113. This is the title of Jones's article.

<sup>64</sup> The affinities between Zhukova's and Tolstoy's works are the subject of ongoing research by Grenier. In her 2001 study, she identifies that although there is no proof that Tolstoy read any tales by Zhukova apart from *Наденька* (1853), there are striking parallels between *Барон Рейхман* and *Анна Каренина*, and also between *Война и мир* and *Медальон* (1837). See Grenier, p. 53.

There are two ways in which Tolstoy's use of the society tale model can be viewed as a textual barrier. First of all, it exposes Tolstoy's own fear of modernity; his use of an old-fashioned literary genre has been said to represent 'a return to the old themes of literature',<sup>65</sup> such as the intrigue of illicit affairs, in a high society setting. The second point relates to the parallels with Zhukova's work. Zhukova, writing from a female perspective some forty years previously, could see no other alternative for a woman in Natalya's situation. Furthermore, the repressive political and moral climate of the regime of Nicholas I, with its strict censorship laws, meant that Zhukova could not have conceived of a more positive ending even if she had wanted to. Tolstoy, on the other hand, had both the freedom to engage with such issues, and the authority of an established male writer. So, then, although Tolstoy was (in theory, at least) able to push the boundaries that much further than Zhukova, as regards women's position, there are perhaps surprisingly few differences in the moral positions taken by her late 1830s work and his 1870s novel.

The second literary genre used in *Анна Каренина* is the *Bildungsroman*; in this regard, Kitty's development from teenager to woman is traced. However, unlike other heroines in this type of novel in the mid to late nineteenth century (such as Jane Eyre), Kitty's story does not involve any kind of self-discovery other than what it means to be a dutiful wife and mother. This forms a striking contrast to other novels in the Russian tradition that can truly be considered to be in the *Bildungsroman* form, such as Khvoshchinskaya's *Пансионерка*. Moreover, as this work was written some fifteen years or more prior to *Анна Каренина*, and depicts the life of a young girl who chooses to live a life as an independent working woman, this makes Kitty's path in life seem even more outdated.

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<sup>65</sup> Eikhenbaum, 1982b, p. 129.

The final genre that Tolstoy draws upon is the European novel of adultery; this is perhaps the most important within the context of this research, because it has considered other novels of this type, such as *Cécile* and *Effi Briest*. Anna's death is more conventionally interpreted as a 'punishment' (because she is a *woman* who commits adultery), not least because her suicide takes place in a train station, the same type of location as where she first met Vronsky. However, some feminist criticism has sought to emphasise two points: firstly, that Anna *chooses* to die. Armstrong, for example, perceives Anna's suicide to defy the 'conventions of the western European novel of adultery',<sup>66</sup> in which 'adulterous females go mad, die by disease or in childbirth, or are murdered, and adulterous males die on the battlefield, in a train crash or in exile'.<sup>67</sup> Secondly, Armstrong has claimed that Tolstoy's 'heroine must administer *to herself* the punishment that he felt he deserved'.<sup>68</sup> In the terms of this reading, which takes account of Tolstoy's 'extra-text' (that is, his own vices of passion and lust, which he seems to impose upon Anna), it can be suggested that Tolstoy sought to express a more general concern with sexual immorality, as opposed to condemning specifically female adultery.

However, the fact that *Анна Каренина* does not end with Anna's death is a further textual barrier, and one that is at odds with Armstrong's more optimistic interpretation. Part Eight of the novel is perhaps most notable for the fact of Anna's absence; furthermore, her fate is barely mentioned. Stiva's reaction to her death is the most telling example of this: 'Степан Аркадьич уже вполне забыл свои отчаянные рыдания над трупом сестры и видел в Вронском только героя и старого приятеля' (376, 2). By denying Anna the end of the novel

<sup>66</sup> Judith Armstrong, 'Anna Karenina and the Novel of Adultery', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, 2003, pp. 117-123 (123).

<sup>67</sup> Priscilla Meyer, 'Anna Karenina: Tolstoy's Polemic with Madame Bovary', *The Russian Review*, 1995, 54, 2, pp. 243-260 (244). Based on this premise, Emma Bovary also defies these conventions.

<sup>68</sup> Armstrong, 2003, p. 121, my italics.

that is in her name, Tolstoy seems to 'punish' her all over again; not only is she excluded from her family and society by the time she dies, she is also excluded textually. This becomes even more apparent if one considers other novels of adultery of the period, such as *Madame Bovary*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Effi Briest*, which all have the heroine's death at or very close to the end (thereby reinforcing these characters as heroines of *their* novels). As noted in Chapter Four, Fontane's *L'Adultera* even ends happily, with the marriage of the adulterous pair of Melanie and Rubehn. However, one might conceive of Anna having the 'last laugh' outside of the text, in terms of the novel's critical reception; various film versions have neglected to include Part Eight, and Tolstoy's publisher, Katkov, stopped serial publication at the end of Part Seven.<sup>69</sup>

The language that Tolstoy uses to describe women may also be viewed as a textual barrier. Although he does not use predetermined images and stereotypes to the same extent as Turgenev, the Madonna/Whore dichotomy is still discernible. In *Война и мир*, for example, the sexually alluring Hélène is juxtaposed with the idealised Natasha. This is achieved not only through contrastive physical description, but also through their relationships with Pierre (they are both married to him). A similar effect is apparent in the characterisation and plot dynamics of Anna and Kitty, who are linked by their relationships with Vronsky. Kitty herself voices her simultaneous attraction towards and revulsion from Anna's sexuality (which is perceived to be inappropriate for a mother); whilst Kitty finds Anna 'преlestн[ая]', she also calls her 'бесовск[ая]' (97, 1). Kitty's dual perception of Anna here might be said to voice Tolstoy's own ambivalent attitude towards his most complex heroine.

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<sup>69</sup> Eydokimova, p. 137.

