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Silent No More:

Servant Voices in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*

A thesis

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Abstract

The names Catherine Earnshaw and Jane Eyre are synonymous with the narratives of which they are the heroine. Yet, under the presence of these well-known characters sit others who are less immediately recognisable, but nevertheless vital, the invisible and silent servants. The names Bessie, Hannah, and Zillah are relatively unknown, even to avid readers of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Yet these servants are given a name and a voice by their creators, and they play small, but significant roles in the novels. Other servant figures, particularly Grace Poole and Nelly Dean, are even more prominent, shaping events, keeping secrets, and speaking truths. In spite of this, these servants are rarely seen and heard in critical commentary, pushed aside by the characters that take centre stage of the novels.

The intention of this thesis is to find and highlight the voices of this seemingly neglected group of servants. Focusing on two novels published in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, I argue that the Brontë novels are radical in the depiction of servant voice and representation when compared to most nineteenth-century fiction. In the Brontë novels that lie at the heart of this thesis, servants escape from the boundaries of the typical Victorian novel and become characters with opinions, voices, and influence. This is part of the wider rhetoric of each novel, with *Jane Eyre* focusing on questions of servitude and independence through the title character's battles with a series of tyrants and *Wuthering Heights* featuring a cycle of rises and falls from master to servant. Drawing on the reality of servant life during this period and using archive material and critical scholarship, this thesis endeavours to foreground both the servant characters in these novels and the wider debates about freedom and slavery, autonomy and obedience, interior life and

public role. The silent servants deserve a focused examination of their voices and this work will bring that voice into the spotlight.

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Preface

During the winter term of 2021, I completed a dissertation towards my Master of Arts degree. I wrote about crossdressing and male impersonation on the Victorian and Edwardian stage, contrasting this with how some women choose to dress, behave, and live as men, with their gender sometimes being undiscovered until a medical event or death intervenes. Some of my research material led me to consider how quietly and silently some people work and others, for example actors, real estate agents or auctioneers need to be bold and loud and confident to display exactly who they are. For me, it is the silent people that provide intrigue. My thought pattern led me to people who are silent and seemingly invisible as they perform their professions; servants and the characters in books and films who are portrayed as servants, who quietly provide care and service to their masters. They seemingly do not interfere with the process of their masters' lives, rather adding to its ability to function successfully. So vital is their role that it is impossible to think of how a lady in silk gloves and a fur stole could whip up a plate of eggs and bacon and still come up smelling sweet.

I began to look at historical records and websites that explained the duties of servants during a time when almost a million women in England were employed as servants: the Victorian era. I am seemingly not the only person who is intrigued by this sector of employment history, in recent years the display of servanthood has been depicted again and again in film and biographies; who could not admire the dignity displayed by Carson in Downton Abbey or have your heart strings pulled by the shy and awkward kitchen maid Daisy? Having looked at historical records and modern interpretations of servant functions and lives, I was intrigued to understand how Victorian novelists depicted their servant characters. Some writers gave scant mention of their servant characters, while some gave them walk on and walk off parts. Amongst

the fine and talented writers of this time, the Brontë sisters, particularly Charlotte and Emily, also provide examples of servants that were silent and invisible, but their novels also feature the servant who will lead the plot and control the moment. These servants provided me with the motivation to write a thesis comparing reality with fiction and how the Brontë sisters were radical in their depiction of the servant with a voice.

Introduction

Early in Emily Brontë's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights* the initial narrator, Mr Lockwood, ponders how to spend a cold and misty afternoon:

> I had half a mind to spend it by my study fire, instead of wading through heath and mud to Wuthering Heights. On coming up from dinner, however, (N.B.—I dine between twelve and one o'clock; the housekeeper, a matronly lady, taken as a fixture along with the house, could not, or would not, comprehend my request that I might be served at five)—on mounting the stairs with this lazy intention, and stepping into the room, I saw a servant-girl on her knees surrounded by brushes and coal-scuttles, and raising an infernal dust as she extinguished the flames with heaps of cinders. This spectacle drove me back immediately.[1]

In the opening pages of the novel Lockwood has been introduced to the reader as intelligent and erudite, a man of letters and great intentions, with a well-developed ego and sense of his own importance. Yet he is not quite bold or brazen enough to parry with the housekeeper who instructs him that he may dine at noon not five, as is his desire and habit. The housekeeper and the servant-girl are treated with distain and dismissal by this man, but an element of fear from Lockwood reveals the powerful voice emitted by the servants; in this passage they are revealed to be people who control the situation through their actions, be it the performance of their duties (as with the hard-working maid) or with their quietly subversive behaviour (as with the housekeeper's imperviousness to Lockwood's wishes).

[1] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p.9.

The housekeeper in this scene is Nelly Dean, who becomes the main narrative voice of *Wuthering Heights*. She is both fearless and fearful. As she eagerly explains to Lockwood what she conceives to be her servant place in this tragic tale, she begins to weave the image of herself as a loyal and trusted servant.

> Before I came to live here … I was almost always at Wuthering Heights; because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children: I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to.[2]

Nelly's voice is immediate and vivid, the voice of an insider and witness who can share her insights into the family at Wuthering Heights to the stranger leasing the nearby house Thrushcross Grange. She has personality and a life story that has taken her on a trajectory from the little girl eager to please and serve, to the housekeeper secure in her position. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and, to a lesser extent, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* the figures of servants are important characters in their own right. This differs from most nineteenth-century fiction in which servants are frequently silent functionaries who form part of the backdrop against which the narrative action, focusing on the "master" figures, takes place. Lucy Worsley suggests that 'to serve is to wear a cloak of invisibility' and she contends that Jane Austen's scene from *Persuasion,* first published in 1817, exemplifies that obscurity. The exchange between two ladies of the house is conducted as follows:

> 'Did you observe the woman who opened the door to you, when you called yesterday?' [Mrs Smith]

[2] Emily Brontë. p. 35.

> ‘No. Was it not Mrs Speed, as usual, or the maid? I observed no one in particular.’ [Anne Elliot].[3]

Servant voice was not always silent in fictional representation or dismissed as being ‘no one in particular’. Bruce Robbins contends that the Victorian period marked a point when servants were increasingly silenced in literary representations, representing a shift from previous examples of servants voicing their concerns and news directly to the audience or reader, for example in Mummers plays, Elizabethan drama, and the work of Henry Fielding.[4] Robbins contends that in Victorian households there was ‘a repression of master servant dialogue’ and a habit of ‘never speaking to a servant who had served [a household] for twenty years’. He argues that the Victorian servant character is ’engulfed in his master’s life’ and the interaction between master and servant becomes one of ‘muted commands’.[5] Robbins dates this change in fictional representations of servants to the example of a maid in *The Absentee,* the novel by Maria Edgeworth published in 1812, who complains of her mistress ‘never talking to me confidentially’.[6] Likewise, Lucy Worsley’s example of the scene from *Persuasion* indicates that the period of silencing began before the Victorian era and was evident in the Georgian period. This hushed and controlled representation is in stark contrast to the vocal and active characters created and displayed by the Brontë sisters in the two novels. Here the servant’s personality and voices are vivid and visible, Nelly Dean controls the narrative of what she hides and reveals, while in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* the eponymous heroine captures the reader’s attention

[3] Lucy Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home: A Biography*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton,2017), pp.95-96.
[4] Bruce, Robbins, *The Servants Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press,1986), pp 53-59.
[5] Robbins, p. 79.
[6] Robbins, p. 80.

with the contrast of her rebellion and patience. These are no silent, obsequious servants; they are not silenced, they are heard.

In the Brontë novels that lie at the heart of this thesis, servants escape from the boundaries of the typical Victorian novel and become characters with opinions, voices and influence. This thesis contends that the depiction of servants in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* is radical and indeed subversive for the time in which the novels were written. The juxtaposition between the way in which servants frequently appear in the nineteenth-century novel and in the work of the Brontës is made clear in the two quotations from *Wuthering Heights* which open this Introduction. In the first, the middle class, gentleman narrator Mr Lockwood typifies the conventional viewpoint of master to servants, he possesses a self-interested demeanour, and is particular in the degree of importance he gives to his dining requirements. However, a transformation happens as the reader learns of his ability to be managed out of this importance by the strong-minded servant, who seemingly will not change her routine for the new tenant of a home she has overseen for several years. He becomes flustered and perturbed by the servant-girl as she tends to the fire; for him to witness this basic household task is an insult to his sensitivities and is sufficient to see him hastily exiting the scene. How superior he thinks himself and how foolish he has become. Emily Brontë has transitioned the gentleman into a fool simply by highlighting his foibles and fears. In the second passage, the servant Nelly Dean speaks directly and immediately to the reader, albeit filtered through Lockwood's narrative, in a way that makes her experiences central and her voice heard. The reader will hear this voice again throughout the novel as it modulates its pitch and endeavours to control the plot.

Domestic servants, under many guises and titles, have cared for others in their employers' homes for centuries. Previously a subject largely ignored by novelists and script writers, the demise of the servant culture class and the rise of historical theories

focusing on the history of ordinary people has ignited an interest in this section of Britain's social and employment history. Television, film, and literary culture have recently placed a spotlight on this group of workers. With the advent and spectacular success of the *Downton Abbey* television series and earlier offerings such as the BBC's *Upstairs, Downstairs* series, and the publication of books such as *Servants* by Lucy Lethbridge, servants have taken centre stage. This has not always been the case and the next section of this Introduction places my current investigation within the wider frame of scholarship about servant figures in the nineteenth-century novel. Attention will then turn to the Brontës' relationships with their own servants and with the wider social and political movements of the day that raised questions about enfranchisement and the rights of the working population.

Representations of Servants in Nineteenth Century Novels

There is a modest range of scholarship on nineteenth-century literary representations of servants. Bruce Robbins's research, mentioned at the start of this Introduction, points to a dearth of literary representations of servants in the nineteenth century, particularly when contrasted with previous literary eras. He contrasts this literary silencing with the historical record, identifying the nineteenth century as a time when increasing numbers of English households employed servants so they could be defined as middle-class.[7] Robbins quotes Eric Hobsbawm who declared that 'the safest way to distinguish oneself from the labourers was to employ a labourer oneself'.[8] Similarly, in *Masters and Servants* Graham Tytler argues that servants frequently form a backdrop to nineteenth-century fiction, but regards Emily Brontë as remarkable in giving servants a voice. He contends that *Wuthering Heights* is

[7] Robbins, p. 15.
[8] Robbins, p. 15.

'exceptional' in its representation 'of the relationships between masters and servants' and highlights Emily Brontë's use of 'complex characters', which allow the novel to challenge the reader's expectations of servanthood.[9]

Much of the available literary scholarship focuses on peripheral and fleeting depictions of servant characters in Victorian fiction. Kirsti Bohata focuses on the potentially intimate relationships between mistresses and maids in nineteenth-century British and American fiction, with readings of short stories by George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. Like Robbins, she acknowledges that there are 'rare' instances of these kinds of relationships in the nineteenth-century novel, but contends that when 'servants feature at all in Victorian fiction, these dynamics lend a homoerotic dimension to the cross-class relationship between mistress and maid'.[10] Stephen Thomson also identifies the literary traces of servants in nineteenth-century fiction as 'slender'.[11] Focusing on sleepwalking maids, he argues that the association between servants and sleepwalking reinforces maids as non-agents, touching on Thomas Hood's *Our Family* and Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*.

Other scholars have explored servant characters in nineteenth-century novels in more detail. One of the most sustained literary analyses of servants in the nineteenth-century novel is Julie Nash's *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell*. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of servants in the fiction of these two authors, with chapters on labour relations, loyalty to the family, and the interplay between comedy and tragedy. As the title highlights, Nash sees master-servant relationships in Edgeworth and Gaskell's

[9] Graeme Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 <https://doi.org/10.1179/147489308X259587> p. 44.
[10] Kirsti Bohata, 'Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45.2 (2017), 341-359, p. 341.
[11] Stephen Thomson, 'Ancillary Narratives: Maids, Sleepwalking, and Agency in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture', *Textual Practice*, 29.1 (2015), 91-110, p. 107.

fiction as fitting into a paternalistic dynamic, concluding that through their 'depiction of the servant class, Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell raised the possibility that hard work, loyalty, intelligence, and ambition should be rewarded on this earth as well as the next.'[12]

Dorice Williams Elliott analyses the servants depicted in the 1839 novel by Francis Trollope, *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong; The Factory Boy*, focusing on a family who are confronted with a small factory boy who has been instructed to join them at the servant dining table. This action disrupts their hierarchical seating plan; they clearly are not sufficiently moved by his plight to be gracious and kind, and invent a false history to suffer his presence at their table.[13] In the novel, Trollope casts the Dowling family as a parody of how the benevolence and respect allegedly shown to servants was a pretext, with, in this case, 'Mrs Dowling largely ignoring the servants, Sir Mathew flirting with the maids', and the servants enduring this behaviour only because of the elevated wage rate they receive.[14]

The role of servants in Victorian sensation fiction has also received considerable critical attention. Anna Peak points to the way in which nineteenth-century sensation novelists tapped into social anxieties about the role of servants.[15] She draws on the work of Anthea Trodd whose perspective of servants in 'sensation novels' is that they contribute to an atmosphere of surveillance which marks them as 'spies'.[16] Peak also quotes Brian W McCluskey as claiming this can be used as a

[12] Julie Nash, *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge: 2017), p. 118.
[13] Dorice Williams Elliott. 'Servants and Hands: Representing the Working Classes in Victorian Factory Novels'. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.2 (2000), 377–90. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058525>. [accessed 28 Jan. 2023]. p. 377.
[14] Williams Elliott, p. 386.
[15] Anna Peak, "Servants and the Victorian Sensation Novel." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 54.4 (2014), 835–851. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24511179 > [accessed 29 Jan. 2023]. p.839.
[16] Anthea Todd, 'Household Spies: The Servant and the Plot in Victorian Fiction', *Literature and History,* 13.2 (1987),175-187.

benefit to the middle classes, certainly in a fictional setting.[17] Peak states that 'sensation novels' awoke fear in the middle class that their servants were as interesting as themselves and for undoing the class hierarchies that held the master and servant system together.[18] Peak observes that if servants are allowed to offer narratives, their words are often filtered through the 'voices of middle-class' participants in the script, but in sensation novels the servant voice is there to offer a viewpoint from different levels of participants.[19] Likewise, Rachel Smillie explores the role of the servant as household spy in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd.*[20] In contrast, Gerri Brightwell's analysis of a female detective disguised as a servant in William Stephens Hayward's 'The Mysterious Countess' concludes that the short story offered reassurance to Victorian readers that their secrets were safe from their servants, the solving of mysteries only possible with the expert intervention of the detective.[21]

Elizabeth Steere's extended exploration of sensation fiction places the female servant centre stage and thus acts as a useful model for my similar profiling of servant voices. Steere argues that while sensation fiction was dismissed as 'kitchen literature' in the mid-nineteenth century, its popularity 'transcends the boundaries of class, education, and gender'.[22] The genre had a 'prominent female readership' and also 'featured key female servant characters' who are 'able to cross social, familial, and class boundaries'.[23] Steere's analysis of fiction by Wilkie Collins, Ellen Wood,

[17] Brian W. McCuskey, 'The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgressions', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 28.2 (September 2000), 359-375.
[18] Peak, p. 839.
[19] Peak. P. 840.
[20] Rachel Smillie, 'Now You See Her - Now You Don't: Household Spies in *Aurora Floyd and Lady Audley's Secret*', *Clues*, 33.1 (2015), 8-17.
[21] Gerri Brightwell, 'The Case of the Household Spy: Public Service and Domestic Service in Hayward's "The Mysterious Countess"', *Clues*, 23.3 (2005), 63-73.
[22] Elizabeth Steere, *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction: 'Kitchen Literature'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.
[23] Steere, pp. 3-4.

Elizabeth Gaskell, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon pinpoints the 'subversive and revolutionary' nature of this profiling of female servants.[24] An early chapter foregrounds the Brontës as ground-breaking authors in terms of giving servants a voice. Steere categorises both Nelly Dean and Jane Eyre as servants, but focuses on their narrative control. Nelly is both housekeeper and narrator, and Jane is the servant governess who writes the novel as an autobiography. Their voices dictate the story, their voices and memories provide the dialogue and action, without these servant characters there is no story, no novel.[25]

Some critical scholarship has been produced around the servants of both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, particularly of the main protagonists Nellie Dean, Grace Poole and the guttural and sanctimonious character Joseph and his ability to voice his zeal and condemnation of the others' souls at Wuthering Heights. Graeme Tytler writes particularly about the complexity of Joseph's character and his devotion and reliability as a servant to the Earnshaw family.[26] Irene Wiltshire foregrounds speech as a definer of class and position in *Wuthering Heights*, arguing that Emily Brontë applies a dialect to Joseph's voice to demonstrate the class distinction between master and servant. She contends that Brontë gives the characters dialect to mark 'their station in life and according to their aspirations'.[27] Judith Stuchiner commends Nellie Dean's ability to have full voice as a narrator and share this stage with Lockwood, a member of 'the bourgeoise', and to profile her servant story with this elite and class-conscious man.[28] My research has gleaned scant scholarly examination of

[24] Steere, p. 4.
[25] Steere, p. 39.
[26] Graeme Tytler 'The Presentation of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights'*, *Brontë Studies*, 43.3 (2018), 188-197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2018.1464799> (p. 188).
[27] Irene Wiltshire, 'Speech in *Wuthering Heights*: Joseph's Dialect and Charlotte's Emendations', Brontë *Studies*, 30.1 (2005),19-29, <https://doi.org/10.1179/147489304x18821>] p. 19.
[28] Judith Stuchiner, 'The Servant Speaks: Joseph's Version of Wuthering Heights', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 26.3 (2013), 191-196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2013.805111> (p. 191).

the peripheral servant characters in *Jane Eyre* with the exception of Grace Poole, although even she has gained little consideration except for her contribution to the themes of madness and the Gothic in the novel.[29] Additionally, Grace has also been the focus of derision, as the subject of a satirical 'interview' published in *The Atlantic* in 1983.[30] My research draws on and extends this focus on the servant figures in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.