In a similar way to Turgenev, Tolstoy uses foreign language (specifically, French) to signify 'otherness', particularly in *Анна Каренина*. Knapp has identified how French is viewed as a 'sinister force' in the novel, from the Oblonsky's governess with whom Stiva has had an affair, to the French-speaking peasant of Anna's nightmares.<sup>70</sup> Another example that should be considered in this regard is Dolly's shocked (and condemnatory) reaction to Anna's revelation that she has been using contraception: "N'est-ce pas immoral?" – только сказала она, помолчав' (227, 2). Furthermore, Tolstoy emphasises French as this 'sinister force' by way of its repeated contrast with Russian. To illustrate this point, it should be noted that Vronsky and Anna usually converse in French ('продолжал он по-французски, как он всегда говорил, избегая невозможно-холодного между ними *вы* и опасного *ты* по-русски' [208, 1]), whereas Kitty and Levin speak to each other in Russian. French is also used to imply a moral fissure between the worlds of the 'good' country and the 'bad' city (St Petersburg in particular).<sup>71</sup> Two points at which the French and Russian worlds collide both involve Levin. First of all, when he visits Stiva in Moscow and they go out for dinner, Levin is repulsed by the French woman working in the restaurant: 'Он, как от грязного места, поспешно отошел от неё. Вся душа его была переполнена воспоминанием о Кити' (43, 1). The second instance is when Levin visits Dolly at her country estate. When he first arrives, 'он очутился пред одного из картин своего воображаемого в будущем семейного быта' (295, 1), yet after hearing Dolly speak French to her children, 'ему было неловко' (301, 1). The clash between Russian and French is perhaps more obvious here because of the country location (the world of Russian as opposed to the Francophile city world of the first example).

<sup>70</sup> Liza Knapp, 'The Names', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, pp. 8-23 (15).

<sup>71</sup> In this context, Tanner's idea of the 'city' and the 'field' is reversed.

This section has explored how Tolstoy uses the textual barriers of narrative structure, narrative voice and generic multiplicity to limit his female characters. Moreover, and perhaps even more striking, is that Tolstoy subverts narrative techniques that other authors use to give women a voice, to take that same voice away.

### **Actual Barriers: Protection and Exclusion**

Previous chapters, particularly those on the Brontës and Eliot, have explored how actual barriers function as a means of protest against the restrictions facing women. In Tolstoy's novels, however, they are used to vindicate female curtailment. This section will now consider how Tolstoy presents actual barriers in different ways for different female character types. This is particularly the case of *Анна Каренина*, where Dolly and Kitty (his 'angels') are protected by the actual barrier of the 'house', because this is where they carry out their duties as mothers. Anna, on the other hand, is restricted by actual barriers; she is stifled – not protected – by domesticity and its associated spaces. This section will also apply a Bakhtinian reading of 'threshold barriers' (such as windows and doors) to Anna; it will be contended that her 'punishment' for rejecting the mother role is to occupy an uncomfortable position as a character 'on the threshold', who does not belong in any of the social worlds in which she moves. Finally, the semiotics of female 'vestimentary markers' will be analysed.

Tolstoy's ideal women, such as Dolly and Kitty, are at their happiest when they are safely ensconced within the domestic sphere, where they carry out tasks pertaining to motherhood. The scene in the Levin household where the women make jam and knit baby garments (Part 6,

Chapters 1 and 2), for example, is one of the most joyful in the novel. Dolly also uses the sanctuary of her domestic space to take her mind off the recent revelations of Stiva's affair with the French governess: 'Дарья Александровна погрузилась в заботы дня и потопила в них на время свое горе' (21, 1). Dolly's move to the country is a further aspect of an interpretation of protective domestic space. Whilst Stiva is funding his bachelor lifestyle ('весело и приятно проводил время и на скачках и на дачах'), Dolly is forced to move to her dowry estate at Ergushovo which is 'стар и гнил', to save money (287, 1). Indeed, one might even conceive of Stiva's neglect of this estate as a metaphor for his neglect of his wife. The repairs that he orders are mainly aesthetic (such as re-covering furniture and putting up curtains) and not pertaining to the functional running of the house: 'но он забыл много других необходимых вещей, недостаток которых потом измучал Дарью Александровну' (288, 1). For example, the house is not suitably protected against the elements (it floods on Dolly's first night there) and there is virtually no food. Ergushovo eventually provides a protective domestic space; crucially, this has not been engendered by Stiva. It comes about through the actions of the housekeeper, Matriona Filimonovna, who enlists the support of the local community to render the house habitable. The situation at Ergushovo, therefore, reinforces the perception of Stiva as a bad husband; not only does he commit serial adultery, he also fails to provide Dolly with a suitable domestic space.

The name of Levin's estate, Pokrovskoe, which derives from ('покрывать/покрыть'; 'to veil, or cover'<sup>72</sup>) takes on a new importance in this context. In contrast to Stiva, Levin succeeds in providing Kitty (and Dolly) with a suitable domestic space. Andrew has noted that Tolstoy also uses this name for an estate in *Семейное счастье*, which sets up what he describes as the

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<sup>72</sup> Lönnqvist, p. 73.



house/anti-house dynamic. Here, the protective 'house' is represented by Masha's country home, and the 'anti-house' is the artificial society of St Petersburg.<sup>73</sup> In this earlier work, Masha is simultaneously protected by the 'house' and exposed to the 'anti-house', but because she is seen to seek her husband's forgiveness, she is permitted to return to the 'house' at the end of the text and fulfil a maternal role.

Anna, on the other hand, is associated from the start with the 'anti-house', and is therefore never protected by the cult of domesticity that 'redeems' Masha. Even before we meet Anna, Dolly's comments hint at her loveless marriage to Karenin: 'что-то было фальшивое во всем складе их семейного быта' (79, 1). At this stage in the novel, Tolstoy invites the reader to feel sympathy for Anna, a vibrant, charming woman trapped in a marriage to a routine-obsessed bureaucrat. This sympathy, however, evaporates after Anna embarks upon her affair with Vronsky, and her exclusion from welcoming domestic space becomes even more apparent. Her 'home' with Vronsky, for example, is artificial for its 'новой европейской роскоши' (203, 2). *Vozdvizhenskoe* is also 'set off against Levin's *Pokrovskoe*';<sup>74</sup> whereas Levin's estate is seen as authentic and natural, Vronsky's estate is perceived to be false and pretentious. This contrast is paralleled in the behaviour of the women who inhabit these places; whilst Kitty is viewed as a natural mother, Anna merely 'plays' at this role in her relationship with her English protégée, Hannah. Crucially, she is unable to be a true mother to her own daughter, Annie (or, for different reasons, to her own son). Anna is also excluded from the domestic space of other women. Benson has linked this with her rejection of the mother role, commenting that 'Anna's refusal to be a wife to Vronsky and to bear more of his

<sup>73</sup> Andrew, 2007, pp. 86-87.

<sup>74</sup> Lönnqvist, p. 72.

children parallels her larger estrangement from the whole world of women. She is either alone or with men (or Dolly)'.<sup>75</sup>

Anna, then, is isolated in life and in death. Her suicide, which sees her jump under the wheels of a train, is the most dramatic of endings, and is a crash into an actual barrier. However, unlike other barriers, such as the walls that surround the protective and nurturing 'house', it is moving, not static. This has three effects: first of all, it reinforces Anna's exclusion from the stability of the home. Secondly, her fruitless attempts to get out of the way of the train (once she has jumped) emphasises the lack of control that Anna has had over her life. Finally, it forms a link to the travel imagery that this thesis has explored in other novels of adultery, particularly *Effi Briest*. In this regard, it should be noted that the sledge in which Effi's affair with Crampas begins is a much more 'open' vehicle than Anna's train. This contrasting choice of vehicle, therefore, seems to accurately reflect both Fontane's liberal tolerance and understanding of Effi's situation, and Tolstoy's judgement upon Anna. Furthermore, and from the very beginning, Anna's and Vronsky's relationship is invested with sordidness by way of its association with the railway, which Tolstoy considered to be dirty and a symbol of all that was wrong with change and development in Russian society. In this regard, Jackson has noted that the railway motif in *Анна Каренина* and *Крейцерова соната* is 'an embodiment of death and destruction', not least, he claims, because 'the railroad carriage is coffin-shaped'.<sup>76</sup>

Tolstoy's use of travel imagery in relation to Dolly and Kitty should also be highlighted here. Their rides in carriages, a traditional vehicle that would have been more acceptable in

<sup>75</sup> Benson, p. 96.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Louis Jackson, 'The Night Journey: Anna Karenina's Return to Saint Petersburg', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, pp. 150-160 (158).

Tolstoy's 'archaic' world, are set up in opposition to Anna's 'dirty', modern train. Dolly, whilst riding in a carriage on her way to visit her sister-in-law, muses upon Anna's situation, and questions her own decision to remain with Stiva: "“Он мне нужен”, думала она про мужа, “и я терплю его. Разве это лучше?”” (195, 2). Although Dolly is able to conceive of leaving her husband, her carriage-ride daydream of an alternative life with another man remains 'safe', because it is clear that it will always be in her imagination: 'Дарья Александровна воображала себе свой почти такой же роман с воображаемым собирательным мужчиной, который был влюблен в нее' (195, 2). In Kitty's carriage scene, a multiple layer of barriers is utilised, which has the effect of idealising her: 'У окна, видимо только что проснувшись, сидела молодая девушка, держась обеими руками за ленточки белого чепчика' (306, 1). Here one should note the textual barriers of narrative perspective (she is seen through Levin's eyes) and language (she is described in idealistic terms, as a 'виденье' [307, 1]). Actual barriers are employed too; the window has a 'framing' effect and the white nightcap is a 'vestimentary marker' of her virginal status.

A sub-type of actual barrier, the threshold barrier, is a key facet of Tolstoy's depiction of female transgression.<sup>77</sup> In *Семейное счастье*, for example, Tolstoy signals Masha's wish to rebel against patriarchal structures when she reaches over a wall to pick cherries, declaring: 'Нет, я сама хочу рвать' (89). As Andrew has noted, this illustrates how Masha desires the 'typologically male role' in terms of plot movement and behaviour.<sup>78</sup> Anna, too, has this 'typologically male role'; her desire to effect a reconciliation between Dolly and Stiva drives

<sup>77</sup> The verb 'to transgress' in Russian may be translated as *Переступить* (as in Dostoevsky's *Преступление и наказание*), but also as *переходить*, which literally means to 'step across'. The German verb 'übertreten' may also be translated in either way.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew, 2007, p. 99.

her storyline forward, in the sense that she would not have met Vronsky had she not been in Moscow. Furthermore, Anna's role as a mediator between Dolly and Stiva affirms her status as a character between worlds, or one who is 'on the threshold', from the very outset.

The first semiotic indicator of Anna's willingness to cross the threshold comes in her literal action of opening the door of the train carriage and stepping out on to the platform. When her servant asks, 'Выходить изволите?', Anna replies in the affirmative: 'Да, мне подышать хочется. Тут очень жарко' (117, 1). This uncomfortable and stifling feeling of heat that she experiences whilst *inside* the carriage is given relief by the *outside* and the cold winter air: 'С наслаждением, полною грудью, она вдыхала в себя снежный, морозный воздух' (117, 1). Metaphorically speaking, one might consider the 'inside' of the carriage to represent her stifling and unhappy marriage to Karenin, whilst the 'outside' (on the other side of the threshold) is her affair with Vronsky; indeed, in the latter regard, Anna meets Vronsky immediately after she has left the train. One should also take account of the thematic affinities between Anna and other literary heroines whose longing for fresh air expresses their desire for freedom, Catherine Earnshaw and Effi Briest.

Once Anna has transgressed by crossing the threshold, she remains on the 'outside', by way of her exclusion from domestic space (as previously discussed). A critical incident at the end of Anna's life brings her back to the threshold of the doorway and to the domain of the mother, as she goes to see Dolly in a desperate plea for help. Unfortunately for Anna, Dolly is pre-occupied with assisting Kitty in feeding Mitya, and there is a strong sense that Anna is a 'stranger' whose presence is not welcome: 'Долли одна вышла встретить гостью, в эту

минуту мешавшую их беседе' (357, 2). Moreover, not only is Anna an unwanted guest, whose presence interrupts the intrinsically female activity of childcare, she is also initially not invited into the house; Dolly goes outside to greet her, and the conversation that follows takes place mostly in the doorway. This is the clearest indication of Anna's self-imposed alienation from her mother role, and it is after this rebuff from Dolly that Anna commits suicide.

Barriers of external adornment (feminine 'vestimentary markers') play a key role in restricting Tolstoy's women. Goscilo has observed that Anna's world 'seems ominously shadowed and corseted' in the sense that Tolstoy 'casts a conceptual net over the novel that binds images and motifs so tightly as to court psychological and stylistic claustrophobia'.<sup>79</sup> As regards vestimentary markers, however, Tolstoy depicts Anna as 'un-corseted', by exposing her body. Anna's exposed body, furthermore, is perceived as a threat because it is an overt display of female sexuality. Kitty and Dolly, on the other hand, are covered by vestimentary markers that protect their modesty, and any discussion of their bodies relates to their functionality as mothers.

The character of H el ene Kuragina in *Война и мир* is an earlier example of Tolstoy's depiction of 'dangerous' female sexuality and exposure of female flesh. She is described throughout in an overtly sexual way, from the perspective of Bezukov in particular. For example, just before his engagement to her, 'он смотрел на её поднимающуюся и опускающуюся прекрасную грудь' (272, 1). Later, after the revelation of her liaison with Dolokhov,

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<sup>79</sup> Goscilo, p. 83.