The Brontë Family and Their Servants

To provide an understanding of the inspiration and influences that motivated the Brontës to write their radical novels, I consider it is important for this thesis to provide an overview of the family, their servants and the people they interacted with. The Brontë family, especially three of the sisters—Charlotte, Emily and Anne— have been the subject of much literary and biographical interest, praise and derision. Their lives and work have not only produced many scholarly reflections but have also inspired numerous television series and films. Haworth, their Yorkshire home, is now a museum, attracting thousands of tourists each year. For many readers and critics the sisters are viewed as being blessed with genius, but they have been received negatively by others, especially contemporary Victorian literary critics, who accused Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* of 'immorality' and railed against Emily's *Wuthering Heights* as 'coarse' and populated with characters who were 'savages'.[31] There appears to be,

[29] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan M. Gubar, 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress', in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 336–371 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn74x.14> [accessed 8 August 2022].

[30] Lynn Caraganis, "She Never Liked Jane Eyre: 'Al' Geebler Interviews Grace Poole". *The Atlantic*, 251.5 (1983), 91+. <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/A211453295/OVIC?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-OVIC&xid=c7baee59> [accessed 18 February 2023].

[31] Claire O'Callaghan & Sophie Franklin, 'Introduction: The Coarseness of the Brontës Reconsidered', *Brontë Studies*, 44.1 (2019) 1-4 < https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2019.1525871> (p.1).

however, one common theme: their work created attention, and for the past 170 years has drawn a plethora of social and cultural comment. It therefore raises the question of where and how three young women acquired the inspiration and knowledge to create characters such as the faithful and diligent Nelly Dean, the careless and inebriated Grace Poole, or gained understanding of the horror of slavery, so grimly represented and suffered by Heathcliff and exploited by the family of Edward Rochester? To address this question, I do not intend to write a life history of the Brontës, others have very successfully both fed and deconstructed the legend behind the lonely windswept parsonage and the three sisters and their opium addicted brother who created a fantasy world with toy soldiers and tiny books. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell addressed Charlotte's life in detail in her work *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and Juliet Barker provides a close and intense viewing of the family in her book *The Brontës*, initially published in 1994.[32] This Introduction to the thesis will, however, examine their close and familial relationships with the servants employed at the parsonage, the Brontës' exposure to the Victorian world, and the social awareness that so firmly comes to life in the characters they create.

The Brontë family moved to the parsonage at Haworth, Yorkshire in 1820. The family unit consisted of the Reverend Patrick Brontë, his wife Maria and six children, namely: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne. They were accompanied by their servants, Sarah Garrs as nursemaid and her twelve-year-old sister Nancy as the cook.[33] Patrick's wife Maria was nursed through her last illness by a local woman and friend, Martha Wright. Following Maria's death in 1821, Patrick

[32] Juliet Barker, *The Brontës*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1994)
[33] Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, 'Servants of the Brontës', *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (2011)
< https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662181.001.0001/acref-9780198662181-e-0991> [accessed 2 January 2023].

dismissed Martha Wright from her role, the circumstance that led to this action is unknown.[34] However Martha Wright communicated with contemporary novelist and biographer Elizabeth Gaskell, who wrote *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* published in 1857, two years after Charlotte's death. Gaskell's book included references to Patrick Brontë's alleged ill treatment of his children, this allegation tainted his reputation and continues to support the myth of his harsh character.[35] Juliet Barker, in *The Brontës*, rejects these accusations and considers Patrick a loving and caring husband and father.[36] She also indicates the nurse (Barker does not name her) was dismissed because Aunt Elizabeth Bramwell arrived from Cornwall to care for her sister Maria; this view indicates that Martha Wright was dismissed before Maria's death.[37]

During 1825, four of the Brontë sisters were at school at Cowan Bridge and with only Branwell and Anne at home, less help was needed, consequently the Garr sisters left Haworth parsonage.[38] In their place, Patrick employed Tabatha Aykroyd (Tabby) as a live in servant. Tabby was diligent, a class-leader in the local Methodist chapel, a woman of good character and 53 years old.[39] Baker notes Tabby as being 'quaint in appearance' and 'extremely active', and if the local folk of Haworth enquired about the children's learning she would reject their enquiry and not 'indulge in gossip', she showed true loyalty to the family.[40] The Brontë Parsonage Museum website notes that Tabby was the only live in servant for the first 15 years of her thirty-one years of service

[34] Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, 'Servants of the Brontës', *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (2011) <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662181.001.0001/acref-9780198662181-e-0991> [accessed 8 January 2023].
[35] Ann Dinsdale, 'Mrs Brontë's Nurse', *Brontë Studies*, 30.3 (2005), 258-259 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1179/147489305x63145> (p.258).
[36] Juliet Barker, *The Brontës*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1994), p. 108.
[37] Barker, p. 104.
[38] Barker, p. 133.
[39] Records differ for the Garr sisters' departure; one source states 1824 the other 1825. They are *The Oxford Companion of the Brontës* (2011) and *Brontës in Context* (2012) respectively. Barker, however, supports the date as 1824.
[40] Barker, p. 194.

at the parsonage, however the Brontë sisters assisted with the running of the household with domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning.[41]

Tabby is described by Charlotte, in a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, as 'like one of our own family', and, similarly, Martha Brown, who had previously worked for the family as a casual servant, and in 1841 joined them as a full-time servant, was considered 'a dear friend' by Charlotte.[42] Martha Brown joined the family to help out when it became clear that Tabby required rest and therefore further assistance was needed to run the household. Martha took on the heavier work and stayed on when Tabby returned. Martha was responsible for cleaning the house washing clothes, stoking fires and when, sadly, Tabby died, Martha became the cook, and provided care if a member of the family became ill.[43] Martha stayed loyal to the family long after the sisters and Branwell died, remaining at the parsonage until Patrick Brontë's death in 1861.[44] Several other servants worked at the parsonage for short periods of time, for example Martha Brown's sisters; Eliza, Tabitha and Hannah.[45]

Whitehead notes that the work of these two servants was recorded in the diary entries for Anne and Emily, alongside the daily living activities undertaken by the rest of the family, such as taking part in the daily household tasks, forming friendships and strong bonds.[46] This would indicate that the Brontës considered the servants as

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[41] *The Brontë Society*, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Friends and Family-Tabitha Aykroyd. < https://www.Brontë.org.uk/the-Brontës-and-haworth/family-and-friends/tabitha-aykroyd> [accessed 2 January 2023].

[42] Stephen Whitehead, 'Friends, Servants and a husband', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.83-90 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=1057464> [accessed 3 January 2023]. (p. 83).

[43] The Brontë Society, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Friends and Family-Martha Brown. <https://www.Brontë.org.uk/the-Brontës-and-haworth/family-and-friends/martha-brown> [accessed 3 January 2023].

[44] Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, 'Servants of the Brontës' in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), < https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662181.001.0001/acref-9780198662181-e-0991> [accessed 3 January 2023].

[45] Whitehead, p. 84.

[46] Whitehead, p. 83.

members of their family, they lived and worked side by side in the parsonage. Barker acknowledges Sarah Garr as stating that the servants were included in family gatherings such as lessons or Bible readings and that they were 'treated as superiors' when the children were involved.[47] The evidence available from diary entries and letters indicates that Tabby and Martha were the servants that the Brontë sisters shared their lives with and mourned with as each member of the family passed into the untouchable world of death, they were faithful and diligent servants.

Whitehead suggests that the Brontës were careful about introducing new people into their family unit.[48] It is therefore to be expected that when Tabby suffered an accident and required a period of recuperation away from Haworth, the family chose to take on more household tasks themselves rather than introduce a new servant into the household.[49] Elizabeth Gaskell wrote of Tabby as 'a fine example of a Yorkshire woman of her class, in dialect, in appearance and in character'.[50] Whitehead notes Tabby was a great storyteller and as she walked with the children she revealed the histories and connections of the families living around the Haworth district.[51] Elizabeth Langland suggests Tabby 'influenced' the children with her stories of local folklore, while providing support to their aunt Elizabeth Bramwell in supervising the growing family.[52] C. Mabel Edgerley considers, in a 1941 *Brontë Society Transaction* article, the possibility of Tabby sharing tales of the old ways of living, when 'fairies danced in the moonlight in the valleys' and suggests she added the flavour of

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[47] Barker, 111.
[48] Whitehead, p. 84.
[49] Whitehead, p. 83.
[50] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë Volume 1*, < https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1827/pg1827-images.html> chapter V. [accessed 3 January 2023].
[51] Whitehead, p. 84.
[52] Elizabeth Langland, 'Class', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 296-302. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/reader.action?docID=1057464 > [accessed 4 January 2023]. (p. 297).

tragedy, superstitions and doomed families not sparing the children the 'rugged details' of the story.[53] Edgerley continues in this vein, suggesting that many of the *Wuthering Heights* scenarios were taken from Tabby's stories and that Nelly Dean is based on this 'practical, comfortable person'.[54] This connection is not without merit and the concepts and characters may have grown into life from fragments of memory and consequently developed into characters in their novels.

It is possible that the dialect and the faithful service provided by Tabby Aykroyd was the inspiration that created characters such as Bessie Lee and Joseph, or influenced the behaviour displayed by Zillah. The Brontës were familiar with the Yorkshire dialect and it may be assumed spoke with a 'local' accent, however, according to Mary Taylor, a close friend of Charlotte from her days at Roe Head School, Charlotte spoke with a 'strong Irish accent'.[55] This may be explained by the fact that Patrick Brontë was born and lived in Ireland until he enrolled at St John's College, Cambridge in 1802, this would indicate his Irish accent may have remained with him and influenced the accents borne by his children.[56] Perhaps Tabby's tales of folk lore and generational blood ties amongst the families of Haworth sparked the Brontës' imaginations, or possibly the influence that awoke their powerful imaginings may have been their exposure to literature from their father's eclectic library and the circulating library from Keighley.[57] Additionally, as Elizabeth Gaskell suggests, Patrick shared 'public news' and his opinions with the children where he thought it appropriate;

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[53] C. Mabel Edgerley, 'Tabitha Aykroyd', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 10.2 (1941), 62-68, <https://doi.org/10.1179/030977641796561559> (p. 64).
[54] Edgerley, p. 66.
[55] Juliet Gardiner, *The Illustrated Letters of The Brontës; The Letters, Diaries and Writings of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë,* (London: Batsford, 2021), p.62.
[56] Barker, p. 1.
[57] Maria Frawley, 'Anne Brontë', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.75-81. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/reader.action?docID=1057464> [accessed 4 January 2023]. (p. 77).

the children read newspapers to each other and were conversant with politics and Maria was able to participate in conversations with her father on both the political and news of the day with the capability of an adult.[58] Barker comments that, on most evenings, Patrick sat with the children to give them lessons in 'travel and history' in his study before their bedtime.[59]

The Brontë household subscribed to county newspapers such as *The Leeds Intelligencer, Tory* and *Leeds Mercury*.[60] Patrick Brontë's circle of friends and acquaintances provided news and political opinion, the children witnessed sermons and meetings. Barker suggests that Patrick may have met with William Wilberforce, the slavery abolitionist, during a visit to Keighley; the children would no doubt have been involved in the conversations and excitement that followed this visit.[61] Their awareness of Roman Catholic Emancipation was evident by their father's stand against his political affiliations to support the movement, Charlotte although a young child, included the concept in one of her childhood plays.[62] Patrick crusaded and supported other causes that were against the political and social will of his friends. The children were not necessarily expected to agree with their father's views, Barker suggests this is a signal of the 'independence of thought' that Patrick engendered in the children.[63]

At the beginning of this section on the Brontë family, I questioned how they gained the inspiration and knowledge for their radical characters and the social issues they championed. Influences from others in their household and the wider community would certainly have created enquiry, however the world outside provided a myriad of

[58] Gaskell, Vol 1, Chapter III.
[59] Barker, p.111.
[60] Gardiner, p. 46.
[61] Barker, p. 145.
[62] Barker, p. 157.
[63] Barker, p. 179.

experiences and emotions that would not have been open to them inside the parsonage, particularly when they took up governess positions in wealthy households. Occasionally during their lives at the parsonage, they ventured into the world outside Haworth, their father called it 'this delusive and ensnaring world'.[64] Seeking formal education for his daughters, Patrick sent them to school, and I consider that the children's well documented experiences at Cowan Bridge School do not require further clarification here.[65] The surviving girls were sent some six years later to Roe Head School.[66] Initially Charlotte was sent to the school, followed by Emily, who left because of sickness, both home and physical, and then Anne. A life-long friendship was forged by Charlotte with Mary and Martha Taylor, her fellow pupils at Roe Head.[67] The prospect of their father dying and being left with little money to live on and consequently the necessity to earn their own living, led the sisters to consider becoming governesses, Gardiner remarks this was considered a 'entirely suitable occupation for the daughters of the clergy'.[68] However, initially, Charlotte became a teacher at Roe Head in 1835. In her letter to her friend Ellen, Charlotte writes of the 'duty and necessity' of accepting the role but also of her delight that it was at Roe Head, rather than the governess proposals she had received.[69] Emily also accepted a teaching post, this was at Law Hill School, however her time at the school was unsatisfactory, she became depressed and she could not find the inspiration to write, her health suffered and she returned home to the parsonage; this was her only excursion into working for a living.[70]

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[64] Lyndall Gordon, *Charlotte Brontë; A Passionate Life*, (London: Chatto & Windus,1994), p. 49.
[65] Gordon, p.15.
[66] The Brontë Society, Brontë Parsonage Museum, *Chronology*, <https://www.Brontë.org.uk/the-Brontës-and-haworth/chronology> [accessed 22 January 2023].
[67] Gardiner, p. 63.
[68] Gardiner, 60.
[69] Barker, p. 225.
[70] Barker, p. 306.

Charlotte and Anne were governesses for a short time, Anne to the Ingham family at Blake Hall and Charlotte working as a governess at several homes. The Inghams were an established and wealthy family who lived in a grand home and had family associations with local judicial and parliamentary dignitaries. Anne was finally dismissed from her job as governess because the Ingham family considered the children had failed to progress under her care and guidance.[71] Six months later Anne accepted a position as governess for the Robinson family, near York; she stayed in this post for five years.[72] However, Charlotte's first and perhaps most pertinent experience as a governess, because of the source of some of her employer's wealth, began at the home of the influential Sidgwick family at their sprawling three storey mansion Stonegappe.[73] Charlotte was unhappy, and declared in a letter to Emily that 'I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence', ending with the comment that if a governess 'steals a moment to herself she is a nuisance'.[74] Her time with the Sidgwicks was difficult and fractious, she felt that she was treated badly and excluded from the family.[75] The position was not a long-term commitment and Charlotte left. However, Charlotte had been exposed to the operation and the servant hierarchy of a large country estate with staff and copious wealth. Moreover, as indicated below, the creation of this wealth may have been from a less than ethical source.

The Brontës' political and social awareness of slavery and social reform stemmed not only from popular newspapers and exposure to the outside world, but from their politically and socially motivated father Patrick. A wave of change and revolt, that the government had failed to resolve since the Luddite riots began in late 1779

[71] Barker, p. 318.
[72] Barker, p. 329.
[73] Barker, p, 309.
[74] Barker, p. 310.
[75] Barker, p. 312.

(this was the workers' response to protest against their jobs and livelihoods being replaced by machinery and industrialisation), continued to affect British society as the young Brontës grew into adulthood.[76] The government suffered condemnation from both their fellow parliamentarians and the general population, and addressed the unrest in The Great Reform Act of 1832. The Act legislated parliamentary votes for certain members of society and specifically disenfranchised others, however, the Act was not enough to quell the political change desired by members of the Chartist movement, consequently riots and protests ensued; the Chartists sought greater reform and equality for all people, however, the uprisings created unrest and fear amongst the population.[77]

The class and power imbalance in England was challenged by the Chartists and other groups, who fought for equality for women and the working classes. The early to mid-nineteenth century saw rebellion amongst the workers and for many of these protestors, deportation to Australia was their punishment, simply because they wanted equality. In April 1834 between 30,000-100,000 people (accounts differ) marched on Whitehall, considered to be the heart of the English government, to submit a petition to support the Tolpuddle Martyrs who were deported because they had protested for fair wages.[78] *The Times* newspaper dated 23rd January 1841, carried a headline column describing the Chartist protest in Leeds, the preceding day. Asking for reform and the right to vote, the Chartists carried banners accusing land owners of putting the working families into slavery and taking wealth away from the workers,

[76] Jessica Brain, 'The Luddites', *History UK* < https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Luddites/> [accessed 23 January 2023]

[77] Jo Eric Khushal, Murkens, 'Unintended Democracy: Parliamentary Reform in the UK', in Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power: Nineteenth-Century Experience, ed. by Kelly L. Grotke and Markus J. Prutsch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 351-370. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198723059.003.0019> pp. 354-359.

[78] Carmen Callil, *Oh Happy Day: Those Times and These Times* (London: Johnathan Cape, 2020) p. 39.

forcing them into a state of deprivation.[79] On the same page of the newspaper are reports of protests in other northern towns executed with equal anger at the authorities and land owners for the lack of equality, neglect and poor treatment of workers and their families.

This was a cause and fight that was not going away and was happening on the Brontës' doorstep. Haworth was not immune to the effects of the unrest, located close to towns and villages that witnessed these protests and riots, the parsonage was not necessarily a safe haven; Patrick Brontë is reported to have slept with a loaded gun under his pillow each night and fired it out of his bedroom window every morning.[80] Terry Eagleton notes the West Riding of Yorkshire was an area of concentrated Chartist activity and revolt, and he suggests that Charlotte, like others of her class, continued to dread the prospect of revolution; in 1848 she wrote to a friend that it would 'check civilization and bring the dregs of society to the surface'.[81] Charlotte and Mary Taylor exchanged views on the Great Reform Act of 1832 but were in disagreement as to which side they supported, and Charlotte discussed political and social ideologies with her two friends Mary and Ellen Nussey.[82]

With talk of rebellion occurring throughout England, liberal voices were also calling for the abolition of slavery which may, at first glance, appear to have no connection to the wild and sweeping moors of Yorkshire. However, the Brontë family were not unaware of the world that operated under an imperialistic, colonised British rule that supported and sanitised the appalling treatment of the peoples of Africa and

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[79] "Whig Radical and Chartist Demonstrations at Leeds" *The Times*, 23 January. 1841, The Times Digital Archive, p. 5. <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS84570167/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=80f4005d> [accessed 26 Jan. 2023].