Bezukhov is haunted by the image of her naked shoulders (32, 2).<sup>80</sup> However, although Hélène's display of sexuality is perceived to be distasteful, she does not cross the 'threshold' of acceptability in Tolstoy's eyes, because she never has any children. Anna, on the other hand, occupies an uneasy position as a mother *and* an attractive, sexual being. Her lack of maternal self-effacement that would be expected of a Tolstoyan mother is emphasised in Kitty's remark that Anna 'непохожа была [...] на мать восьмилетнего сына' (84, 1). Kitty also expresses surprise at Anna's ball dress: 'Анна была не в лиловом, как того непременно хотела Кити, а в черном, низко срезанном бархатном платье, открывавшем её точеные, как старой слоновой кости, полные плечи и грудь и округлые руки с тонкою крошечною кистью' (92, 1). Again, through the perspective of one of his 'ideal' women, Tolstoy is able to emphasise the inappropriate nature of Anna's behaviour, this time by way of her exposure of flesh.

Another example of Anna's 'exposure' can be found in the first, crucial train scene. Before she seeks out the fresh air of the 'outside', Anna attempts to cool herself down in the carriage itself: 'Она поднялась, чтоб опомниться, откинула плед и сняла пелерину теплого платья' (116, 1). This action can be interpreted in two ways; firstly, because it comes directly before Anna crosses the threshold (by stepping out of the carriage), it can be seen as a vestimentary precursor to her transgression. It may also be viewed more simply, as a sexual symbol. This second interpretation is reinforced by both the overtly phallic motif of the

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<sup>80</sup> In later works, Tolstoy's depiction of women as sexual objects becomes even more blatant. Pozdnyshev, for example, is obsessed with how women dress provocatively, and compares 'society ladies' to prostitutes, with 'то же оголение рук, плеч, груди и обтягивание выставленного зада' (284). In *Дьявол*, Tolstoy's polarised physical descriptions of women become even more extreme, as he alludes to the contrast between the sickly body of Irtenev's dutiful wife, Liza, and the wide hips, flashing black eyes and red lips of the enchanting temptress, Stepanida.

penknife that Anna uses to cut open the pages of her English novel, and her little red bag, which Goscolo has described as a 'reductive, demeaning symbol [...] for Anna's awakened carnal desire'.<sup>81</sup> The second moment of crisis, at which the blanket motif recurs, is in Anna's 'mad scene'<sup>82</sup> following Annie's birth. Here, she frantically cries: 'Да снимите же с меня эти шубы!' (454, 1).

In contrast to the sexualised Anna and H el ene who are 'exposed', Tolstoy's ideal women remain 'hidden'. Kitty in particular is covered up by her clothing; this, furthermore, is an aspect of her idealisation. Three separate passages which describe Kitty's attire (all seen through Levin's eyes) have this effect. First of all, and on Kitty's very first appearance in the novel, Tolstoy details her with 'маленькою ручкой в черной перчатке иглы инея, упавшие на муфту' (38, 1). The second example is on her wedding day, when we see her with a 'длинным белым вуалем' and a dress with a 'высоко стоявший сборчатый воротник, особенно девственно закрывавший с боков и открывавший спереди её длинную шею'. Her 'невин[ая] правдивост[ь]' in her wedding attire, moreover, leads Levin to deem her 'лучше, чем когда-нибудь' (21, 2). The final example comes just after she has given birth, where she is lying on the bed, covered with a counterpane, 'в нарядном чепчике с чем-то голубым' (312, 2). In this scene, Kitty is the very picture of serenity, and she takes to her new role as a mother with ease (in contrast to Anna's post-birth experience, as detailed above). In this way, although Kitty is more 'corseted' than Anna (in the sense that her clothing is

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<sup>81</sup> Goscolo, p. 86.

<sup>82</sup> There are considerable stylistic and thematic parallels with Catherine Earnshaw's 'mad scene' in Chapter 12 of *Wuthering Heights*. Both scenes take place in a bedroom, and see the female protagonists in a state of extreme anxiety before (Catherine) and after (Anna) childbirth. Both Catherine and Anna make reference to their fear of the 'other' woman in them; Anna says, 'Но во мне есть другая, я её боюсь' (453, 1) and Catherine is frightened of her own reflection.

restrictive in its function of covering her up), she is simultaneously protected by the 'vestimentary markers' of courtship, marriage, and finally, motherhood.

It has become apparent that Tolstoy uses actual barriers in multiple ways; to exclude, to protect, to expose, and to cover. His 'ideal' women, Dolly and Kitty, are protected by barriers such as walls and doors, which keep them 'safe' in the domestic sphere. They are also shielded by their clothing, which preserves their modesty *and* their morality. Anna, on the other hand, is simultaneously 'corseted' (to use Goswami's term) by her association with the enclosed space of the railway carriage, and 'un-corseted' in her exposure of flesh. Furthermore, in her attempts to overcome these actual barriers, Anna is punished all the more for daring to transgress.

### **The Problem of Society and Anna's Identity Crisis: Perceived Barriers**

As this chapter has argued, the main perceived barrier to face Tolstoy's women is the fact of their limited role. However, there are two other important types of perceived barriers in Tolstoy's works. The first type encompasses social concerns, such as class and status, marriages of convenience and 'society's judgement' (particularly as regards the sexual moral double standard). The second type is linked with women's limited role and concerns the question of female identity (particularly Anna's).

Class and status, first of all, is particularly pertinent to a consideration of the role of the 'marginal women' in Tolstoy's fiction. As this chapter has already discussed, some critics



have interpreted the depiction of Varenka (the most important example of this type) as 'feminist'. However, one should also highlight the fact of her ongoing marginality as indicative of 'compromise or failure'.<sup>83</sup> The first point to consider in this regard is, although it later transpires that she is meant to have been raised as Madame Stahl's daughter, Varenka is introduced as her companion. Secondly, and as Knapp has identified, Tolstoy uses the semiotics and etymology of her name to allude to her diminished social status. Unlike other characters in the novel, she is almost exclusively referred to by her nickname, and her family name is never revealed.<sup>84</sup> The name 'Varenka' itself is a double diminutive, deriving from 'Varvara' (which comes from the Greek for 'stranger' or alien') by way of 'Varya'.<sup>85</sup> Varenka, therefore, is not only doubly marginal in her status as ward and spinster, her name itself is emblematic of her peripheral role. In view of all this, it can be suggested that Varenka is less of a fully-developed character in her own right and more of a token symbol of Tolstoy's contribution to the debate on the Woman Question. Indeed, she may also be viewed as a 'phase' in Kitty's development; this is intimated by way of Kitty's fear that she will remain an 'old maid' when she first meets Varenka, but this is resolved when she marries Levin.