[80] Barker, p. 194.

[81] Terry, Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005) <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230509726> (p.46).

[82] Gordon, p. 48.

the Indies. Their father was an associate of William Wilberforce, who was a primary advocate of the abolition of slavery, this association, according to Gawthorp, allowed the education of the Brontë sisters at Cowan Bridge School.[83] Patrick had a close relationship with others in the Abolition movement, both Charlotte and Emily would have been exposed to the literature and newspaper articles supporting the movement, an awareness of the situation is evident. Aside from the familial connection with the abolition movement is the connection to slave owning families in the geographical district. The Sill family were wealthy landowners in Dent, as were the Sidgwicks of Skipton and the Caruses of Tunstall, and each family's money and land had a strong connection to the Atlantic slave trade, their wealth being adversely affected by the abolition of this practice.[84] Christopher Heywood reports that four generations of the Sidgwick and Caruses families had business connections with the slave trade on plantations and in the ports of Liverpool and Lancaster.[85] This knowledge was available and evident to the Brontë sisters and precipitated their desire to expose slavery to the full light of their narrative talents. Heywood comments that the Sidgwicks and Caruses provided the concept of the Reed and Brocklehurst families.[86] He argues the character of Rochester and its overlap with the demise of the Sill family is evidence that the Brontës had awareness of the 'plantation economy' in the area.[87]

The Brontës, as children and later as young adults, were exposed to current political and social news, to authors such as Scott, Byron and Shakespeare, historical fables and biographies, and the newspapers of the day. As children, the Brontës amused themselves by inventing kingdoms, games, and fantasy worlds. As adults,

[83] Humphrey Gawthrop, 'Slavery: *Idée Fixe* of Emily and Charlotte Brontë', *Brontë Studies*, 38.4 (2013), 281-289 <https://doi.org/10.1179/1474893213Z.00000000082> (p. 282).
[84] Christopher Heywood, 'Yorkshire Slavery in *Wuthering Heights*', *The Review of English Studies*. 38.150 (1987), 184-198 < https://www.jstor.org/stable/515422> [accessed 9 October 2022), (p. 185).
[85] Heywood, p. 185.
[86] Heywood, p. 184.
[87] Heywood, p. 186.

this work of imagination was also embedded in the social and cultural context in which the Brontës lived and wrote, commenting on topical issues of the day, particularly those relating to women but also connecting to current political debates about class, slavery, and power dynamics. One of the most radical and innovative aspects of their fiction is their ability to give voice to those frequently silenced and overlooked in nineteenth-century fiction; the servants.

The Shape of the Thesis

Before embarking on an analysis of the two novels at the heart of my discussion, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*—which form Chapters Two and Three of the thesis—it is necessary to have a clear sense of the role of servants in nineteenth-century Britain. Chapter One of this thesis offers an insight into the operation of the domestic servant system between1800 and the late 1880s, reflecting the time at which the novels were set, the time period of the novels' publication, the period of the Brontës' lifetime, and the birth of the Brontë industry in the years following their death and the publication of Mrs Gaskell's influential biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. This chapter foregrounds the significance of the lives of ordinary people in the historical record, exploring the role of the nineteenth-century British servant through a discussion of the methods, avenues, and reasons for entering service, the roles open to the individual, dependent on age, gender, appearance, familial affiliations, and character. I will provide details of wage scales, job requirements and the remuneration gained by the servant from their employer or master, the conditions they worked with and the merits and disadvantages of being a domestic servant. This forms a necessary backdrop for the focus of the subsequent chapters on the Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels.

Following this historical overview, Chapter Two engages with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, to provide an example of master servant relationships, power and oppression. The novel is narrated by the servant protagonist Jane, who, as an educated governess and then heiress, both experiences oppression and servitude and maintains a sense of her own position. This chapter begins with an analysis of how the many servant characters in the novel are introduced through Jane's journeys to a series of places. Some of these characters are given names and personalities, but these are not fully developed and in many ways the servants remain on the periphery of Jane's narrative. It is in Jane's encounters with a series of tyrants that the novel's more subversive and radical message emerges, with Charlotte Brontë engaging with a complicated dialogue between rebellion and servitude.

In Chapter Three, which examines Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the figure of the servant is transformed, with Nelly Dean the housekeeper being one of the key narrative voices of the novel. She not only has voice but agency, manipulating the lives and emotions of those she serves in a successful attempt to secure and improve her own position. Although Nelly Dean, the servant narrator in *Wuthering Heights*, is the key focus of my examination of the servant voice, her fellow servant Joseph employs the strength of his religious affiliations to enable his voice, willing to chastise anyone he regards as a "sinner", regardless of their social status and power. As with *Jane Eyre*, my analysis of servants in *Wuthering Heights* is also concerned with wider dynamics of power and oppression. These are seen, in particular, through Heathcliff who oscillates between the role of servant and master. The cycle of power and oppression, mastery and servitude that is central to the narrative reinforces the novel's radical interrogation of class hierarchies.

In each chapter I focus on the servant characters, analyse their specific role in the operation of the household, their voice and influence, how they are portrayed and

the characteristics and behaviour that display their position in the servant and family hierarchy. I also explore the political and social issues that are the focus of the novels and the attitude and development of key issues relevant and active at the time the novels were written and depicted, especially servanthood, servitude and slavery, and the way the Brontë sisters create characters that exemplify these issues in both subtle ways and, at times, through startlingly violent depiction. I argue that the servants of both novels are given a voice rarely heard in other novels of their genre and time.

Carolyn Steedman claims that many writers of social history have produced work that is devoid of female domestic servant voice, with this lack of voice being a deliberate omission. She quotes Nicole Verdun as remarking she had not looked at domestic servants in her research of 'rural women's work and wages'.[88] My intention is to search for this voice.

[88] Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant; Labour and Love in the English Industrial Age*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 13. <https.www://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=307097> [accessed 13 January 2023].

Chapter One: A 'History from Below': Servants in the Historical Record

The fictional representations of nineteenth-century British servants that form the core of this thesis are embedded in the cultural and historical context out of which they were produced. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* reflect the social practices of the day, but they also challenge and critique the treatment of servants and the hierarchical world in which servant culture was embedded. Before turning to these fictional depictions, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities and conditions of the historical servant during this period. Drawing on both contemporary historical scholarship and archival material, I explore the people and lives behind the employment, management and purpose of the domestic servant in Britain during the time period of 1800 to the late 1880s.

My research has revealed a myriad of publications that address servant life; from the insightful Michelle Higgs' *Servant Stories - Life Below Stairs in their Own Words,* to the autobiographical publication by Margaret Powell, *Tales from Below Stairs*, to the academic scrutiny of specific time periods and locations undertaken by Sian Pooley and published as *Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers: A Case Study of Lancaster, 1880-1914*.[1] Social and feminist historians, such as Leonore Davidoff, have emphasised questions of gender and class. In her article 'Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England' published in 1974,

[1] Michelle Higgs, *Servants Stories: Life Below Stairs in Their Own Words. 1800-1950* (South Yorkshire, England: Pen and Sword History, 2015); Margaret Powell, *Tales from Below Stairs; Below Stairs, Climbing the Stairs* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2012); Sian Pooley, Domestic servants and Their Urban Employers: A Case Study of Lancaster, 1880-1914, *The Economic History Review*, New series, 62.2 (2009), 405-429 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20542918 > [accessed 26 April 2022].

Davidoff explores the law and the social changes affecting married working-class women and domestic servants and their subordination by husbands and masters.[2]

I draw on these, and other relevant scholarship, in the subsequent sections to this chapter focusing on the historical servant, structuring my overview around the key themes of: employment opportunities; roles and responsibilities; and the advantages and disadvantages of this form of employment. Although the array of publications provides valuable knowledge of Victorian servanthood, many focus on the later nineteenth century which is when more detailed information such as statistics and personal accounts became accessible and available. I have drawn on relevant material from both this later period and the time period in which the Brontës were living and writing to provide the necessary contextual frame.

In focusing on the lives and history of servants, I am influenced by the theory of 'history from below', a term that came to be used by historians in the 1960s following the eponymous article in the *Times Literary Supplement* by E. P. Thompson.[3] Andrew I. Port highlights that this form of historical analysis focuses on the lives, struggles, and relationships of ordinary people, and Jim Sharpe points out that this approach is embedded in a sense of a dichotomy between 'below' and above'.[4] Sharpe writes the presence of 'above' means that the history of 'the common people … cannot be divorced from the wider consideration of social structure and social power'.[5] This form of historical analysis also seeks to show how ordinary people had control over their

[2] Leonore Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life: Servant and wife in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Social History,* 7.4 (1974), 406-428 <https:// www.jstor.org/stable/3786464> [accessed 20 March 2022].

[3] E. P. Thompson, 'History from Below', *The Times Literary Supplement,* 7 April 1966, pp. 279-280.

[4] Andrew I. Port, 'History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), p. 108; Jim Sharpe, 'History from Below', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 27.

[5] Sharpe, p. 33.

own lives and were not just 'victims of large, amorphous, impersonal forces'.[6] In foregrounding the lives and working conditions of servants in nineteenth-century Britain and in turning the spotlight on servant figures in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* I am inspired by both the need to acknowledge the power structures in place and foreground the significance of individual servant voices and servant lives.

Defining the Servant

Before exploring the roles and responsibilities of nineteenth-century servants, it is important to understand just how many people were employed as servants in this era. There are conflicting viewpoints and mathematical conjecture which fill pages of script detailing who should be counted in or out of the servant cohort. For example, Frank Dawes in his book *Not in Front of The Servants; Domestic Service in England 1850-1939* states the census of 1891 enumerated 1,386,167 females and 58,527 males working as domestic servants in England and Wales.[7] Edward Higgs contests these numbers and considers the census material of 'dubious validity'.[8] Higgs maintains the process was inconsistent, noting the enumerators were instructed to tabulate the duties of all females in households as servants or housekeepers, he claims this has 'very serious consequences for any study of domestic service.[9] Higgs continues to uphold his derision of other historians in his publication *Domestic Servants and Households in Rochdale 1851-1871,* he observes the dating of the 'rise

[6] Port, p. 108.
[7] Frank Dawes, *Not in Front of The Servants; Domestic service in England 1850-1939* (London: Wayland,1973), p. 9.
[8] Edward Higgs, Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England, *Social History*, 8.2 (1983), 201-210 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4285250 > (p.202).
[9] Higgs, Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England, p. 206.

and fall' of domestic service in Victorian Britain by some historians was based on the inaccurate collection and interpretation of census records.[10]

The National Archive for the United Kingdom proposes a similar viewpoint and suggests historians maintain an awareness that the occupation field of the census may not contain the correct information. Further to this, their current website user guide advises that domestic service may not have been considered a 'profession or occupation' for women or children and consequently may not have been included in the census record, also noting that any work of this gender and age group was 'un- or under recorded'.[11] The census in the UK is government operated, during the census of 1871 the question was introduced regarding a person's physical state. This question specifically enquired if a person fitted into the following categories of blind, deaf and dumb, idiot, imbecile or lunatic, evidently bureaucratic concern was focused on the infirmity suffered by its population rather than the accurate recording of their occupation.[12] The importance of the number of domestic servants is seemingly overridden by the volumes produced detailing the duties, drudgery and paternalistic control suffered by servants. However, I consider numbers to be important, they help us to understand if there was an accurate measurable rise and fall of the domestic servant in this long nineteenth century.

Advertisements are another key resource, the individual narratives of households searching for servants and servants seeking employment painting a cumulative picture of a significant job market. Below are advertisements from domestic

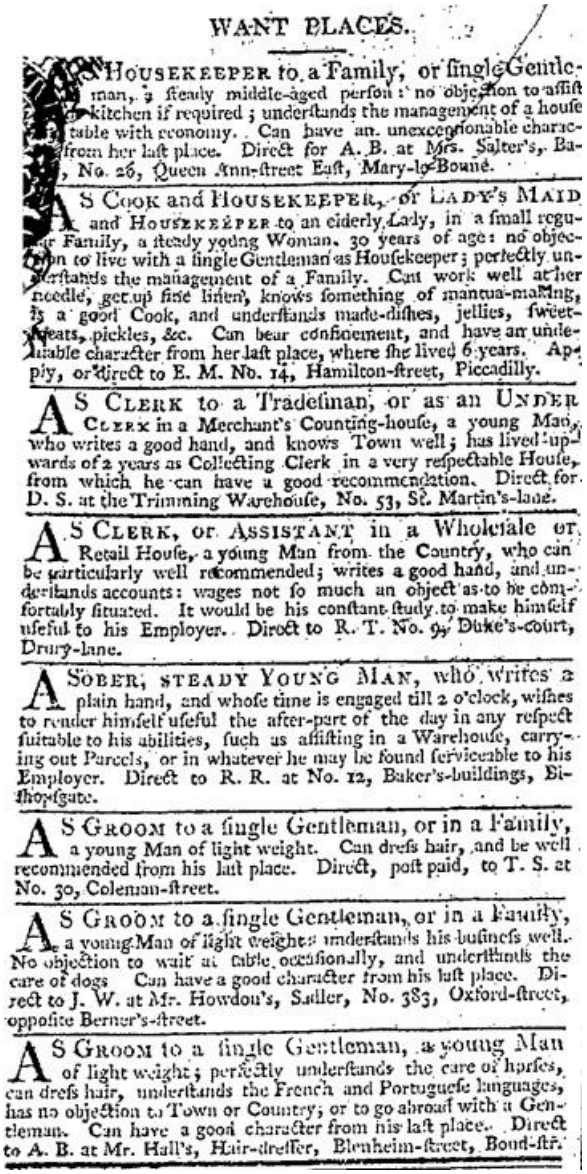
[10] Edward Higgs, *Domestic Servants and Households in Rochdale 1851-1871*, (Oxford: Routledge Library Editions,1986), p. 211.
< https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9781315637471> (p.211).

[11] 'Focus on Census', National Archive UK.
<https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/focuson/census/pdfs/using_the_census.pdf>
[accessed 28 March 2022]

[12] 'Help with your Research', National Archive UK.
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/census-records/>
[accessed 28 March 2022]

servants detailing their skills, status, and requirements, published in the *Times* of London newspaper dated February 1800. It should be noted that little had changed in the requirements offered and requested fifty years later in January 1850. These advertisements give an insight into both specific servant roles and the emphasis on the need for servants to be of good character.

The February 1800 advertisement is from a woman who is searching for a role as cook or housekeeper to either an elderly lady, ‘regular family’ or single gentleman, she extols her own virtues as having the ability to make ‘sweetmeats, jellies and pickles’ and that she holds an undeniable character from her previous employment that lasted six years (figure 1). In October 1800 two adverts display requests for a gardener who has skills with land and horses and the second for a young man who has an ‘active disposition’ who is familiar with farming (figure 2). Similarly, one of the 1820 advertisements, is for a man and wife asking for work, the man as a gardener, ‘who understands his business’ and can obtain an ‘undeniable character’ from his previous employers and his wife offers her skill as a cook (figure 3). The 1850 servant is seeking work as a butler with a regular family, he is also of respectable character and can execute his duty in or out of livery, clearly a very versatile man (figure 4). By 1852, the requirement is for a woman as a general servant, but she must be English, active, obliging and of course the expectation of a good character continues to be a vital condition of employment (figure 5).



WANT PLACES.

A HOUSEKEEPER to a Family, or single Gentleman, a steady middle-aged perſon: no objection to aſſiſt in kitchen if required; underſtands the management of a houſe and table with economy. Can have an unexceptionable character from her laſt place. Direct for A. B. at Mrs. Salter's, Baker, No. 26, Queen Ann-ſtreet Eaſt, Mary-le-Bone.

A COOK and HOUSEKEEPER, or LADY'S MAID and HOUSEKEEPER to an elderly Lady, in a ſmall regular Family, a ſteady young Woman, 30 years of age: no objection to live with a ſingle Gentleman as Houſekeeper; perfectly underſtands the management of a Family. Can work well at her needle, get up fine linen, knows ſomething of mantua-making, is a good Cook, and underſtands made-diſhes, jellies, ſweetmeats, pickles, &c. Can bear confinement, and have an unexceptionable character from her laſt place, where ſhe lived 6 years. Apply, or direct to E. M. No. 14, Hamilton-ſtreet, Piccadilly.

AS CLERK to a Tradeſman, or as an UNDER CLERK in a Merchant's Counting-houſe, a young Man, who writes a good hand, and knows Town well; has lived upwards of 2 years as Collecting Clerk in a very reſpectable Houſe, from which he can have a good recommendation. Direct for D. S. at the Trimming Warehouſe, No. 53, St. Martin's-lane.

AS CLERK, or ASSISTANT in a Wholeſale or Retail Houſe, a young Man from the Country, who can be particularly well recommended; writes a good hand, and underſtands accounts: wages not ſo much an object as to be comfortably ſituated. It would be his conſtant ſtudy to make himſelf uſeful to his Employer. Direct to R. T. No. 9, Duke's-court, Drury-lane.

A SOBER, STEADY YOUNG MAN, who writes a plain hand, and whoſe time is engaged till 2 o'clock, wiſhes to render himſelf uſeful the after-part of the day in any reſpect ſuitable to his abilities, ſuch as aſſiſting in a Warehouſe, carrying out Parcels, or in whatever he may be found ſerviceable to his Employer. Direct to R. R. at No. 12, Baker's-buildings, Biſhopſgate.

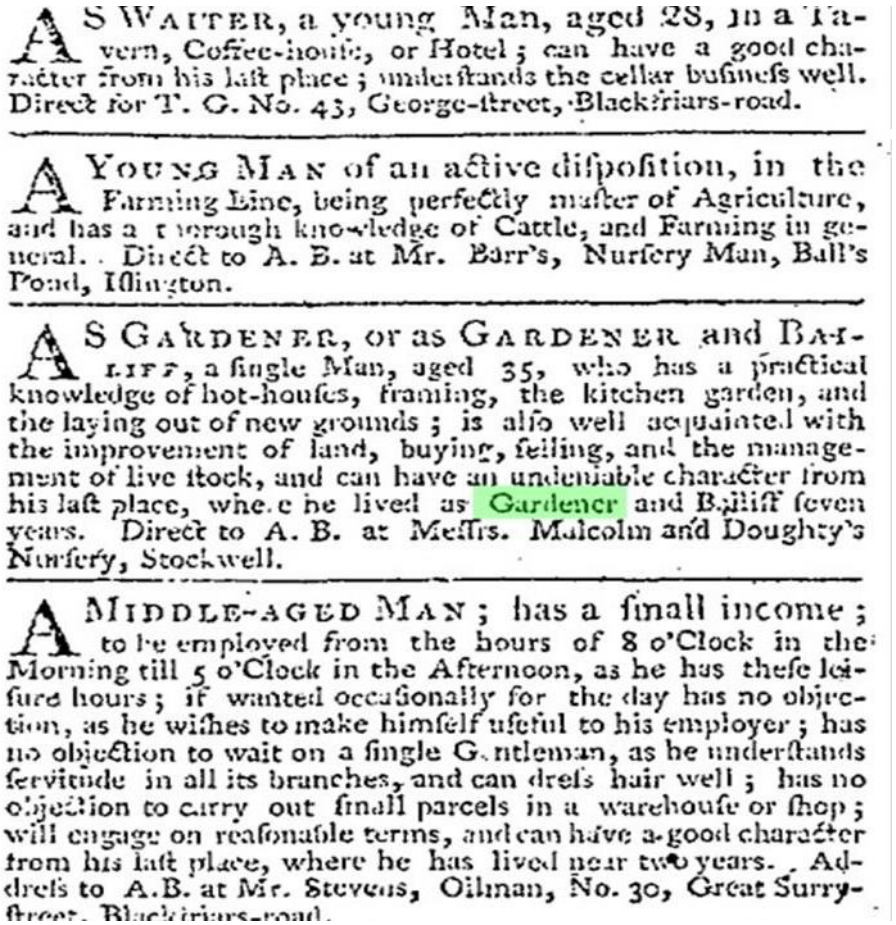
AS GROOM to a ſingle Gentleman, or in a Family, a young Man of light weight. Can dreſs hair, and be well recommended from his laſt place. Direct, poſt paid, to T. S. at No. 30, Coleman-ſtreet.

AS GROOM to a ſingle Gentleman, or in a Family, a young Man of light weight: underſtands his buſineſs well. No objection to wait at table occaſionally, and underſtands the care of dogs. Can have a good character from his laſt place. Direct to J. W. at Mr. Howdon's, Saddler, No. 383, Oxford-ſtreet, oppoſite Berner's-ſtreet.

AS GROOM to a ſingle Gentleman, a young Man of light weight; perfectly underſtands the care of horſes, can dreſs hair, underſtands the French and Portugueſe languages, has no objection to Town or Country; or to go abroad with a Gentleman. Can have a good character from his laſt place. Direct to A. B. at Mr. Hall's, Hair-dreſſer, Blenheim-ſtreet, Bond-ſtr.

Figure 1. Advertisement in *The Times* of London 5 February 1800.[13]

[13] 'Want Places'. *The Times*, 5 February 1800, p. 4. *The Times Digital Archive* <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS67247685/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4b9efc99> [accessed 27 January 2023].



A S WAITER, a young Man, aged 28, in a Tavern, Coffee-houſe, or Hotel; can have a good character from his laſt place; underſtands the cellar buſineſs well. Direct for T. G. No. 43, George-ſtreet, Blackfriars-road.

A YOUNG MAN of an active diſpoſition, in the Farming Line, being perfectly maſter of Agriculture, and has a thorough knowledge of Cattle, and Farming in general. Direct to A. B. at Mr. Barr's, Nurſery Man, Ball's Pond, Iſlington.

A S GARDENER, or as GARDENER and BAILIFF, a ſingle Man, aged 35, who has a practical knowledge of hot-houſes, framing, the kitchen garden, and the laying out of new grounds; is alſo well acquainted with the improvement of land, buying, ſelling, and the management of live ſtock, and can have an undeniable character from his laſt place, where he lived as Gardener and Bailiff ſeven years. Direct to A. B. at Meſſrs. Malcolm and Doughty's Nurſery, Stockwell.

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN; has a ſmall income; to be employed from the hours of 8 o'Clock in the Morning till 5 o'Clock in the Afternoon, as he has theſe leiſure hours; if wanted occaſionally for the day has no objection, as he wiſhes to make himſelf uſeful to his employer; has no objection to wait on a ſingle Gentleman, as he underſtands ſervitude in all its branches, and can dreſs hair well; has no objection to carry out ſmall parcels in a warehouſe or ſhop; will engage on reaſonable terms, and can have a good character from his laſt place, where he has lived near two years. Addreſs to A.B. at Mr. Stevens, Oilman, No. 30, Great Surry-ſtreet, Blackfriars-road.

Figure 2. Advertisement in *The Times* of London 15 October 1800.[14]

[14] 'Want Places'. *The Times*, 15 October 1800, p. 4. *The Times Digital Archive* <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS67247951/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=ad7fac33> [accessed 28 January 2023].

medicine, which can be immediately forwarded to any part of th
world.—13, Bouverie-street, Fleet-street.

WANT PLACES.—All letters to be post paid.

AS Cook and Housekeeper to a single Gentleman c
Lady, or as Cook in a small Family, a middle-aged Woman
who can have a good character from the situation she is about to leav
Direct to A. B., at Mr. Johnston's, baker, 191, Piccadilly. N
officekeeper need apply.

A Middle-aged Man and his Wife, without incumbrance
the Man as Gardener, who understands his business in all i
various parts, and can have an undeniable character from his la
place: the Woman is a general good Cook, who understands the ma
nagement of the dairy; they would have no objection to undertak
either of the above situations if required. Direct to A. B., at M
Huntley's, bookseller, 4, Duke-street, Grosvenor-square.

AS Valet to a single Gentleman, or with an Invali
Gentleman, a middle-aged Man, aged 30, who can dress an
shave, and perfectly understands his business; can have an undeni
able character from the gentleman he served last. Direct to A. B.
at W. G. Maskell's, 3, Great College-street, Westminster.

AS Coachman, a Person, who thoroughly understand
his business, and the management of horses, and can hav
one of the best of characters from the gentleman he has lately lef
Direct to J. J., at Mr. Poole's, saddler, 3, Charles-st., Berkeley-sc

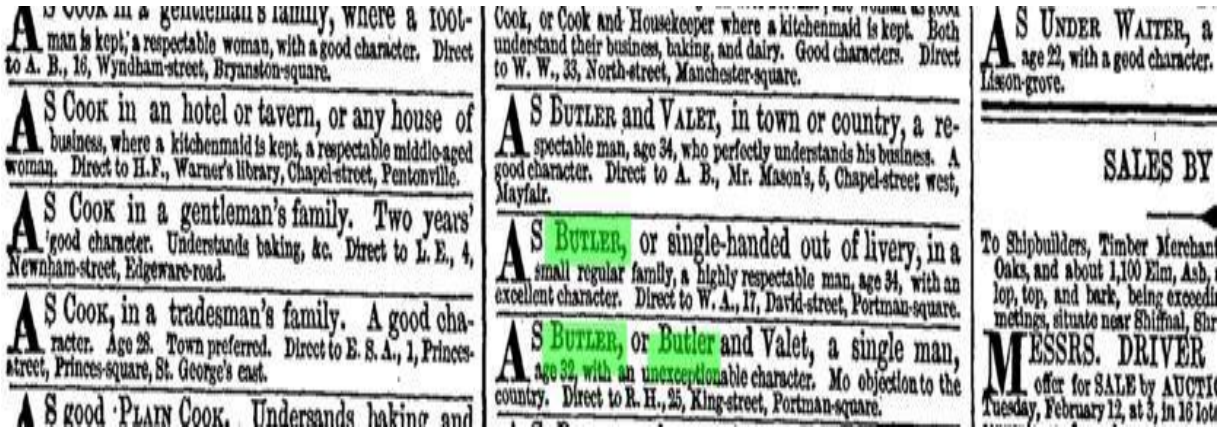
AS Coachman or Groom, a young married Man, wh
can have a good character from the gentleman he has just lef
whom he served near six years in both capacities. Direct to S. H.
at Mr. Branch's, grocer, Stratford, Essex.

AS Waiter in an Hotel, Tavern, Inn, or Coffee-house
a single young Man, who perfectly understands his busines
in all its branches, and can have an undeniable character of fou
years from the situation he has just left; security given if required
Direct to E. D., 8, Chiswell-street, Finsbury-square.

AS Gardener, an experienced steady Man, aged 32
who perfectly understands his business in all its variou
branches; has no objection to attend any other concern if required
either to board in or out of the house, or to go to any part of th
country; his character will bear the strictest investigation from th
gentleman he has been with many years. Direct to A. B., at Mr
Wansen's, shoemaker, near the Prince of Wales, Brixton, Surrey

Figure 3. Advertisement in *The Times* of London 1 January 1820.[15]

[15] 'Want Places'. *The Times*, January 1, 1820, p. 4. *The Times Digital Archive* <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS67257889/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=7abc3d2c>. [accessed 28 January 2023]



AS Cook in a gentleman's family, where a footman is kept; a respectable woman, with a good character. Direct to A. B., 16, Wyndham-street, Bryanston-square.

AS Cook in an hotel or tavern, or any house of business, where a kitchenmaid is kept, a respectable middle-aged woman. Direct to H.F., Warner's library, Chapel-street, Pentonville.

AS Cook in a gentleman's family. Two years' good character. Understands baking, &c. Direct to L. E., 4, Newnham-street, Edgeware-road.

AS Cook, in a tradesman's family. A good character. Age 28. Town preferred. Direct to E. S. A., 1, Princes-street, Princes-square, St. George's east.

AS good PLAIN COOK. Undersands baking and

Cook, or Cook and Housekeeper where a kitchenmaid is kept. Both understand their business, baking, and dairy. Good characters. Direct to W. W., 33, North-street, Manchester-square.

AS BUTLER and VALET, in town or country, a respectable man, age 34, who perfectly understands his business. A good character. Direct to A. B., Mr. Mason's, 5, Chapel-street west, Mayfair.

AS BUTLER, or single-handed out of livery, in a small regular family, a highly respectable man, age 34, with an excellent character. Direct to W. A., 17, David-street, Portman-square.

AS BUTLER, or Butler and Valet, a single man, age 32, with an unexceptionable character. No objection to the country. Direct to R. H., 25, King-street, Portman-square.

AS UNDER WAITER, a age 22, with a good character. Lisson-grove.

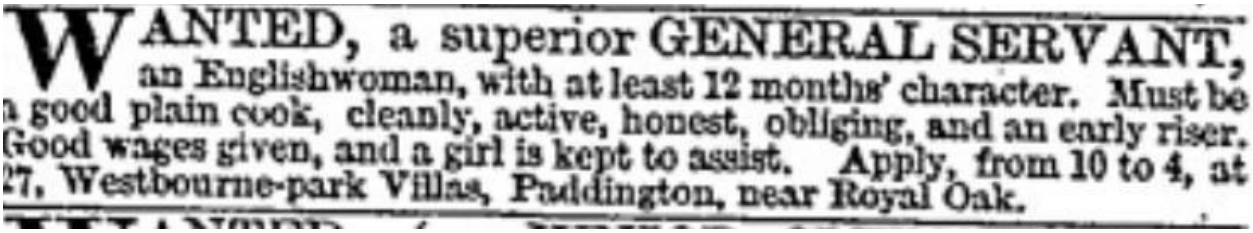
SALES BY

To Shipbuilders, Timber Merchant Oaks, and about 1,100 Elm, Ash, lop, top, and bark, being exceedi metings, situate near Shiffnal, Shr

MESSRS. DRIVER offer for SALE by AUCTI Tuesday, February 12, at 3, in 16 lot

Figure 4. Advertisement in *The Times* of London 22 January 1850.[16]

This emphasis on respectability, and the need for servants to do a range of work in smaller households is evident in an advertisement placed by a prospective employer.



WANTED, a superior GENERAL SERVANT, an Englishwoman, with at least 12 months' character. Must be a good plain cook, cleanly, active, honest, obliging, and an early riser. Good wages given, and a girl is kept to assist. Apply, from 10 to 4, at 27, Westbourne-park Villas, Paddington, near Royal Oak.

Figure 5. Advertisement in *The Times* of London in 21 January 1852. [17]

Advertisements in newspapers, word of mouth from friends and family, and the professional guidance of organisations and agencies were used by domestic servants in pursuit of a fresh start or promotion. Michelle Higgs notes that if a servant wanted

[16] 'As Lady's-Maid, a respectable person, who per-'. *The Times*, 22 January 1850, p. 12. *The Times Digital Archive* <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS201490998/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=e2938c1> [accessed 27 January 2023]

[17] 'Wanted, in a lunatic asylum, a Kitchen-Maid'. *The Times*, 21 January 1852, p. 2. *The Times Digital Archive* <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS33719861/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=e5fa91c7> [accessed 21 Dec. 2022]

to find a kind and understanding employer, who paid fair wages, they would be advised to look at the situations page of a 'high quality' newspaper.[18] Franklin suggests that of the many avenues open for employment in domestic service, the jobs found in large country houses were the most attractive and therefore received the most applications and competition. She reveals the interest in a job as a footman at a home in Norfolk amounted to twenty-six applications.[19] Franklin also proposes that the more staff a large country house employed, the duties became less arduous and the easier the working life would be, conversely a small house with one or two servants would have to complete all the tasks required to care for the family.[20]

Domestic service was a precarious occupation, whose longevity depended on the whims and fancies of the employer, for example, a lady's maid could lose her job and be cast on the street because of an infraction or simply because she had grown old and lost her youthful appearance.[21] A young woman might become pregnant with a child fathered by her master or another servant. She might find herself with no job, with a child at her feet and no prospect of work. A character or reference might infer something that is untrue, for example a servant may be accused of theft but later be exonerated, however the employer does not completely trust the servant and therefore this is inferred in a reference, and consequently the servant is not offered the job they applied for. The act of theft would inevitably end a domestic servant's employment.

Eventually a domestic servant would leave or retire from their employment. Having been dependent on the master of a home for a lifetime; some servants were granted an annuity or pension, some were left money in the deceased master's estate,

[18] Michelle Higgs, p. 8.
[19] Jill Franklin, 'Troops of Servants: Labour and Planning in the Country House 1840-1914.' *Victorian Studies*, 19.2 (1975), 211–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825912> [accessed 25 April 2022] p. 212.
[20] Franklin, p. 213.
[21] Dawes, p. 63.

while others died in service. After years of service, some of the upper servants saved enough to control their future away from the protection of the master, while others languished. Changes to welfare systems and the wage structure provided modest financial security for servants but before those changes, the workhouse was the destination for some, while others were fortunate enough to gain entry to alms houses.

Much has been written of the cruelty and harsh treatment of domestic servants by their masters. Michelle Higgs classes them as 'common themes' that run through the diaries and narrative of domestic service.[22] Yet every story of cruelty is overshadowed by acts of immense kindness and care from the master. In return a set of rules was expected to be strictly adhered to, the foremost was the expectation of deference and silence from servant to master. Some domestic servants were a submissive presence in their employer's life, but others held reign over the master and his household, with the power reversed. Close relationships between master and servants could last for a lifetime; the love a nanny felt for her master's children, the care and protection given by a footman as he travelled with his mistress. Some considered themselves to be entrenched within the family with the relationship lasting long after the employment has ceased. Some children remained in contact with their former nanny and spoke of a bond that would last a lifetime.[23]

The complexity of the relationship and the expectations on both sides could lead to difficulties. The master of Glynliven Park in Caernarvonshire, had the very odd habit of always speaking to his domestic servants with his back turned, an action provoking negative emotions from his staff.[24] Sally Eales explains the feelings of one particular domestic servant toward her employer were of resentment and hostility,

[22] Michelle Higgs, p. xi.
[23] Pamela Sambrook, *The Servants Story: Managing a Great Country House* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2016) p. 98.
[24] Pamela Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2009) p. 165.

Eales quotes Isabella Beeton as writing 'it was the custom of 'Society' to abuse its servants'.[25] Michelle Higgs observes the powerful force of reactions that passed between the master and his servant, from anger at the treatment inflicted to the appreciation of opportunity and growth.[26] Eales quotes Davidoff in her assertion that 'it was the essence of mastery that the lives of subordinates did not matter'.[27]

These relationships, for many, were based on paternalism, the duty of the master was to protect and illuminate the domestic servant with ideals of the moral code expected from a civilised society.[28] However, this was a symbiotic relationship, one could not do without the other, masters could not cook or dress or light a fire in the coal range, just as a footman may not understand the operation of a country estate or a successful company. They needed each other, they lived under the same roof, one listening and the other may have presented control, but often the master was in grateful acceptance of the care provided by the dutiful and silent servant.

Servant Titles and Duties

The domestic servants in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are placed and depicted in a variety of homes and roles. Some, like the servants at Thrushcross Grange, have specific defined roles that they are unlikely to stray from, however others, for example Nelly Dean, are ready to assume any role they are given.[29] In the world outside the novels, as displayed in the advertisements on the previous pages, domestic servants were categorised, advertised, and recruited by specific titles and job requirements.

[25] Sally Eales, ''I am but a livery servant', examining ruptures in master-servant relationships of the nineteenth-century country house', *Family & Community History*, 22.3 (2019). 85-100 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631180.2019.1675349> (p. 85).
[26] Michelle Higgs, p. xi.
[27] Eales, p. 85.
[28] Eales, p. 91.
[29] Brontë. p. 35.

This does not mean, however, that the job requirements were always strictly adhered to. Some of the titles and roles detailed below are not depicted in the novels, for example there is not a butler at Wuthering Heights or the mention of a footman at Moorhouse, however I have signalled them here because they part of the servant structure and I consider them important factors to enable an understanding of this hierarchical system. The titles became infused in everyday language, they littered books and diaries, newspapers, and letters. The term butler, footman or lady's maid was a signal to others of the employer's social status, the employer could appear as if they were dwelling amongst a certain class and a certain tier of society, even if they, as in some cases, could barely afford the indulgence of a domestic servant. Now the words conjure an image in the reader's mind of a bygone era, then the elite and not so elite benefitted from the service and care provided by one or many of the people who bore the title of domestic servant.