Another perceived barrier is manifested in the marriage of convenience. In *Анна Каренина*, Tolstoy attacks a society that expects marriages to come about not for love, but from a desire to be rich and/or socially accepted. For example, he implicitly criticises Princess Scherbatsky's belief that Vronsky is a suitable match for Kitty: 'Вронский удовлетворял всем желаниям матери. Очень богат, умен, знатен, на пути блестящей военно-

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<sup>83</sup> Goscilo, p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> The only time she is referred to by her full given name and patronymic is just before Koznyshev is about to propose. See Knapp, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> Loc. cit.

придворной карьеры и обворожительный человек. Нельзя было ничего лучшего желать' (54, 1). Her husband, however, questions this shallow basis for her approval of Vronsky; he reminds her of the fate that befell 'несчастную Долли' (67, 1), who had a similarly 'good match' in Stiva, and is now desperately unhappy. In this regard, one might also consider Anna to be a victim of social convention; she too has married for the sake of a 'good match'. This is emphasised in Dolly's introduction of her sister-in-law: 'жена одного из важнейших лиц в Петербурге и петербургская grande dame' (80). Although Anna has money and status, she is unhappy in her marriage to Karenin, a dull and officious bureaucrat, and spends much of her time alone, due to his work commitments: 'Алексей Александрович вернулся из министерства в четыре часа, но, как это часто бывало, не успел войти к ней' (125, 1).

Another perceived barrier is the sexual moral double standard; that is, the way in which society condones male adultery, yet condemns female adultery.<sup>86</sup> In *Анна Каренина*, family ties serve to highlight this hypocrisy; as Morson has emphasised, 'the key to understanding Anna is that she is Stiva's sister, Anna Oblonskaia'.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, whilst Anna's adultery leads to her social isolation, Stiva is seen to prosper despite his affairs. Although Tolstoy invites criticism of Stiva due to his poor treatment of Dolly, he is, to some extent, portrayed as a figure of fun. He even jokes about adultery to Levin: 'Отчего же? Калач иногда так пахнет, что не удержишься' (51, 1). Anna, too, recognises society's acceptance of male adultery, even if she does not understand it; in her attempts to reconcile Dolly and Stiva, she comments to Dolly: 'Эти люди делают неверности, но свой домашний очаг и жена – это для них

<sup>86</sup> *Крейцерова соната* is more explicit in its treatment of this theme. Pozdnyshev describes the acceptance of men having sex outside of wedlock (both before and during marriage) thus: 'ведь это один сплошной дом терпимости' (283). Again, one might argue here that Tolstoy is expressing a more general concern with immorality (as opposed to denying the Woman Question).

<sup>87</sup> Cited in Karpushina, p. 69.

святыня [...]. Они какую-то черту проводят непроходимую между семьей и этим' (83, 1). From the perspective of barrier semiotics, this 'line' to which she refers is one that she – as a mother – is unable to draw. More generally, this passage holds the key to an understanding of Anna's situation, not as a *woman* who has an affair, but rather, as a *mother*. The fact that Anna's adultery brings about the abrogation of this role renders her 'crime' much worse within the Tolstoyan moral framework. This interpretation may also explain how, whilst Anna is made a social outcast, another woman, Princess Betsy, is accepted in society despite her affairs.

The final perceived barrier relates to female identity. On this point, it can be argued that Tolstoy's 'punishes' Anna for relinquishing her mother role by way of the identity crisis that she suffers in the later stages of the novel. By way of introduction to this notion, one might consider Mandelker's claim that 'most continental novels separate the passion of the adulterous woman from the passion of motherhood, perhaps representing a fissure in social perceptions of women's potential to fulfil multiple roles'.<sup>88</sup> In Anna's case, this 'fissure' is perhaps her most insurmountable barrier. Indeed, Tolstoy depicts her struggle to fulfil her mother role once she has commenced her affair with Vronsky, by emphasising the difference in her behaviour around children before and after this. For example, when she first appears in the novel, it is obvious that she loves children, as her nieces and nephews smother her with affection, even though they have not seen her for some time: 'еще до обеда прилипли к новой тете и не отходили от нее' (84, 1). Through Vronsky's mother, we learn of Anna's affection for her son, Seriozha: 'она никогда с ним не разлучалась и все мучается, что оставила его' (75). However, upon her return home, Anna's feelings towards her son have

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<sup>88</sup> Mandelker, 1990, p. 97.

changed: 'И сын, так же как и муж, произвел в Анне чувство, похожее на разочарование' (123, 1). Later in the novel, Anna becomes even more distanced from children; firstly, in her estrangement from Seriozha, which is enforced by Karenin. Benson has noted that in her final visit to Seriozha, Tolstoy depicts Anna as a 'furtive intruder in his room', and in doing so, Tolstoy 'serves to show Anna the consequences of the choice she has irrevocably made'.<sup>89</sup> The feelings of guilt surrounding their affair also extend to Vronsky, and centre on Seriozha: 'Присутствие этого ребенка всегда и неизменно вызывало во Вронском то странное чувство беспричинного омерзения, которое он испытывал последнее время' (207, 1). In this way, Anna's dual identity as mother and adulteress not only denies her the love of her child, it also affects her relationship with her lover. It is a situation in which she cannot win. By the time she has her second child, she has distanced herself even more from the mother role, and is unable to bond with baby Annie. When Dolly visits her, she is shocked that Anna does not seem to spend any time with Annie: 'посещение матерью было дело необычайное' (206, 2). In the same scene, it is revealed that Anna does not even know where her toys are kept or how many teeth she has.

Tolstoy's deliberate choice of the name 'Annie' also serves to highlight Anna's identity problems. In this regard, Knapp has suggested that Anna's 'crisis of identity [...] seems to be internalized in her (Annie's – КА) name', not least because Annie's patronymic is Alexeyevna; this perpetuates what she describes as Anna's 'nightmare of the two Alexeys'.<sup>90</sup> One might also consider how Anna has other 'doubles', in the form of her servant, Annushka,

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<sup>89</sup> Benson, p. 95.

<sup>90</sup> Knapp, pp. 19-20.

and her adopted daughter, Hannah.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, by naming Annie after herself,<sup>92</sup> Anna reveals her self-preoccupation, to the extent that it has been suggested that she suffers from a narcissistic personality disorder.<sup>93</sup>

Anna's crisis of identity is developed further by way of the two linked motifs of portraits and mirrors. First of all, and as Weir has pointed out, Anna needs to look at portraits of Seriozha to reaffirm her identity as a mother.<sup>94</sup> However, she rejects baby Annie, as she serves as a reminder to Anna of her social isolation (and also of what she has lost in Seriozha). Portraits of Anna herself also play an important role in the iconography surrounding her. Vronsky, for example, has attempted to paint her portrait, but he cannot get it right; he complains that 'Я сколько времени бьюсь и ничего не сделал' (51, 2).<sup>95</sup> Mikhailov's portrait, however, truly captures her beauty (in Levin's eyes, at least); upon seeing it, Levin 'не мог оторваться от него'. Furthermore, Levin believes that 'только потому она была не живая, что она была красивее, чем может быть живая' (290, 2). The fact that reality is less than the fiction of art is confirmed once Levin meets Anna herself just moments later: 'Она была менее блестяща в действительности' (290, 2). Another possible interpretation of Levin's observation might be that Anna has become a shadow of her former self; this assessment would be consistent with her general physical and mental decline as depicted up to this point.

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<sup>91</sup> Mandelker, 1993, p. 158.

<sup>92</sup> One may also discern another link here with *Wuthering Heights*, where a daughter is also named after her mother.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, 'Anna's Adultery: Distal Sociobiology vs Proximate Psychoanalysis', *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 1993, 6, pp. 33-46 (pp. 39-40).

<sup>94</sup> Justin Weir, 'Tolstoy Sees the Truth but Waits: The Consequences of Aesthetic Vision in *Anna Karenina*', in Knapp and Mandelker, eds, pp. 173-179 (174).

<sup>95</sup> Here we might also note the reference to the Tintoretto painting just prior to this scene (Chapter 7, Part 5), which may be the 'Woman Taken in Adultery' as featured in Fontane's *L'Adultera*.

This decline culminates in Anna's suicide, and, in one of her final scenes before her death, Tolstoy foreshadows Anna's fate by way of the mirror motif.<sup>96</sup> In a final examination of her conscience and confrontation of her self-identity, Anna sits in front of a mirror, identifying that her relationship with Vronsky is over and that 'надо кончить' (342, 2). This prompts her to remember her confinement and subsequent illness, which leads her to the idea that death would be a way out of her impossible situation: 'Да, это была та мысль, которая одна разрешала все. "Да, умереть!"' (343, 2). A few pages later, Vronsky glances at Anna's almost corpse-like reflection in the mirror before he leaves her for the last time: 'Он в зеркало увидал её лицо, бледное, с дрожащими губами' (349, 1). In this sense, and perhaps for a long time preceding this incident, Anna is already 'dead' in Vronsky's eyes.

Although certain aspects of perceived barriers in Tolstoy's works (particularly his critique of society) 'might [today] be interpreted as feminist', I would concur with Marsh's subsequent assessment that this does not make it 'a feminist text'.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Tolstoy's 'punishment' of Anna for abrogating her role as a mother is a firm indication of his 'inflexible closedness' towards alternative roles for women, and possibly his strongest denial of the Woman Question.

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<sup>96</sup> Here we might remind ourselves how mirrors are associated in some traditions with death. For example (and as discussed in Chapter Three), in *Auf dem Staatshof*, the mirrors are covered up because of the North German superstition that if a corpse is reflected in a mirror, it will go on to haunt the house.

<sup>97</sup> Marsh, 1998, p. 30. Here Marsh is referring to *Крейцерово соната*, but this reading may equally be applied to *Анна Каренина*.

## Conclusion

This study of the semiotics of barriers in Tolstoy's fiction, as viewed within a wider European context, seems to confirm Tolstoy's denial of the Woman Question. It has become apparent that Tolstoy takes techniques used by other authors considered in this thesis to argue *for* greater freedom for women (for instance, Charlotte Brontë's use of enclosed spaces) and subverts them to argue *against* it. Indeed, textual and actual barriers are constructed so as to emphasise what Tolstoy felt women were 'biologically and emotionally marked' for – motherhood.<sup>98</sup>

It is quite probably the case that a feminist approach to Tolstoy's fiction raises more questions than it answers. It is more probable still that – in seeking to posit 'feminism' in his works – we are looking for something that is not there. Tolstoy's 'humane portrayal'<sup>99</sup> of Anna, particularly following the birth of Annie, undoubtedly raises questions, and it may be tempting to identify this as 'crypto-feminism'. However, this may more appropriately be viewed as an example of realism, which derived from Tolstoy's own experiences of family life, and *not* feminism. Paradoxically, then, the crypto-feminist approach may be viewed as an 'extra-textual' barrier of sorts, because it does not acknowledge the reality that all of Tolstoy's women, even those who conform to his 'holy ideal', are seen to suffer at some point, simply for being women. Goscilo's 'inflexible closedness' applies, therefore, not only to Anna, but equally, to most women in Tolstoy's fiction.

<sup>98</sup> Tolstoy's words in 'On Marriage and the Vocation of Women' (published posthumously). Cited in Benson, p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> Benson, p. 102. In a paper given at BASEES in 2009 ('The Unattainable Ideal: Tolstoy's Mother Heroines'), I explored how Tolstoy might be said to depict Anna to suffer from a severe form of post-natal depression, puerperal psychosis.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to provide a revisionist view of the Woman Question in mid- to late-nineteenth-century English, German and Russian literatures, by analysing the semiotics of barriers. By way of conclusion, the key findings will now be considered on three levels: firstly, in each individual chapter; secondly, in each individual country; and finally, as part of the wider European context.

The first two chapters, on Charlotte and Emily Brontë and George Eliot, both explored how barriers are used as a means of protest against women's limited role. It was argued that Eliot's use of barriers, albeit more subtle than that of the Brontës, still revealed a greater degree of 'feminism' than has previously been assumed of her works. Both of these chapters focused on the core issue of female identity, alongside what was deemed to be the extra-textual barrier of writing as a woman and the associated 'anxiety of authorship'. It was argued that the woman/author (Brontë/Bell) conflict was a key component of an interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's work. The fact that this dichotomy did not impinge upon Emily Brontë in the same way as her sister was cited as one possible reason why *Wuthering Heights* is such a difficult text to locate within any one given genre. The extra-textual barrier of Eliot's masculine pseudonym was also taken into consideration when providing this re-vision of her works along more 'feminist' lines. Both chapters discussed the way in which patriarchal literary techniques are re-worked, particularly as regards the language used to describe women. It was contended that Eliot in particular sought to subvert the Madonna/Whore dichotomy in her presentation of 'hybrid' types (women who are simultaneously Other and Angel). In my discussion of actual



barriers, I suggested that Eliot's use of more 'fluid' barriers, such as clothing and water, represented a more subtle means of protest than the Brontës' attics and locked doors. Finally, both chapters considered how perceived barriers, particularly the mirror/portrait motifs, have implications for an interpretation of female identity in the novels themselves.