The inclusion of their titles in this work was an important factor, because I consider titles, as I have indicated above, were for the benefit of the employer, a title also had the additional benefit of providing status to the individual domestic servant. It may be imagined with what pride a young kitchen boy would rise through the ranks of domestic servants and eventually wear the title and uniform of butler to a wealthy household. To provide an understanding of the many and varied titles and duties undertaken by domestic servants, I have separated the sections under their job titles.

The titles may be considered to be generic, but the work expected of them was as varied as their employers. Michelle Higgs believes it is 'impossible to generalise' about the type of domestic service experienced by the servants.[30] However there was a strict hierarchy within the world of domestic servants between the upper and lower

[30] Michelle Higgs, p. xi.

house servants, and the many specifically gendered roles within the household. This division or class distinction influenced the performance of many daily tasks and behaviours, for example the distinct eating arrangements, the specific dress codes, the different benefits received, and, most of all, the Holy Grail of being in the presence of the family.

Amongst the many workers who moved from one employed position to another was, 'the lifestyle servant'. They were driven by an urgency to take any work that provided food for their family, grasping an opportunity to escape from an unhappy family life or to stay out of the workhouse. Another class of domestic servant was prevalent; that of 'the career servant'. This type of domestic servant moved up the career ladder by taking work in lower ranked positions such as kitchen or scullery maids, worked hard and gained the skills to earn promotion as a housekeeper or a lady's maid, a boot boy could in time, and provided he had the right looks and height, become a valet or butler.[31] Servants often changed employers in search of better conditions and promotion. Sambrook, however, reports that this had a disadvantage for some domestic servants as they would gain a reputation for being 'short-charactered' and would advance more by staying in a job long enough to gain a satisfactory reference.[32]

The Butler

The butler was regarded as imposing, authoritarian and the head of the household of male servants. Dawes states that butlers were not selected for employment by their masters, rather they 'engaged themselves', this was considered self-congratulatory

[31] Michelle Higgs, p. 3.
[32] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 3.

confirmation of their status in the household.[33] Mrs Beeton acknowledges this man must be 'beyond suspicion' and capable of setting a good example to the male servants in his charge.[34] Despite the self-assurance emitted by some butlers, they were subject to the same process of employment scrutiny as other domestic servants. Sambrook relates the engagement of a certain Phillip Osgood as butler to Lord Stamford. Osgood was 5-foot 10½ inches tall and had 'very tolerable' handwriting and held a respectable character, but despite his face having freckles and smallpox marks and his potential master being a Scotsman, he was hired.[35]

If the household did not employ a footman, the butler was the man who opened the door to visitors, Lethbridge labels the butler as one of the 'display servants' who were often selected for the marvel of their height and facial features.[36] He had his own domain, the butler's pantry, from there he organised his staff. Aside from this duty, the butler was responsible for the valuable articles in the house such as the silver- plated ornaments and serving dishes and the contents of the wine cellar.[37]

The butler sat at the head of the table in the servant's hall and, carved the meat and ensured not an unsanctioned word was uttered by his staff during the meal. The moment he stood up, the others immediately put down their knife and fork, he said a closing prayer and was off to eat pudding in the housekeeper's parlour.[38] He was addressed as Mister by his staff and his family name by his master,[39] The butler's duty was to rule the underlings under his charge, this was not a man to cross or try to control.

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[33] Dawes, p. 63.
[34] Isabella Beeton, *Household Management* (London: Ward Lock, 1907), p. 1762.
[35] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 10.
[36] Lucy Lethbridge, *Servants* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 25.
[37] Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan,1975), p. 77.
[38] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 113.
[39] Lethbridge, p. 12.

The Housekeeper

Pamela Horn observes that the term housekeeper was used to label a variety of women who 'kept house'; some worked in the noble houses of the English gentry, while others in less fortunate circumstances were employed by railway porters or hairdressers.[40] The desired principles for these guardians of the household were 'honesty, industry and vigilance'.[41] Mrs Beeton recommends 'cleanliness, punctuality and method' as the attributes of a successful housekeeper.[42] Strength and health were also a prerequisite, Mrs Beeton pays particular attention to the importance attributed to the strength of the housekeeper's hands.[43]

The housekeeper, in her role of disciplinarian in the household, was second only to her mistress. She had additional staff, for example this was typically the parlourmaid, to support her in her duties, she was responsible for the management of the laundry and the staff attached to this area. The housekeeper carried the keys to the household, often attached to a belt around her waist. The sound of the keys clashing together in rhythm with the housekeeper's step, set fear into the hearts of many and, according to Horn, triggered a trembling reaction in a particular housekeeper's junior staff.[44] Mrs Parker, a housekeeper to Lord Bath had a habit of 'running her fingers' over surfaces to check the quality of cleaning and dusting, this action induced quaking through the body of the staff who may have failed in their duty.[45]

[40] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 53.
[41] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 54.
[42] Beeton, p. 28.
[43] Beeton, p. 38.
[44] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 54.
[45] Dawes, p. 11.

The housekeeper was responsible for preparing the household accounts, linen and crockery inventories and the allocation of rooms for house guests and their servants. Her skills of producing healing lotions and cordials added to the talents of these often both feared and revered women.[46]

The Lady's Maid

The lady's maid was engaged by the mistress of the house to act as her dresser, keep her wardrobe of clothing in an immaculate condition, sew items of clothing and hold responsibility for her mistress's hair, jewellery and secrets. The ideal candidate for this most intimate of jobs was a woman who was a talented needlewoman, truthful, and someone who did not share the gossip and family secrets she heard as she attended to her mistress's every need. The family status of the candidate was considered an important reference point for employment; a family would certainly not want to have a person of dubious provenance in their home, dwelling amongst their treasures and possessions. Horn reports of the Harcourt family, who asked one applicant not only of her own abilities but also her father's profession. Horn also notes that appearance was a factor and that the style of hair with fringe was not acceptable.[47] Mrs Beeton wisely advises her readers that a lady's maid should have lessons in hairdressing because fashions are continually changing.[48]

The lady's maid held an influential position with her mistress and as she was in a place to share the transgressions of other servants with the mistress, this meant that at times they suspected this happened and consequently rejected her company.[49]

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[46] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 55.
[47] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 44.
[48] Beeton, p. 1772.
[49] John Brooks, Weddington Castle, *Key People: The Duties of Victorian Servants* <https://www.weddingtoncastle.co.uk/servants-duties.html> [accessed 29 March 2022].

Other servants also thought the lady's maid put on 'airs and graces', however Dawes notes the expectation from her mistress was to be well spoken and very discreet. He also writes that the lady's maid had her own standards and preferred to work for only one mistress in a household.[50] Dawes reflects on a Victorian publication called *The Lady's Maid* that warned her that despite the trappings of a comfortable lifestyle working alongside her mistress, she would eventually return from where she came 'among the poor', because this is where she belonged. [51]

The Valet

The valet held similar duties to the lady's maid, but he attended the master of the house. His responsibilities were varied; he organised the dressing room ensuring its cleanliness, set out his master's clothing for the day, and ensured breakfast was prepared before his master woke. He set out razors, combs, brushes and hot water to enable him to carry out the delicate task of shaving his masters face and clipping his side whiskers.[52] He aided his master to bathe and dress in immaculately clean and ironed clothing. Arranging tickets for shows, organising travel plans and hotel bookings, the valet was expected to be discrete and polite.[53] He travelled with his master to country houses, attended to the guns and equipment necessary for game shooting and listened to the gossip, therefore becoming an invaluable asset in his position amongst the upper ten in the household.[54] Horn describes the valet as the 'gentleman's gentleman, a specimen of high civilisation'.[55] Despite his illustrious place

[50] Dawes, p. 62.
[51] Dawes, p. 62.
[52] Lethbridge, p. 210.
[53] Frank E. Huggett, *Life Below Stairs: Domestic Servants in England from Victorian Times* (London: John Murray,1977), p. 29.
[54] Huggett, p. 29.
[55] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 87.

in the household and intimate knowledge of his master's behaviours, the valet was expected to show the same respect to his masters as any other servant. Mrs Beeton is specific in her attention to the deference required from both the lady's maid and the valet: 'Deference to a master and mistress, and to their friends and visitors, is one of the implied terms of their engagement; and this deference must apply even to what may be considered their whims'.[56]

The Housemaid

Mrs Beeton discloses that larger houses would employ several housemaids. This group of women would be under the orders of a head housemaid, who according to Mrs Beeton 'had very little to do'; her duty was to ensure the work of the housemaids was completed to the required standard and of course at the prescribed time.[57] The census count of 1881 yields thirteen household staff employed at Weddington Castle, amongst them was a housemaid named Emma Colitte, aged 36 years.[58] The work of housemaids, such as Emma, ensured the house was clean and well maintained, each maid having their own areas of duties and responsibilities. Their work started before breakfast; removing rugs and mats and on into the day as they scrubbed, cleaned, dusted, swept floors, emptied chamber pots, cleaned fire grates and any other back breaking duty required of them.[59] Housemaids who worked in homes where one or two housemaids were employed fared no better, the expectation of a high quality and efficient service continued but in that situation all the duties would fall to one woman. Mrs Beeton is firm in her guidance that the summer months, when the arduous task of fire grate cleaning and lighting is not required, released time for the

[56] Beeton, p. 1774.
[57] Beeton, p. 1775.
[58] John Brooks, Weddington Castle, *Key People 13: The Victorian Servants at Weddington Castle* <https://www.weddingtoncastle.co.uk/victorian-servants.html> [accessed 22 April 2022].
[59] Brooks, p. 1.

house maids to spring clean the house and polish the furniture ‘so not a speck of dust is found in the room’.[60]

The Footman

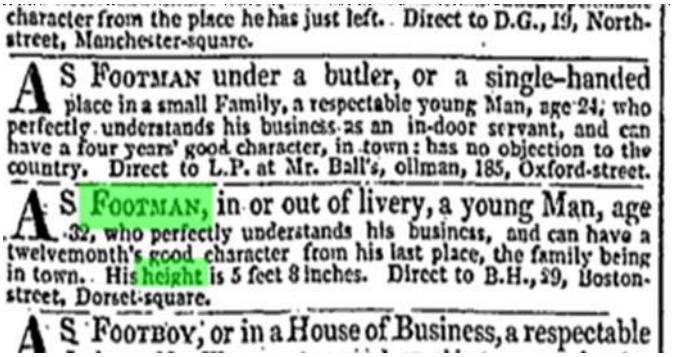
The physical qualities of height and good looks were considered an advantage for men to gain employment as a footman. Pamela Sambrook considers the footman to be the ‘kingpin of the country house’; success in this role almost guaranteed employment in the illustrious role of butler.[61] A diverse skill set was required of the footman; he travelled with and waited for his mistress while she visited other homes, he brushed her clothing and polished her boots, stoked the fires, laid the table for dining and waited behind his master’s chair at dinner for the word or nod to serve his masters whims and fancies. During the execution of these many and varied tasks the footman changed his clothing from the work clothes required for cleaning and fire duties to the pristine starched shirts, suit and white gloved uniform of the footman considered a necessity when in contact with his master or their visitors.[62]

The hierarchical system within the household specified the duties of the first, second and third footman, for example each had, what was considered, the honour of serving a particular part of dinner, the first footman along with the butler served the meat or poultry, the second the gravy or sauce while the third served the vegetables.[63] Sambrook explains the task of ‘close waiting’; this was the duty of standing waiting to serve, deliver messages or help the master and his family for the entire day with no other duty but to wait, this was arranged on a three-day roster, on the other days the

[60] Beeton, p. 1777.
[61] Pamela Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House,* p. 60.
[62] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 80.
[63] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House,* p. 60.

footman would resume his normal duties.[64] The footman was strictly drilled in the process of answering the door to visitors in a polite and civil manner, Mrs Beeton is at pains to express the necessity for this man to be able to pronounce names correctly, as mispronunciation of a visitor's name may have caused offence and was considered not in keeping with polite behaviour.[65]

Appearance, specifically height, often influenced a footman's wage. The following advertisement is from a footman requesting employment opportunities, it details his height as 5 feet 8 inches indicating height is considered an advantage to gain employment (figure 6).



character from the place he has just left. Direct to D.G., 19, North-street, Manchester-square.

AS FOOTMAN under a butler, or a single-handed place in a small Family, a respectable young Man, age 24; who perfectly understands his business as an in-door servant, and can have a four years' good character, in town: has no objection to the country. Direct to L.P. at Mr. Ball's, oilman, 185, Oxford-street.

AS FOOTMAN, in or out of livery, a young Man, age 32, who perfectly understands his business, and can have a twelvemonth's good character from his last place, the family being in town. His height is 5 feet 8 inches. Direct to B.H., 39, Boston-street, Dorset-square.

AS FOOTBOY, or in a House of Business, a respectable

Figure 6. Advertisement in *The Times* of London in 25 August 1830.[66]

The Cook

A relentless and essential component of Victorian households was the preparation, cooking and presentation of food, not simply the two or three-course meal of present-

[64] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House,* p. 54.
[65] Beeton, p. 1765.
[66] 'Want Places. -All letters to be post-paid.' 25 August. 1830, p. 4. *The Times Digital Archive*, <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS68967193/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=a0355876> [accessed 10 Feb. 2023].

day households but a dinner of seven or eight courses served in succession over a period of several hours. Added to this gargantuan task was the preparation of breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and various tea and cake delicacies served to day time visitors. The multitude of meals were prepared by the cook and in large estate houses her army of underlings. Within the title of cook yet another hierarchy reigned, that of the professional cook whose duty was singularly involved with cooking, as opposed to the plain cook who performed additional duties of cleaning, mopping and sweeping.[67] To support the cook, she had, under her management, a number of junior staff to undertake the menial tasks within the kitchen, these staff would have included the kitchen boys, scullery and kitchen maids.

Third in line of senior servants, the cook held a prestigious and highly paid position in the household, Frank Huggett suggests the cook was the 'most independent of all female servants.[68] Horn comments that male cooks were employed in only the most well-off homes and some households employed a male for a brief time to pass on their skills to the female cooks.[69] During her reign, Queen Victoria employed a male chef, namely Charles Francatelli, he was sympathetic to the housewives who could not afford the fine dining enjoyed by the rich and famous, consequently Francatelli published a cook book; *Plain Cooking for the Working Classes,* in 1852.[70] Whether male or female, the cook met with the mistress each morning to discuss the menus for the day, liaised with shopkeepers, butchers and sundry other suppliers and managed the coming and going of the staff under her/his management. In a similar manner to the housekeeper, the cook ruled her domain with a strong hand, Frank

[67] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 59.
[68] Huggett, p. 95.
[69] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 59.
[70] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Kitchen History*, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=199781.> [accessed 26 January 2023] p. 271.

Dawes considered many were ‘tyrants’ and many induced ‘terrors’ in both staff and employers.[71]

The Maid of All Work

Under the title maid of all work or general servant, women were employed by the upper, middle and lower classes. However, Jacob F. Field reports most women who were employed in single servant households were general servants.[72] Horn observes the term ‘general’ made up almost two thirds of the female servants counted in the 1871 census.[73] Mrs Beeton categorises the duties as dependent on the size of the household and if other servants are employed.[74] Field describes domestic servants working in smaller household as ‘generalists’ taking on whatever work was needed at that time.[75] Horn notes Mrs Beeton considered the class of employer for the general servant may only be ‘just a ‘step above’ her in social status, Horn refers to the ‘modest occupations’ of the employers.[76]

Huggett suggests that the expectation of their employers was that the maid of all work in single servant households would carry out all the domestic duties apart from the laundry, duties could range from caring for the children, cleaning and scrubbing the home and cooking for the family.[77] Mrs Beeton provides a two-paragraph description of the general servant’s duties and routines including the rotational cleaning and scrubbing of the house, fire lighting and care.[78] However, Edward Higgs

[71] Dawes, p. 59.
[72] Jacob F. Field, Domestic Service, Gender and Wages in Rural England, c.1700-1860, *The Economic History Review*, 66.1 (2013), 249-272 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2011.00648.x> (p. 252).
[73] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant,* p. 18.
[74] Beeton, p. 1781.
[75] Field, p. 251.
[76] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant,* p. 18.
[77] Huggett, p. 106.
[78] Beeton, p. 1781.

decries the descriptions of duties and behaviour dictated by Mrs Beeton and her peers, framing the household management books as not representative of how middle-class families lived or managed their households.[79] Higgs suggests that an alternative publication by Mrs Warren entitled *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds A Year*, would have been a more appropriate advice for the middle class. Nevertheless, the maid of all work was the woman on which many households relied on to ensure they had a clean and dry home, food and water, and the care required to raise children.

Benefits and Disadvantages of Domestic Service

Working for wages as a domestic servant, with the added benefits provided, was a means by which both young and old, male and female, and rural and urban employees, could provide for themselves and the families that depended on them for financial support. What these people, who were labelled as domestic servants, exchanged for these benefits depended on the type of work with its attached title, and the kindness or cruelty of their employer. The servants were at the mercy of their employer, their tenure of employment was vulnerable and subject to change and termination at moment's notice for the slightest error in the execution of their duty. For some, servanthood was one mistake or wrong action away from the workhouse, and for others fear may have sprung to life as their master called out their name.

'All found', along with a yearly wage, was offered as recompense to the domestic servant; the wage was dependent on type of work, age, gender and placement within the household hierarchy. Field explains his conclusion using these

[79] Edward Higgs, *Domestic Servants and Households in Rochdale 1851-1871*, (Oxford: Routledge Library Editions,1986), p. 210.

criteria was that a domestic servant's gender dictated the wages they received.[80] 'All found' was normally considered to be food, laundry and accommodation.[81] Leonore Davidoff employs the term 'total support' to describe the remuneration servants received, this amounted to 'food, housing and a cash wage', in return the domestic servant made themselves available to the wishes of their master.[82] The food value of 'all found' may have differed depending on gender and position, Field proposes this may have been greater for males because of their greater 'calorie intake'.[83] Wages were paid annually or quarterly in arrears; the starting salary was reviewed after one year and the employee could often take advances on their salary during the year. Some however were paid at the end of their service.[84]

The wages for some domestic servants were low, while others received nothing; according to Edward Higgs it was feasible to employ a woman who was an inmate in a workhouse and pay her 'practically nothing'.[85] For others, for example the butler or housekeeper, the wage was sufficient to enable them to save money, in some cases enough for a comfortable retirement. During the years from 1850 up to the late 1890s a housemaid employed in upper and upper middle-class households would expect to earn between £11.10s.10d and £18.10s.0d. each year, while cooks earned between £16.6s.0d and £24.0s.0d each year.[86] Cooks in a less affluent home were paid considerably less, Horn quotes an advertisement for a 'plain cook' in 1872 for a wage of £9 a year.[87] Male cooks, however, were considered to be of greater 'value' to the household , consequently the pay gap ratio between male and female cooks

[80] Field, p. 269.
[81] Lethbridge, p. 54.
[82] Davidoff, p. 410.
[83] Field, p. 256.
[84] Field, p. 254.
[85] Edward Higgs, Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England, p. 201.
[86] W.T. Layton, 'Changes in the Wages of Domestic Servants during Fifty Years', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society,* 71.3 (1908), 515-524 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2339295> [accessed 13 April 2022] (p. 518).
[87] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 124.

between 1826 and 1860 was 0.239.[88] Cooks' wages were often listed with the additional benefit of free beer, Mrs Beeton produced a wage chart indicating an allowance for tea, sugar and beer.[89] Free access to alcohol as the butler decanted his master's wine and port may be considered a perk, this sadly led to some butlers indulging liberally in this perk; one such butler was 'drunk by lunchtime' but managed to retain his employment within an aristocratic household for forty years.[90]

Prerequisites or perks were an addition to paid wages. The perk produced cash from the sale of excess or waste items from the household or as a tip from a guest to the house. The servant's position in the household would dictate what they could sell. For example, cooks would sell used bottle corks, rabbit skins, dripping and bones from the kitchen; by the same token they would negotiate commission from tradesmen for placing their business with a particular company.[91] The butler had access to, and could sell, candle ends and bottles. The butler, footman, valet and lady's maid expected and received gratuities in the form of cash or an item of clothing from visitors they attended to. The tips depended on the situation, length of the visit and the 'social standing of the visitor', in some houses it was an expectation, in others tipping was prohibited.[92] The opportunity to defraud the employer yielded itself to the unscrupulous employee, taking advantage of perks and making special arrangements with tradesmen could be very lucrative for the cook or butler. However, the majority of domestic servants remained loyal and honest with their employer's possessions and if they did not, Dawes reminds us, the culprit would have been 'sent packing without a character reference'.[93] However, trust was not always anticipated by some employers, Dawes

[88] Field, p. 260.
[89] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 130.
[90] Lethbridge, p. 57.
[91] Field, p. 255.
[92] Dawes, p. 123.
[93] Dawes, p. 124.

also reports the anecdote of one mistress who had the words; ‘Stolen from’ engraved on the cutlery in the servant’s hall. [94]

Upper servants ate separately while the ‘lower five’ ate in the servant’s hall – the lower five labelled as such irrespective of the number of people and departments involved.[95] In some households the housekeeper and the upper servants ate breakfast, supper and pudding in the housekeeper’s room, Franklin describes the scene of the upper servants filing into the housekeeper’s room, ‘plate in hand’ walking in order of superiority.[96] In larger country estates, servant food was often readily available and plentiful. For example at the Longleat Estate a plate of bread and cheese along with a jug of beer was placed on the table in the servant’s hall, available for any hand to take.[97] Huggett explains than often the servants, who were served dinner at noon, ate cold meat and vegetables, with a hearty pudding of rice or apple pie for pudding.[98] In contrast, some servants were short of food either because of a dishonest cook who purchased less food than her budget allowed or an employer cutting back and saving on their expenditure.[99] For servants who came into service from poor households the sight of the variety and quantity of food available to them provoked strong emotions, Lethbridge writes of a young woman who, when seeing the food spread before her on her first day of work, cried, her thoughts immediately with her parents who lived in dire circumstances.[100]

The standard of the accommodation provided in ‘all found’ varied from household to household. The promise of accommodation did not mean a clean, warm bed with fluffy eiderdowns placed in a warm and draught free room. For some it meant

[94] Dawes, p. 13.
[95] Dawes, p. 57.
[96] Franklin, p. 217.
[97] Pamela Horn, *High Society: The English Social Élite 1880-1914* (Stroud: Alan Sutton,1992), p.103.
[98] Huggett, p. 83.
[99] Dawes, p. 13.
[100] Lethbridge, p. 33.

sleeping on the floor beside the kitchen fire or in a room with fellow servants snoring and crying their way through the night. However, fortunately for the housekeeper, she often found comfort in having her own suite of rooms. Horn recounts the story of a young 13 year old female servant who was obliged to sleep in the kitchen basement alongside an infestation of 'black beetles'.[101] Horn continues with this theme as she relates the story of the employer who 'had a glass plate inserted into the door of the servant's bedroom so she could check if they were wasting a candle by reading in bed'.[102] Dawes reveals the memories from many servants of the bare floors, 'lumpy' mattresses and dreary rooms at the top of the house, to retire to at the end of their working day.[103] Lethbridge records the words of Beryl Lee Hooker, who as a child experienced the treatment imposed on her family's domestic servants; Hooker describes them as 'poor souls' who lived in a small room with no fire.[104] Lethbridge notes that many employers considered domestic servants were 'happiest living in spartan simplicity', nevertheless for many these damp, cold spaces led to the proliferation of life threatening diseases such as consumption.[105]

Uniform was a significant factor in the conspicuous display of servant keeping. Footmen in livery were the epitome of this display, with their gilded buttons, silk stockings and powdered wigs. Lethbridge explains powdered wigs became less widely used following the introduction of a tax on the powder in 1795, but remained in place for footmen.[106] Dawes advises that powdered wigs were used by footmen for ceremonial occasions up to the 1930s.[107] Consequently, emphasis was placed on the uniform and its design, colour and who had the panache required to wear the

[101] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 88.
[102] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 117.
[103] Dawes, p. 67.
[104] Lethbridge, p. 66.
[105] Lethbridge, p. 67.
[106] Lethbridge, p. 46.
[107] Dawes, p. 55.

flamboyant apparel of a footman. Dawes states Victorians wanted their domestic servants to be easily identifiable for what they were, 'domestic servants'.[108] Uniforms were provided by some employers while others expected a contribution towards its purchase or for the domestic servant to provide their own, Christmas gifts of uniform material were often given to housemaids, male servants received their masters' old clothes or the cast off from visitors. Female servants who purchased their own uniform often saved for this before they started work. As Huggett has highlighted, charities assisted girls in the purchase of uniforms, the money being returned by deductions from the girl's wages.[109]

Control of the domestic servant's life was often the intention of the employers; this was because they wanted absolute obedience to their rules. This they considered necessary to operate a successful home, and for the employer to enjoy a comfortable and pleasurable life for themselves and their families. To elicit this control and obedience, areas of the domestic servant's life were under constant scrutiny and surveillance. Davidoff suggests that without the power to demand loyalty using deference to the master's class position, the 'whole façade' of servanthood would have been endangered.[110] The expectation for servants was their method of dress, hair, food, sleep and religious opinion and even names were controlled. Added to this was the scrutiny of the quality and efficiency of their work. Using money as method of control is highlighted by Davidoff, she comments that employers did not want servants receiving gratuities or money in lieu of board, because this gave the servant financial independence from the employer and allowed them to decrease their working hours and consequently gain free time outside the family home.[111] Jacob C Field quotes

[108] Dawes, p. 91.
[109] Huggett, p. 58.
[110] Davidoff, p. 418.
[111] Davidoff, p. 414.

Steedman as commenting that 'authority over the servant was perpetual, the employer had obtained the day in, day out attention of the servant'.[112] Some employers used their right to search servants rooms and personal possessions if they suspected any theft or misconduct, and a servant who engaged in misconduct could legally have their employment terminated with no recompense, Delap comments that servants had little success in seeking legal redress, because it was often the employers word against the servant.[113]

The ideal domestic servant was viewed by some employers as a silent being, with no life outside service, no feelings or opinion, simply there waiting for their masters call to action. Others, such as the Brontës, enjoyed their servant's company and engagement with the family, and developed and encouraged the domestic servant to aspire to the best of their ability.

Pressure was exerted by the employer to influence the domestic servant's personal relationship with their God. Religious observance was considered a method to engender servitude in the domestic servant class, Dawes suggests biblical tracts were employed to keep the working class in their place, the doctrine was that domestic service could be compared to the service of the Lord and their reward for servitude would be in heaven.[114] Religious tracts were offered to servants to augment this intention, encouraging domestic servants not to concern themselves with the wages they were paid, rather being in 'a safe and happy home' was more important.[115] Horn suggests that the dominant discourse of the day was that domestic servants held a

[112] Field, p. 250.
[113] Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572946.001.0001>, [accessed 11 January 2023]. p. 87.
[114] Dawes, p. 46.
[115] Huggett, p. 63.

place in the social order that was 'divinely ordained' and therefore the servant was to keep that place without grievance or aspiration.[116]

Sunday attendance at church was considered mandatory for some domestic servants, they were relegated to the back pews away from the other believers', seated in order of hierarchy within the household.[117] The owners of Wimpole Hall produced a list of regulations for their staff, amongst the many rules was one that advised all servants they were expected to attend a church service at least once every Sunday.[118] Other employers forced their religious beliefs on their servants, by insisting that daily prayers for all servants and family were obligatory in certain households.[119] Advertisements and characters often specified religion, Sambrook notes a letter written in 1868, requesting further information about a potential employee, asking if he followed the Church of England as his faith.[120] Dawes suggests that advertisements stating 'No Irish need apply' may have been because of religious prejudice or the supposition that rural Irish females were incapable of successfully undertaking anything but the most simple tasks.[121] Some employers prevented their Roman Catholic servants from attending mass, which is a holy obligation for Catholics.[122]

Work time, and therefore time away from work, was controlled by the rhythm of each household; gender and title affected the amount of freedom allowed to the domestic servant. Time off was dictated by the requirements of the family. A lady's maid would not be allowed to go to bed before her mistress, she would need to be available to assist her mistress to undress from evening clothes and into a nightdress, only after this task was complete could the lady's maid sleep. The same applied for

[116] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 110.
[117] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 115.
[118] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 57.
[119] Lethbridge, p. 37.
[120] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 22.
[121] Dawes, p. 50.
[122] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant,* p.114.

the butler, who would be last to go to his room to sleep after all the other servants and the family had gone to bed. The request for time off was sanctioned by the butler or housemaid or for a single, general servant the mistress of the house.

The time off for a domestic servant living in a remote area may have been used up by travelling to the nearest town, or to their family in a distant village, consequently they spent their time off at their place of work. [123] Although the social aspect of time off and holidays was seen as an important aspect of the job, Sambrook comments that Edwardian employers 'encouraged' servants to seek society with others. Michelle Higgs states that apart from church attendance little free time was offered to servants in the early nineteenth century, but by 1890s some hours on Sunday afternoons and perhaps an evening each week was seen as acceptable and was considered an advantageous part of a job offer.[124] However, Higgs also suggests that this extra time off was an inconvenience to some employers, because the work neglected by the servant during the time off , was undertaken by the mistress of the house or extra staff were required to complete the task and this created an extra expense for the household.[125]

Male and female servants' sleeping accommodation was routinely segregated by locked doors or located on different floors of the house. This was to prevent fraternisation of the sexes in their private rooms. Despite many households taking this precaution, female domestic servants suffered sexual abuse perpetrated by other staff, the master, male members of the family or visitors. Some women were seen as being available for the pleasure of the males within that household. Sambrook explains that although the occurrence was acknowledged it was not well documented, but was a frequent and disturbing factor of domestic service.[126] Higgs claims there was 'no

[123] Sambrook, *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 128.
[124] Michelle Higgs, p. 46.
[125] Michelle Higgs, p. 46.
[126] Sambrook *Keeping Their Place: Domestic Service in the Country House*, p. 166.

doubt' that sexual abuse was a factor in some female servant's lives.[127] Bruce Robbins, however writes of a different aspect to this belief than is initially evident, he takes the position that sexual abuse of servants was not simply about the possession of power of money or class by the perpetrator; rather it was the female servant's seduction of the master and the monetary exchange for sexual favours that was the most influential factor of this sexual transgression.[128] Robbins contends that an 'unusually high number' of prostitutes were formerly domestic servants, and of a count of 'illegitimate pregnancies (Nantes, France), half were domestic servants, of these women, the biological father was their master'; Robbins suggests this may be the same issue in England and seems to place the blame on the women who found themselves in this situation.[129] This assessment is outweighed by the harrowing stories of the women who had no other option but to leave their illegitimate babies at institutions such as the Foundling Hospital in London or be convicted of murder and hanged for the crime of infanticide. Higgs quotes the story of a maid Mary- Ann who rejected the sexual advances of her male employer, she was consequently raped by him whilst his wife attended the theatre and repeatedly when the wife was at church. Mary Ann became pregnant; she complained to the police but by the time she had the baby the master and his wife had left.[130]

Unwanted pregnancies, often a consequence of unwelcome sexual activity, frequently resulted in the dismissal of the woman from her employment and therefore the loss of her home.[131] Higgs suggests that some mistresses tried to help and some arranged to have the child adopted, however, there seems to have been no

[127] Michelle Higgs, p. 48.
[128] Bruce Robbins, p. 197.
[129] Robbins, p. 197.
[130] Michelle Higgs, p. 48.
[131] Dawes, p. 12.

consequences for the biological father.[132] The defences for these women were sadly lacking, they were in submissive employment and clearly their fellow domestic servants or the family, were powerless or reluctant to stop the abuse and willing to turn them away when the inevitable pregnancy occurred. And if Bruce Robbins is correct in his commentary about servants turning to prostitution, he highlights a group of women who had no other choice, no other way of finding food for themselves or the unfortunate illegitimate children they tried to care for. Although some scholars have written about this situation, in most cases they allude to it rather than offer specific details of who may have been raped or abused by their employer. Shame and pride must have forced some women to make extremely difficult decisions about their lives and perhaps many decided that fate had dealt them a hand they could no longer bear.

Often birth names were erased as servants entered employment in the country houses of England, instead they were endowed with a generic name for footmen, maid or cook that was peculiar to that specific household, this may have been James or John or a surname like Taylor or Stokes, but not the Fred or Mabel they were baptized with.[133] This action de-personalised the domestic servant, they became simply a name, that when uttered by their master, meant a certain action would take place. Ignoring the past or present that the person brings with them, ignoring their personality was cruel and yet probably the master failed to give it a second thought, it simply made their life easier by not having to learn a new name for a new face.

Some families considered a stigma was attached to undertaking a job as a domestic servant, Michelle Higgs observes this was evident in upper working class and middle-class households and illustrates it with the story of Mary Ann Ashford who was cautioned against going into service by a relative, who said may it 'injure her future

[132]Michelle Higgs, p. 48.
[133] Brooks, p. 2.

prospects'.[134] Horn highlights a case of two sisters from the same family, one sister employed as a clerk while the other sister took employment as domestic servant, accordingly was considered lower in status.[135] Lethbridge notes the inhabitants of Knighton in Herefordshire who considered going into domestic service as the only option open to young women, taking work in the local jam factory was seen as ' vulgar and disreputable'.[136] Michelle Higgs considers that going into service as a domestic servant remained problematic for more than 150 years from 1800 onwards and, despite the progress to provide advantageous working conditions and remuneration, the notion of stigma remained.[137] Sian Poole, however, suggests allowing your son or daughter to enter service was considered a 'desirable' option because it reduced the financial pressure for working class parents.[138]

From the inhabitants of the 'Pugs Parlour' to the maid of all work scrubbing the steps on a suburban home, every domestic servant had a place in the hierarchy to defend and hold. Huggett illustrates this by describing how lower servants were treated with such distain that some servants refused to communicate with them. Huggett's example is of a 'footman who would not hand his mistress shoes to the lady's maid for cleaning and she refused to pick them up'.[139] Dawes comments of staff who preferred to work in smaller households because of the difficulties encountered with the upper servants endorse this perception.[140]

The terms, conditions and benefits of this serving class were often hard to tolerate for some, while others seemingly enjoyed a successful and beneficial career

[134] Michelle Higgs, p. 14.
[135] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant,* p. 173.
[136] Lethbridge, p. 97.
[137] Michelle Higgs, p. 15.
[138] Sian Pooley, Domestic servants and Their Urban Employers: A Case Study of Lancaster, 1880-1914, *The Economic History Review*, New series, 62.2 (2009), 405-429 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20542918 > [accessed 26 April 2022] (p. 418).
[139] Huggett, p. 38.
[140] Dawes, p. 63.

as a servant, many used it as a staging post towards other goals and ambitions. For some it was a way of life that sustained them until the grave. Servants performed a function that if left undone would have meant the ladies and gentlemen balanced their own tea trays up the long stairs to the drawing room while holding on to their tiaras and top hats. The class system would not have survived without the hard work, diligence and sometimes cunning of the domestic servant. This was an institution, a monolith that staggered on for decades until finally reform, war and social conscience diminished this serving class to benefit only the favoured few.

This discussion of the British servants in the nineteenth century is informed by the theory of the history from below which emphasises the need to pay attention to the lives, employment, hopes, and disappointments of ordinary people. Following Sharpe's example, I have foregrounded that every mention of 'below' stairs comes with the parallel emphasis on the way in which servant lives were shaped and impacted by those 'above stairs' and the power structures and hierarchies of wider society.[141] Port's argument that this form of historical analysis also seeks to show how ordinary people had control over their own lives and were not just victims is particularly important for my analysis of the Brontës.[142] My following discussion of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* turns the spotlight on the frequently overlooked servant characters, arguing that in giving their servant characters names and voices, Emily and Charlotte Brontë profile stories from 'below' in a way that gives at least some of the servants a role beyond that just of a function.

[141] Sharpe, p. 27.
[142] Port, p. 108.

Chapter Two: 'How is he my master? Am I a servant?' Servitude and Tyranny in *Jane Eyre.*

The title of this chapter focusing on servant figures in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* comes from an exchange between the young Jane and the Gateshead maid Miss Abbott. Here Miss Abbott attempts to relegate Jane to a status below that of her own, pointing to Jane's lack of family and wealth when she declares that Jane is 'less than a servant'.[1] Jane vehemently resists this conduct. The exchange points to both the prominent role servants hold in the novel—sometimes as cameo appearances and sometimes as sustained and important parts of the narrative action—and the largely conventional way in which Charlotte Brontë depicts these servants. She may give them a name and a voice, but filtered as it is through Jane's first-person narrative viewpoint, the novel is invested in hierarchies. Some of these hierarchies, particularly those to do with gender, are challenged by the heroine, but the division between 'master' and 'servant' remains largely intact.