Chapters Three and Four, on Theodor Storm and Theodor Fontane, argued that although the Woman Question was not manifested in the historical context of Germany to the same extent as the rest of Europe, it was played out in literary texts, albeit subtly. The Storm chapter sought to offer a new interpretation of his works from a gender perspective. To this end, it looked at his depiction of different female character types, and identified a new figure, that of the 'marginal female performer'. It contended that Storm is at his most 'feminist' in his depiction of the 'demonic woman' type; these women are able to transcend textual, actual and perceived barriers, but they are subsequently 'punished' by way of social exclusion, because they are seen to challenge the status quo. The Fontane chapter provided a more comprehensive analysis of his engagement with the Woman Question (which normally focuses upon *Effi Briest*) and suggested that there is a clear development of female autonomy in his works, from the earlier balladesque novellas to the later social novels. To this end, the chapter identified the prevalence of the fairy-tale theme in relation to the 'fairy-tale heroines' and the 'innocent adulteresses', and aimed to illustrate the contrasting treatment of later Fontane heroines (the 'social climbers'), who are able to overcome the barriers which they face. Both chapters considered the Woman Question against the backdrop of Bismarck's Germany, and explored how both writers are critical of prevailing social norms, whether they are those of the inward-

looking communities depicted in Storm's works or the militaristic and honour-driven society to be found in Fontane's fiction.

Chapters Five and Six considered aspects of the Russian context of the Woman Question, in the works of Turgenev and Tolstoy respectively. They explored the implications of one of the initial research questions addressed by this thesis, which was the diverging attitude of Turgenev and Tolstoy towards women. Adopting the Lotmanian theory of the text/extra-text dichotomy, these chapters highlighted links between both writers as regards their mutually ambivalent literary treatment of women. The Turgenev chapter considered the implications of textual barriers (particularly narrative frames and Turgenev's use of predetermined images and stereotypes to describe his female characters) for a re-vision of his stance on the Woman Question. Turgenev's use of multi-layered barriers (encompassing textual, actual and perceived barriers) to emphasise female curtailment was highlighted. The chapter also discussed how barrier semiotics could equally be applied to an interpretation of male characters, particularly the superfluous man type. The Tolstoy chapter suggested that the semiotics of textual and actual barriers are constructed to emphasise the overarching perceived barrier in his works: the fact that Tolstoy demonstrates an 'inflexible closedness' to alternative roles for women other than that of wife and mother. All of this, it was argued, served to vindicate his denial of the Woman Question. Links were highlighted between Turgenev and Tolstoy in terms of their use of textual barriers, particularly the notion of French as a 'sinister force'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Knapp, p. 15.

As was discussed in the Introduction, this thesis had as one of its starting points cross-cultural biographical connections (between Turgenev, Eliot and Storm in particular). By analysing the semiotics of textual, actual and perceived barriers, literary connections have become apparent, in all three of these barrier types.

The study of textual barriers has identified cross-cultural affinities as regards both types, narrative and linguistic. Looking at narrative textual barriers first of all, Chapters Three and Five discussed the parallels between Turgenev's and Storm's use of narrative frames. *Wuthering Heights* was also considered alongside Storm's texts, as regards its complex narrative frame and multiple narrators. The implications of narrative voice were explored in all six chapters; this identified connections between the male first-person narratives of Turgenev and Storm, and the way that Charlotte Brontë and Tolstoy sought to subvert the narrative voice of the opposite gender, in *The Professor* and *Семейное счастье* respectively.

The study of linguistic textual barriers has also revealed the affinities between male and female writers across literary cultures. Eliot and Turgenev, for example, both invoke the use of animal imagery to denote female 'otherness'. However, and as suggested in Chapter Two, Eliot seeks to subvert this language. To this end, she suggests that 'otherness' is a social construct, and, furthermore, presents the 'hybrid' type of heroine – women who are simultaneously Other and Angel. This 'structural doubling' is another example of a linguistic textual barrier that is evident in male- and female-authored texts. I would suggest that it is perhaps more obvious in female-authored texts because it is manifested in its extremes, in the

idea of 'doubles'. Again, it might be contended that the fact of these exaggerated polarities is a subversion of a patriarchal literary technique.

In terms of actual barrier semiotics, links have been identified across all three literary cultures. Water, for example, is a key barrier image that can be found in the works of Eliot, Turgenev and Storm, and is used to suggest transience and a loss of control. This thesis has also considered how travel imagery is used, particularly in the novels of adultery. To this end, the contrast between Tolstoy's and Fontane's attitude towards female adultery was suggested to be mirrored in the mode of transport. All chapters have applied a Bakhtinian reading to a consideration of threshold barriers, particularly doors and windows. This interpretation has drawn attention to affinities between all three literary cultures in the way that doors and windows are used to signal exclusion and/or transgression. The semiotics of the barriers of external adornment, or gendered 'vestimentary markers' also reveal cross-cultural connections in all six chapters, in the sense that these markers are used to define female identity and/or locate female characters as part of any one given social sphere.

Perceived barriers often allude to broader themes that transcend cultural context. Indeed, concerns such as class struggles and marriages of convenience were common to nineteenth-century Europe in general. The area of female identity is another more universal theme which unites male and female authors across all three cultures. In this regard, the mirror motif (or the linked image of portraits/paintings) is extensively developed in the works of all but one writer (Turgenev). Its most interesting manifestations, however, are to be found in the striking

parallels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Анна Каренина*; this is an area of research that I propose to develop in the near future.

On an important final note, a key thread running throughout this thesis is the relation of both biographical and socio-historical context (the 'extra-text') to the discussion of barrier semiotics in the 'text'. All six chapters, therefore, are united by the fundamental importance of these 'extra-textual' barriers.

### **The Woman Question Revisited**

Another aim of this thesis, as outlined in the Introduction, was to explore how men and women viewed the Woman Question differently. Reflecting upon the discussion of the context of the Woman Question in all six chapters, which focused on the key areas of women's education and role, the following general observations may be made. It has become apparent that most writers – male and female – are disparaging of female 'accomplishments'. However, there is a discernible difference in the way that female and male writers present more serious attempts by women to educate themselves, particularly by way of reading. Charlotte Brontë presents Jane's reading positively; not only does it afford her an 'escape' from the harsh reality of her life with the Reed family, her education also provides her with the skills to gain employment in later life. In her depiction of Maggie Tulliver, Eliot also portrays reading as a form of escapism, whilst emphasising its destructive potential to engender female isolation. Furthermore, in the characters of Dorothea and Maggie, it was argued that Eliot expresses an

aspect of her own frustration at being excluded from the 'masculine' domain of a Classical education.