The voices of many of the servants in *Jane Eyre* are not strong. Some, certainly the minor servants, have little to say and their existence is only signalled as an aside from another character. In contrast, Mrs Fairfax has lengthy conversations with Jane and Rochester and Grace Poole is a consistently unsettling presence. Mrs Fairfax and Grace Poole are part of the narrative dynamics of the story, while others such as Sarah the housemaid at Gateshead are silent. Bruce Robbins in his study on servants, *The Servants Hand: English Fiction from Below*, claims that in the Victorian novel the servant voice has been 'partially or fully silenced'.[2] He contends that their role is restricted to providing traction to their 'master's characters', with the mode and the

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eye*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 15.
[2] Bruce Robbins, *The Servants Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 113.

'frequency' of their communication reduced to providing a supporting role to the upper and middle class characters who take centre stage.[3] *Jane Eyre* is in some ways part of this tradition, with the servants typically occupying the background rather than the foreground. Yet at times Charlotte Brontë also allows her servant figures to speak and through the eponymous title character the novel directly engages with the discourse of servitude. The servants, however, do not have an independent life without Jane, they only come alive when Jane is in the scene. The novel is written in the first-person narrative, the descriptions and interactions come from Jane, and the depiction of the servants is filtered through her consciousness and her class background and attitudes. As Terry Eagleton points out, in spite of having to work for her living as a governess, Jane never loses the sense of herself as a lady and while she is unfailingly polite and considerate to the servants in the households she lives in (at least as an adult) there is a divide between them.[4]

Jane Eyre lived, worked, and interacted with many characters in many places through the novel. The structure of this chapter is centred around place, with first the servant characters and then the tyrant characters being carefully considered. Each place and accordingly the people in these places shape Jane, strengthening or weakening her character and power, until she becomes the woman Brontë finally leaves at Ferndean. The first half of the chapter focuses on the various servant figures, characters who are largely ignored and overlooked in studies of *Jane Eyre*. My analysis of these characters attempts to reverse this neglect. I do not follow Jane's travels to each place chronologically, but rather move between types of servants,

[3] Robbins, p. 79.
[4] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005). *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=736576.> [accessed 9 August 2022] p. 28.

beginning with Gateshead and Lowood, shifting to the two final locations in the novel, and then turning to Thornfield, the place in which the servants occupy the foreground rather than the background. I then turn from the servant characters to the wider ideas of servitude that Charlotte Brontë explores throughout the novel, from Jane's interactions with a number of tyrants to her own internal dialogue between her instinctive rebellion and her learned ideas of obedience.

Jane fights to free herself from the conventional expectations of Victorian society, the power and control inflicted by a series of tyrants and the institutions they represent. The novel revolves around her interaction with these powerful forces; however, I contend that a group of characters in the novel are as influential in her life as the tyrants. Some are cruel and malicious, while others provide a more subtle approach, and offer support and encourage Jane in the pursuit of her goals; collectively they are the servants of *Jane Eyre*. My focus highlights the interaction and influence exerted between Jane and the servants, while examining the rise and fall of the tyrants, from oppressors to subjugated servant.

Many of the servants in *Jane Eyre* operate in a similar way to the servant figures of other nineteenth-century novels; they are silenced and stand in the shadow of their master and are stereotypical embodiments of traditional servant roles. Grace Poole, however, is rather more subversive; her intentions and role remain hidden for a significant period before her purpose is revealed. The character of Jane has, however, received critical attention for her role as the governess and the pitfalls and scant alternatives for a young gentrified woman pursuing employment.[5] However, some have identified the novel as different from others published at the time, Tamara

[5] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, "'Portrait of a Governess, Disconnected, Poor, and Plain': Staging the Spectral Self in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre." *Brontë Studies: Journal of the Brontë Society,* 34.2 (2009),127–37, < https://doi.org/10.1179/147489309X431584>

Wagner uses the Charles Dickens novel, *Hard Times* and Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* as examples of this difference, arguing that *Jane Eyre* is essentially a story of 'personal passion'.[6] Although agreeing with this opinion, and at times highlighting its importance in Jane's story, I examine this novel from a different standpoint; the servants, their silence, and their power. In this respect, as with so many others, *Jane Eyre* exemplifies Elaine Showalter's contention that Charlotte Brontë was a trailblazer, altering 'the direction of the female tradition of writing'.[7]

Gateshead and Lowood: Judgement and Comfort

At the beginning of the novel Brontë places Jane, as a small vulnerable child, in a small breakfast room adjacent to a drawing room; the house has a nursery and many servants who attend to the family, this is a substantial home.[8] This is Gateshead, a grand English country house with grounds, shrubbery and enough space for a long walk. This illustrious place offers both judgement and comfort to Jane, through the eyes of the servants of Gateshead and treachery and deceit from the tyrants waiting to pounce at the first glimpse of her weakness or fear. Here Jane's social status is judged and reduced, she is excluded from the family both physically and emotionally. The attitude displayed by the inhabitants of Gateshead is Jane's first experience of this level of unkindness, but a saviour appears in the form of Bessie her nursemaid, who, in her kinder moments, shows Jane there can be more to her life than fear.

[6] Tamara S. Wagner, 'Jane Eyre, Orphan Governess: Narrating Victorian Vulnerability and Social Change ', in *British Women's Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury*, ed. by A. E. Gavin & C. W. de la L. Oulton, (Champaign, IL: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.81-85 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1007/978-3-319-78226-3_6> (p. 82).

[7] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977). *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv173f0v7 > (pp.105-106).

[8] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eye*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 10.

In contrast to Gateshead is Lowood School, an institution very different to the fine country house. Lowood is a series of buildings or houses scattered through an unspecified area. Jane is ushered to a 'wide, long room' lit by two candles to provide 'the dim light' that allows her to view her new acquaintances.[9] This is a place that provides no comfort to Jane; this is defined by the condition of the room she awakes to and how the air is 'bitter cold' and the wash water makes her shiver.[10] More is to come, more tyranny, more hunger and yet more judgement as Jane meets her Lowood tyrant, Mr Brocklehurst. Lowood will provoke in Jane a resolve to survive, it will educate her and provide an avenue for her freedom. Later in the chapter the role of the tyrants will be analysed, among them Brocklehurst. Here the significance of the servants the young Jane encounters will be explored, beginning with silent servants at Gateshead and Lowood, moving to the harsh servants in these places, and ending with two Gateshead servants who show compassion and loyalty. The roles that these servants occupy are frequently stereotypical, yet the fact that they are named and often given distinct personalities suggests that Brontë was aware of servants as people and not just functions.

Brontë peoples Gateshead with servants who both conform to the 'silent' trope and who have more of a voice. Sarah is the silent servant, she is the house-maid at Gateshead, she follows requests and instructions from Bessie regarding sleeping arrangements and Jane mentions she hears a whispered conversation, but the words are not attributed to Sarah. Sarah is simply there as a character with whom Bessie shares a whispered conversation and a safe bed.[11] It highlights Bessie's fear and lack of understanding of Jane's plight. However, Brontë does give Sarah the privilege of a

[9] Brontë, p. 52.
[10] Brontë, p. 53.
[11] Brontë, p. 24.

name and I argue this indicates Brontë considered all servants were important and therefore deserved a name rather than simply a title; she gives them respect as a person and recognition as being part of the household no matter how fleeting their appearance.

At Lowood there is a similar character whose role is very slight but who is also given the dignity of a name. Barbara the servant is requested by Miss Temple to bring extra cups and toast for Jane and Helen when she comforts them after Brocklehurst's cruelty. Barbara obeys, but returns with a message from Mrs Harden the housekeeper regarding the supply of bread.[12] This interaction allows the conditions and control of food at Lowood to be highlighted, so Barbara's role is important in this instance, revealing that although Miss Temple is the headmistress it is the housekeeper who is in charge of food. Barbara is not mentioned again, like Sarah fulfilling a function rather than being given a personality, but again the naming does individuate her a little.

Mrs Harden, the housekeeper at Lowood has a slightly greater role and points to the complex relationship between servants and their masters. Her very name suggests a harsh and cruel attitude, Jane remarking that she has a 'heart made of whalebone and iron'.[13] Mrs Harden demonstrates the mean-spirited ethos of the school as she rations the food available to the girls. She is, however, only following the instructions of Mr Brocklehurst and could well fear that he will remove her from her employment if she does not obey him. Mrs Harden thus exemplifies the precarity of a servant's position and the way in which obedience was often the product of vulnerability and fear.

This is also the case with Miss Abbott at Gateshead. She appears as a harsh tyrant and Jane attempts to resist her power as she does other tyrants in the novel,

[12] Brontë, p. 84.
[13] Brontë, p. 86.

however she encounters Miss Abbott as a young girl and is unable to defend her position and must accept the cruelty meted out by the servant. Miss Abbott is introduced as a sharp-tongued and 'stout legged', lady's maid, identified as the other servant who restrains Jane along with Bessie.[14] Miss Abbott has limited dialogue in the novel, but her words play a significant part in Jane's knowledge of her own status. In the midst of the red room fracas, Jane's status is questioned by Miss Abbott, asking her why would she strike her young master, Jane's retort, which gives this chapter its title, is 'How is he my master? Am I a servant?' to which Mrs Abbott replies 'No, you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep'.[15] Jane suddenly and emphatically is shown her class status and her place in the hierarchy of the Reed family home; she is now aware that a servant believes her to be less than a servant. Miss Abbott, in voicing this, reveals her understanding of 'being a servant': it is to display the physical and visible activity required to be a servant. Nancy Pell suggests Jane's rebellion against John Reed will rise again in the face of the use of 'illegitimate power' from St John Rivers and Brocklehurst and that here Charlotte Brontë is drawing parallels with 'rebellion and regicide' as historical events.[16]

Miss Abbot offers further judgement when she shares her opinion that it is Jane's place to be humble as she has no money or position. By uttering this statement Miss Abbott reveals she considers herself above Jane in the household and that in her eyes Jane sits below the servant class. With this statement Miss Abbott displays her own understanding of and adherence to the hierarchy within the household.[17]

[14] Brontë, p. 15.
[15] Brontë, p. 15.
[16] Nancy Pell, 'Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage: The Economics of *Jane Eyre*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 31.4 (1977), 397-420. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0029-0564%28197703%2931%3A4%3C397%3ARRAMTE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9> [accessed 20 February 2023] (p.400).
[17] Brontë, p. 16.

Following this verbal tirade, her words to Jane are the threat of hell and damnation if she does not repent. Miss Abbott is cruel and imposes her religious and archaic beliefs on a vulnerable young girl; in doing this she is mirroring the opinions and words of her employer Mrs Reed. The novel does not linger on Miss Abbott, however the actions of this servant reflects her need to ensure her continued employment in the Reed household and this need overrides any remaining kindness. These are the actions of an obedient servant but not of a kind and compassionate woman.

Through the character of the maidservant at Gateshead, Bessie, Brontë highlights the way in which servants were expected to follow their employers' commands, but also the way in which being a servant did not mean they denied their own values of kindness and compassion. Bessie is the nursemaid to the Reed children and Jane. The dialogue and interaction between Mrs Reed, Jane, and Bessie offer a series of opportunities for Bessie to be both an obedient servant and a compassionate woman. An example of this situation is highlighted within the red room incident. Jane is required to follow the rules and regulations set by Mrs Reed, her progress to meet these requirements is monitored by Bessie, who in her gentler moments may enjoy the company of this strong and thoughtful child. Jane fails to meet these requirements and consequences ensue. Mrs Reed orders Bessie to physically restrain the child and place her in a room away from the family. As this interaction unfolds, and as Jane resists, Bessie, despite her kindness, must obey her employer; she is powerless to ignore her instructions and alongside Miss Abbott the lady's maid, 'four hands' force Jane up the stairs and into the room.[18] Here the anonymising of the 'four hands' speaks of Miss Abbott and Bessie as essentially the tools or instruments of Mrs Reed's will at this moment.

[18] Brontë, p. 15. The text reads 'two pairs of hands', I have described them as four hands.

Despite being forced to physically manhandle Jane, Bessie does not concur when Miss Abbott decries Jane for her actions; rather in her wise and kindly way Bessie warns Jane that 'But for Mrs Reed you would have to go the poorhouse'.[19] Here Bessie is trying to encourage Jane, offering kindness and protection through her awareness of what life may be outside the walls of a secure family home for an orphan child. The novel does not disclose if Bessie had experienced the suffering and deprivation inflicted on the inmates of the poorhouse, however, it is highly likely she would have heard talk of life inside these institutions. She may have considered her own precarious position within the Reed household if she did not obey instructions. Bessie has learnt to guard her place with her gruff and scolding manner; however, Jane sees her kind nature, and comments that Bessie was 'pretty and had a natural capacity for being smart in all she did' and preferred her to the other members of the Reed household.[20] Overhearing a conversation between the two servants, Jane discovers her parental heritage, Miss Abbott shares the intimate details with Bessie. Miss Abbott commented that Jane's father was a 'poor clergyman' and her mother had married him despite her family and friends advising her not to undertake this union.[21] This is an example of the knowledge servants hold regarding their employers' private lives and are seemingly undaunted by the consequences of their gossip.[22]

A later interaction between Bessie and Jane highlights the status she assigns to Jane. Bessie, who is now a married woman with two young children, but who continues to work for the Reed family, is described as 'a well-dressed servant, matronly, yet still young looking'.[23] Bessie may be considered well-dressed because

[19] Brontë, p. 16.
[20] Brontë, p. 36.
[21] Brontë, p. 31.
[22] Brontë, p. 31.
[23] Brontë, p. 107.

of her position in the household, the longevity of her employment and her marital status. Bessie as the loyal and obedient servant, has insight and knowledge of the family, and their progress over the intervening years. She tells Jane she considers her 'genteel enough' and remarks 'you look like a lady', Bessie continues by adding 'you were no beauty as a child'.[24] Later in the conversation she reiterates that Jane's skill with languages and art makes her 'quite a lady'.[25] Jane is silent in the text on her feelings regarding this last declaration of her ladylike status, however she does comment on the statement regarding her lack of beauty. The statements from Bessie most likely arise from her lack of expectations and aspirations for herself, despite her well-dressed appearance, and the respectability of marriage and a family. She has internalised her position as servant, with a clear sense of demarcation between her station and that of the educated Jane. This fits with Jane's own self-view as a 'lady' and their similar viewpoint accounts for the cordial relationship between them. Bessie's view of Jane has changed although her own status has remained the same, she now admires Jane as a lady. Bessie will remain the good and faithful servant.

Brontë gives Bessie a private as well as a public life, with reference to her marriage to Robert Leven. In Robert, Brontë creates a servant who holds a fleeting moment in the novel, coming to Thornfield to deliver news of Jane's aunt, yet the news he delivers confirms Jane's opinion of one family and brings the opportunity to dispel her fear of another. Robert is both the husband of Bessie and the coachman at Gateshead, and he provides Jane with a torrent of information regarding the Reed family and as an aside of his wife Bessie.[26] He is entrusted with intimate knowledge of John Reed and his behaviour, financial hardships and ultimate death. Robert Leven is

[24] Brontë, p. 107.
[25] Brontë, p. 109.
[26] Brontë, p. 255.

sent on a quest to persuade Jane to visit Mrs Reed, who is terminally ill. Robert is a faithful servant, who is diligent in his duties but shows a gentle and loving nature as he speaks of his wife and family. He offers continuity to the Reed family as they suffer the shame inflicted by John Reed. He is aware of their failings and foibles; he states that John's life has been 'very wild…and that his death was shocking' and that John was in debt and squandered himself on worthless pursuits and people.[27] Despite this revelation, he exemplifies the valued and trusted servant who will serve and protect his employer and execute their wishes. Robert displays his loyalty and respect for the family by the black crape he has placed around his hat, by engaging in this act, he follows the conventions of mourning for the death of John Reed, Robert upholds the family honour and is allowed to display his mourning both as a respectful man and a faithful servant.[28]

Moorhouse and Ferndean: Kinship and Loyalty

Similar values of loyalty as those demonstrated by Bessie and Robert are evident in the servants at the two last locations Jane inhabits: Moorhouse and Ferndean. Moorhouse is 'a black, low, and rather long house with latticed windows'; in contrast to the grand country estate of Gateshead this is a modest and peaceful home.[29] 'The parlour is clean and neatly furnished with old fashioned chairs', worn but cared for, the mark of wealth has faded.[30] This is the home of the Rivers siblings: Diana, Mary and St John. In this place Jane will find, friendship, kinship and her strength. Because Moorhouse is a modest home, a large entourage of servants, such as those

[27] Brontë, p. 255.
[28] Brontë, p. 255.
[29] Brontë, p. 381.
[30] Brontë, p. 397.

employed at Gateshead, is unnecessary. Only one woman attends to the family; Hannah the servant.

Hannah meets the expectation of the archetypal servant; defensive, loyal and cautious as she encounters a bedraggled and hungry Jane on the doorstep of Moorhouse. Hannah makes an immediate assessment of Jane's character, considers her to be a vagrant and tells her to leave. Hannah's language and demeanour reveal she is suspicious of this stranger, who she believes has the motive and capability of stealing from and harming her mistresses. Hannah assumes her defensive position and refuses to allow entry, instructs Jane to 'move off', and bolts the door. [31] When St John Rivers finds Jane on the door step, Hannah continues to fulfil the role of watchdog, declaring that Jane is a 'beggar-woman', and, in spite of allowing Jane entry, St John commends Hannah, she has 'done her duty'.[32] Eagleton suggests that Jane's struggle and conquest to gain entry to the Rivers' household and the young ladies is a 'sound class tactic' as she aligns herself with the ladies as 'quiet, spiritual and self-composed'.[33]

Hannah, this faithful and defensive servant is cautious of Jane, however, she executes her duties as instructed, she cares for Jane, places her in bed, provides food and cleans her muddy clothing. Hannah behaves in a negative way towards Jane until she can confirm her social status, and it is not until she has questioned and assessed Jane that she treats her with any civility. Eagleton suggests Hannah is a snob because it is not until she realises that Jane is 'book learned' that she is civil, reading this as a

[31] Brontë, p. 385.
[32] Brontë, p. 386.
[33] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005). *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=736576.> [accessed 9 August 2022] p. 29.