Male writers, on the other hand, have a tendency to be more critical of women's education. Tolstoy, for example, suggests that reading has a negative impact on the 'vulnerable' female mind, and Storm highlights how Marthe's reading has contributed to her social isolation. Turgenev, on the other hand, presents an alternative view; as has been noted in Chapter Five, of Asya, her feeling that her education has been inadequate might be interpreted as a social critique. Asya's reading, furthermore, has affinities with that of Eliot's Gwendolen and Dorothea, as all of these heroines seek male guidance on their choice of texts. Here, one might reflect upon the differing literary treatment afforded to the male educator figure. Whilst in *Анна Каренина*, Levin may be seen as a positively presented example of this type, other texts challenge the notion that men should be given the authority to take sole charge of education. In this regard, one should consider the criticism directed onto Casaubon in *Middlemarch*, and, to a lesser extent, Innstetten in *Effi Briest*.

One might also highlight the difference between the way male and female authors portray working women. Male writers, on the one hand, tended to focus on the efforts of middle-class women from comfortable backgrounds to find something 'useful' to do. Even Turgenev's Elena, whose emancipation (relative to the pre-1855 context in which her story is set) cannot be denied, fits into this assessment, because it is not absolutely essential for her to work. In this respect, one can conceive of Eliot's portrayal of Dorothea as a parody of patriarchal plots.

Women writers, on the other hand, were unafraid to dramatise the attempts of lower-class women to find work, which was necessary to their survival. This is given literary treatment in Charlotte Brontë's work in particular, in the characters of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* should also be considered along these lines, and would be an area for future research. As regards working women more generally, one should point to the contribution of Russian women writers such as Khvoshchinskaya, whose texts assert a woman's right to work, and not just in the traditionally 'feminine' professions of teaching or being a governess. The actual fulfilment of this ambition can be seen in Lolenka's ending in Khvoshchinskaya's *Пансионерка*; this text would also be an area for future research into barrier semiotics and the Woman Question.

### **The Superfluous Woman and the Superfluous Man Revisited**

This thesis has aimed to explore the representations of the 'superfluous woman' type across three literary cultures. It has been suggested that the foremost example of this type is Dorothea Brooke, not least because of Eliot's sense of regret that her talents are not to be fully realised. It might be suggested, furthermore, that the prevalence of the 'superfluous woman' can be related to context. In England, for example, concerns about the number of unmarried women brought about literary discussion of this issue (especially in Charlotte Brontë's works). Storm's depiction of the 'marginal female performer' type draws attention to a more general concern in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Germany; that is, the lack of freedom of expression in Bismarck's authoritarian regime.

In the light of the fact that it was Russian literature which provided the initial idea of the 'superfluous woman' (by way of the superfluous man), it is perhaps ironic that she is more difficult to identify in this context. Although Tolstoy is derisive of female emancipation, he does not seem to depict any 'superfluous women'. This, it may be argued, is because his works do not conceive of the wife/mother role as a waste of female talent; this, after all, is the path that he believed most women<sup>2</sup> should follow.

Turgenev's Liza and Asya are probably the closest to the 'superfluous woman' type in terms of my definition; however, Liza is not presented as naturally talented, and there is no sense of Asya's wasted potential. Elena is not a truly 'superfluous woman' either; although her destiny is not realised within the framework of the text, it is suggested that she will go on to achieve something with her life, albeit not in Russia. In Turgenev's fiction, it might even be contended that there is no room for a 'superfluous woman' type alongside the numerous superfluous men. His concern about Russian men being unfit to fulfil a role in society, however, has its cross-cultural gendered equivalent in Brontë's and Eliot's anxieties about women's role.

As was discussed in Chapter Five, an analysis of barrier semiotics also has implications for a re-reading of the superfluous man. This chapter illustrated how examples of this type – Lavretsky, Insarov and Bazarov – are all curtailed by barriers in some way. The study of barrier semiotics, therefore, which came about as part of a 'feminist' critique, may also be utilised in a discussion of masculinity. New examples of the superfluous man type have also come to light in the course of this thesis. This in itself is an important discovery, not least because it indicates the transferability of literary concepts from one culture to another to be

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of peasant women.



viable. In the English context, one might consider Casaubon from *Middlemarch* and Crimsworth from *The Professor* to be 'new superfluous men'. In German literature, Reinhard from *Immensee* also fits in with the definition of the superfluous man; he too is educated to a high standard, but this education does not prevent him from losing the love of his life (it perhaps even brings this about). The two English examples, furthermore, illustrate the tendency of female authors to be more critical of these 'new' superfluous men, perhaps because they are perceived to waste opportunities that their heroines, and they themselves, would have made the most of.

### **Future research pathways**

In its application of a new methodological framework, this thesis has established the fact that there is considerable scope for further research. This might be undertaken by way of discussion of writers mentioned in the Introduction (for example, Gaskell, Hardy, Flaubert, Khvoshchinskaya and Droste-Hülshoff). One might also consider future work into texts of other periods, beyond that of the mid- to late-nineteenth-century remit of this thesis. As has been discussed, a whole new line of enquiry might even be opened up as regards male-gendered barrier semiotics, particularly in relation to the superfluous man type.

This thesis has aimed to re-evaluate all writers considered from a fresh perspective. In doing so, it has included discussion of writers and texts which literary criticism has not usually considered through the lens of gender, particularly the works of Theodor Storm. It has also provided a re-vision of some canonical texts, such as *Анна Каренина*, *Jane Eyre*,

*Middlemarch*, and *Effi Briest*, and has identified new links and affinities across the three literary cultures. Furthermore, it has reconsidered other connections, such as those between the European novels of adultery, in the light of barrier semiotics.

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw attention to the broader ramifications of this research. Although the focus was on the gendered aspect of barriers, other approaches may be adopted to barrier semiotics. Textual, actual and perceived barriers can equally be applied to literary texts on the grounds of class, religion, culture and ethnicity. Moreover, I believe that barrier semiotics may be evident in any work of literature, because of the fundamental nature of text as an exposition and resolution of conflict and division. In this sense, the parentheses in the title of this thesis may be opened up, to fully *engender* the potential of barrier semiotics to make an original contribution to literary criticism.

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