'lesson in social equality'.[34] Hannah apologies for mistaking Jane for a beggar and in defence of her actions, Hannah behaves in the manner expected of servant who protects and serves the family.[35] She is however an uneducated woman whose intelligence and practice of kindness and Christianity is questioned by Jane. The conversation heralds a shift in Hannah's attitude to Jane, she has again assessed her status and deems it safe to speak about the family. Hannah has worked for the same family for thirty years, nursing the three Rivers children, she is happy to divulge what she knows about the family, in this way Hannah is similar to many servants who are aware of the history, triumphs and failings of each member of the family they serve.[36] Because she is a successful and useful servant, she is given the opportunity to progress her standing in the household. Hannah's ability for service has raised her from nursemaid to the defender and guardian of the family with whom she has a familiar and motherly relationship. Hannah becomes a reliable and trusted friend to Jane, she remains the faithful servant, who executes her duties with a cautious but kind heart.

When Jane leaves Moorhouse to discover that Thornfield Hall is in ashes, Bertha Mason is dead, and Rochester has been maimed, Jane searches for Ferndean, his new home. Hidden in the woods, the evening light reveals the old manor house, 'no flowers or garden brightened this gloomy scene'. Jane has lived in grand houses and in damp and austere school rooms, but the sight of Ferndean forces her to ask herself 'can there be life here?'.[37] Jane sees a figure emerge from the house, with instant recognition she identifies this figure as her 'master Edward Fairfax

[34] Eagleton, p. 28.
[35] Brontë, p. 392.
[36] Brontë, p. 393.
[37] Brontë, p. 497.

Rochester', Jane stops almost in mid breath and looks at her blind and broken lover.[38] Jane immediately defines herself, despite her newly found confidence and wealth, as the servant to her master Rochester. Jane's complex relationship with both Rochester and the rhetoric of servitude will be discussed at the end of the chapter, here I foreground Brontë's use of a staple of nineteenth-century British fiction: the loyal family retainer. As with Bessie and Robert, however, Brontë does individuate these characters, giving them names, voices, and personalities.

Supporting Rochester following the fatal blaze at Thornfield are the faithful servants John, the coachman and his wife Mary, the cook who epitomise the trope of the faithful family retainer. They are barely mentioned in the first part of the novel, aside from their dismissal into a class hierarchy by the housekeeper Mrs Fairfax. But now they are the only servants at Rochester's home, Ferndean Manor. John reveals he worked as a cadet at Thornfield and knew Rochester as a young man, referring to him as Mr Edward, and discloses that he knew Rochester enough to predict that he would marry Jane. This type of respect, yet familiarity, and John's willingness to stay in Rochester's service despite his failings, is evidence of his loyalty and devotion to the Rochester family.

Thornfield Hall: Loyal Service

The most developed servant figures in *Jane Eyre* all inhabit Thornfield Hall. Mrs Fairfax the housekeeper describes Thornfield as a 'fine old hall, rather neglected... but still a respectable place'.[39] In contrast, Jane describes the quality of the chintz curtains, carpeted floors and the papered walls, commenting that everything appeared 'very

[38] Brontë, p. 497.
[39] Brontë, p. 115.

stately and imposing'.[40] To her the three storied mansion is a gentleman's manor house with the land and seclusion that embellishes a fine house.[41] The servant population of this manor house outnumbers the servants at the homes where Jane has previously lived. I begin with the various permanent and transient servants at Thornfield, once again exploring both their function in the household and whether their brief appearances on the page reveal anything about them as individuals, while these servants only have bit parts, others have far more influence on Jane's life. Mrs Fairfax and Grace Poole are fully realised characters. Filtered as they are through the first-person narrative their motives and life histories may remain shadowy, but their words and actions reveal much about their personalities. In subtle ways these two servants also subvert the master-servant hierarchy, Mrs Fairfax through her family connection to Rochester and Grace through the many freedoms she is given.

As the supporting cast to the servant leads at Thornfield, are the servants that Jane considers to be unremarkable 'decent people'.[42] They are Sophie, Leah, John, Mary his wife, and Sam the footman. Jane addresses them infrequently, at times with kindness and at others with indifference; they offer Jane an opportunity to show her empathy but essentially, they appear only to support the movement and actions of the main characters in the novel. They make no grand gestures or statements—apart from Sam the footman, who acts to defend his master—they are merely included to create the illusion of the comings and goings of honest and faithful servants. For the majority of the novel, they are silent and absent, as Robbins notes in relation to characters

[40] Brontë, p. 117.
[41] Brontë, p. 118.
[42] Brontë, p. 130.

from Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, servants are evident only by the nouns by which they are known, 'house-keepers, under-gardeners', used only as 'counters in a status game'.[43]

Leah is there to light the way, clean the house and make and serve copious hot drinks and sandwiches, she is not there to create or add to the forward momentum of the story. Leah, the maid-servant, admits Jane through the door on her arrival at Thornfield, makes a hot drink and a sandwich and disappears for several pages.[44] She brings candles to light the way for an injured Rochester.[45] Leah is named on the list of servants as Jane attempts to identify the person who ripped her wedding veil.[46] Leah is not given a personal voice, she is there to serve a function and has no other purpose but to be in place.

Rochester's ward, Adele, is cared for by Sophie, a nurse who appears as a fleeting addition to the servants at Thornfield. Sophie is introduced rather ungraciously as a seasick, foreigner who speaks French.[47] Her interaction with Jane is initially unremarkable, she speaks French with her and Jane comments that her conversation is limited; Sophie does not allow herself the opportunity of a lively discussion, rather she defends and deflects questions with feeble answers perhaps wary of the security of her own position now that her charge has a governess.[48] Jane unfortunately does not pursue this questioning and Sophie's history remains an enigma. This could be viewed as a moment in which Jane is guilty of regarding Sophie as a function rather than a person, not seeming to realise that she is one of the only people Sophie can speak to given her facility in French. Jane's preoccupation with her own interior life

[43] Robbins, p. 113.
[44] Brontë, p. 114.
[45] Brontë, p. 138.
[46] Brontë, p. 326.
[47] Brontë, p. 120.
[48] Brontë, p. 130.

perhaps at times blocks her empathy for others. Sophie however, does interact with Jane on the morning of her marriage to Rochester, she offers advice and helps pin her veil to her hair. Despite Sophie's reluctance to communicate about her past, this very act reveals that she is using her flair for fashion or that she has experience of dressing fashionable French ladies in beautiful gowns, perhaps a signal of Brontë's awareness of Sophie's interesting past. Sophie encourages Jane to look at her reflection in the mirror dressed as a bride saying 'you have not taken one peep', making her see her own image and acknowledge the stranger staring back.[49]

Sam, the footman, is given more of a voice and personality. He is surprisingly vocal in his interaction with the weekend guests at Thornfield. He is bold enough to advise and comment on a gypsy woman who arrives at Thornfield to tell their fortunes.[50] He delivers messages from the gypsy woman to the guests, advising them of her demands and curious behaviour, he describes her as looking 'such a rough one'.[51] His sense of urgency and desperation are evident as he tries to rid the kitchen and the guests of this ghastly creature. Acting as an obedient servant, Sam follows instructions and ushers the gypsy in the door, as he does, and although he lets out a 'titter', I believe he has a sense of grave concern for the wellbeing of his master and the guests.[52] Sam's understanding of life on the outside of Thornfield seems much more enlightened than the guests, he is aware of the danger of allowing this woman into the house but now he sees how amusing it looks and how excited and intrigued the assembly has become. Sam is indeed an admirable footman.

The process of housekeeping for Rochester and Thornfield operates under the

[49] Brontë, p. 331.
[50] Brontë, p. 222.
[51] Brontë, p. 223.
[52] Brontë, p. 224.

control of the permanent servants, this is normal practice in other country houses. This normal practice continues when Rochester is absent; Mrs Fairfax remarks that the house is not shut up nor is the furniture covered with dust sheets, this is because the house is always ready for his return.[53] However, when Rochester is at home and entertains his friends and holds weekend parties, additional staff are needed to ease the burden of extra work required of permanent staff, this enables them to continue to provide the level of service expected at these occasions. Guests are normally accompanied by their own valet or lady's maid; these servants are accommodated within the existing servant's quarters; this is signalled by Mrs Fairfax as she discussed her plans for securing extra staff with Jane.[54] This process is acknowledged in the novel through three women who are hired to help with cleaning, scrubbing and preparing the rooms for the guests, extra kitchen hands to help with cooking and food preparation are hired from the local inn , the house is a vision of industry and action as they prepare for their illustrious guests.[55] The guests' arrival brings coachmen and gentlemen's gentlemen to the kitchen and abigails attend to their mistresses in their rooms.[56] The duties mirror those of servants in any other country house, they provide care, food, warmth and clothing for their masters and reveal little of what they see or hear in the place they work and live.

Mrs Fairfax: Friendship and Deceit

In contrast to the silent servants who join Thornfield when Rochester entertains, Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield Hall, plays an integral part in the positioning of

[53] Brontë, p. 123.
[54] Brontë, p. 190.
[55] Brontë, p. 190.
[56] Brontë, p. 194. Abigail is an archaic name for a lady's maid; a female servant or attendant. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2022), <httsp://www.oed.com/view/Entry/307> [accessed 2 August 2022]. s.v. abigail.

Jane within the household; she employs, befriends and protects her. Although initially guarded, she discloses scant facts about the man who employs her, her own history is revealed by fragments of information she provides to Jane. Mrs Fairfax appears to be a comfortable and dependable servant but, as the novel unfolds, I contend that as well as the keeper of keys, she is the keeper of secrets at Thornfield Hall.

Mrs Fairfax, sends a coach to collect the new governess, Jane. The simplicity of the coach and servant creates in Jane an opinion that Mrs Fairfax is of a similar nature. Jane's negative remarks regarding 'fine people' and her experience of them, infer she would be happier if Mrs Fairfax and her household were ordinary.[57] Her first glimpse of Mrs Fairfax is of 'a neat, elderly lady in a widow's cap'.[58] The first act Mrs Fairfax undertakes is to behave as if she is Jane's lady's maid, helping her remove her bonnet and shawl, as she orders Leah the servant to make Jane a hot drink, but not before she hands a bunch of keys to the servant to unlock the storeroom, one of the accessories of a housekeeper employed in a household.[59] Jane is 'confused' by the treatment she receives from Mrs Fairfax; she expected the welcome for the governess would be austere and unemotional. Her initial assumption that Mrs Fairfax is the lady of the house highlights the housekeeper's gentility, while Mrs Fairfax's actions show a benevolent kindness to a new arrival that she clearly hopes will become a kind of confidant given that Jane is likewise well-bred.[60]

The hierarchies operating within households who employ several servants, are highlighted by the role and attitude of Mrs Fairfax. She comments freely about the house and staff to Jane—seeing in her an equal— specifically pointing out that Leah,

[57] Brontë, p. 112.
[58] Brontë, p. 113.
[59] Brontë, p. 114.
[60] Brontë, p. 114.

John and his wife are ‘only servants’ and she does not converse with them because of ‘equality’ and she keeps them at a distance in case she ‘lost authority’ over them by being too familiar.[61] The servants are promptly put in a ranking below both Mrs Fairfax and Jane, with a few short phrases. Mrs Fairfax, as housekeeper, sets herself above the lower servants; this aligns with the recognised and accepted servant hierarchy of mid-Victorian employment status. This provides the housekeeper with a framework of power to exert on her staff, Mrs Fairfax holds her position using the authority provided by her title. The comments regarding Leah and the staff, provide a glimpse into her understanding of her position as controller of the household and that she is not simply an elderly lady in a widow’s cap. Mrs Fairfax tells Jane the owner of the house is a Mr Rochester. Mrs Fairfax continues as she describes her position within the household, and, despite her previous comments regarding servants, defines herself as ‘only the housekeeper-the manager’, this news gratifies Jane, now she looks at Mrs Fairfax with fresh eyes and a sense of equality that Mrs Fairfax is a ‘dependent’ like herself, and she now considers herself ‘freer’.[62] Brontë’s use of the ‘freer’ may be considered as the release from bonds and imprisonment or not being under the control of another.

However, as I indicate in Chapter One of this thesis, a housekeeper is much more than simply the title of housekeeper. She is as an experienced manager, who controls her staff, allocates their duties and has a firm hand on the events and situations that occur within the household. Mrs Fairfax exhibits many of these qualities and clearly knows the secrets of Thornfield. However, despite previously displaying her status as housekeeper with authority over her staff, she now describes herself as only the housekeeper. This may be considered to be for two reasons; one she is attempting to align herself with Jane to make her feel accepted and comfortable at

[61] Brontë, p. 115.
[62] Brontë, p. 119.

Thornfield or she is absenting herself from the responsibly and knowledge of what lies waiting and therefore will not be blamed if and when the secret is revealed.

In addition to this, Mrs Fairfax stages her position as a distant relative of Rochester. She was a clergyman's wife with the responsibility of a local parish and the status and respect given to that honourable role. However, her husband is now dead, and his death and consequently her reduced financial circumstances has necessitated her employment as a housekeeper, she denies any implication that her relationship with Rochester is anything more than benign and describes herself as an 'ordinary housekeeper'.[63] Mrs Fairfax continues to distance herself from connection or responsibility for the household. Although she denies it, the tenure of her position may be assured by the distant family connection with Rochester, but her present social position is lower than a clergyman's wife. Her status has changed and she is at the command of a relative, consequently she is a servant with the additional responsibility and awareness of family loyalty, although she specifically declares she has no expectations of Rochester because of this connection.[64] The conundrum can be aligned with Jane's social position, her father is a clergyman, his marriage to Jane's mother is condemned, they are rejected by the family and the death of both of her parents brings an uncertain and painful beginning to Jane's life.[65]

Setting aside her position as the servant, and opposing the wishes of her employer, Mrs Fairfax discloses her own moral code as the relationship between Rochester and Jane develops. Her advice to Jane is deliberate and targets their class and age difference; 'Equality in position and fortune is often advisable in such cases'.[66]

[63] Brontë, p. 119.
[64] Brontë, p. 119.
[65] Brontë, p. 31.
[66] Brontë, p. 305.

She continues in this frame as she advises ‘Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governess’.[67] Here, Mrs Fairfax is attempting to caution and protect Jane, at the same time as not divulging the truth about the hidden inhabitant at Thornfield, hence defending Mr Rochester, as she reverts back to the role and duty of the obedient servant.

Following Mr Rochester’s attempt at a bigamous marriage, the mystery of Thornfield is at last revealed, a secret so well hidden that even the good and faithful Mrs Fairfax apparently did not know the truth, even though she may have thought something was amiss.[68] Mrs Fairfax’s declared ignorance is questionable as it is unlikely that the housekeeper did not know the full scope of the duties undertaken by her staff. Was Mrs Fairfax closing her eyes to reality or was the arrangement at Thornfield too comfortable to relinquish? Whatever her motive, Mrs Fairfax is subsequently paid off with a generous annuity from Mr Rochester, the last words spoken of her are from the innkeeper at the Rochester Arms as he tells Jane, Mrs Fairfax was ‘a very good woman’.[69] She may have been a good woman in her appearance and demeanour, but in her neglect of the household and her lack of honesty in revealing the truth to Jane she is remiss. Her power over the lower servants is evident, this is displayed as she speaks to Leah, John and his wife. Her lack of control over Grace and her duties is baffling and does not fit with her other actions. This creates the impression of a woman who turns her back on the truth and only desires a comfortable and positive outcome for herself.

[67] Brontë, p. 306.
[68] Brontë, p. 357.
[69] Brontë, p. 493.

Grace Poole: Mystery and Power

In contrast to Mrs Fairfax's dignified display of faded gentility, is the enigmatic character of Grace Poole who I consider to be the most fascinating and mysterious servant in *Jane Eyre*. Her surname evokes an image of a dark, gothic attic that holds the dreadful secrets of the house. A different viewpoint is suggested by Kate Lawson, who has paid particular attention to the name *Grace* and the biblical and religious connotations attached to it. Lawson suggests her name may be considered as a 'pool of Grace', associated with the waters of Bethesda and with the remission of disease, the pool is referenced again by Brocklehurst as he suggests Jane will benefit from its healing waters.[70] Despite of the connotations of healing that the name suggests, Grace remains an ambiguous character, hiding and only evident in fleeting moments.

The secret Grace holds is granted to her by Rochester, he empowers her with the knowledge and care of his deranged wife and entrusts the protection of his household from this woman into the hands of Grace. Unfortunately, Rochester has chosen a servant who may, for a price, be able to keep the secret, but who is ultimately destined to fail in her protection of both her patient or the house. Her service is rewarded by a plentiful supply of alcohol and food, the former clouds her senses and diminishes her response to danger. Like many servants who know secrets about their employers, Grace has power over him. In this case, the danger for Mr Rochester is she will reveal the truth about his wife and therefore his reputation and character will be damaged. Grace is the one servant figure in the novel who disrupts the hierarchies between master and servant and in this creation Charlotte Brontë not only makes a servant visible but gives her a distinctive personality and voice. Grace is certainly not

[70] Kate Lawson, 'Madness and Grace: Grace Poole's Name and Her Role in *Jane Eyre'*. *English Language Notes* 30.1 (1992), 46-50.

a character to be relegated to the background and her failure to remain within the bounds of a traditional servant makes her a subversive and unsettling presence.

A ‘curious laugh’ rings out as Jane explores Thornfield with Mrs Fairfax.[71] The cause of this sound is Grace, or so Mrs Fairfax claims. Grace, unexpectedly opens a door and the image that emerges is described as a large robust and plain woman, Mrs Fairfax reminds her of ‘directions’, and Grace silently returns to her place.[72] Grace helps with sewing and housemaid’s work, explains Mrs Fairfax. Grace, at this point, is respectful and obedient; she gives no indication of her position or her patient, rather she appears to mirror the actions and behaviour of an obedient servant.

Grace is a solitary and enigmatic figure in the household and Jane struggles to make sense of her. When Jane saves a sleeping Rochester from certain death by fire Grace Poole is blamed, she becomes the scapegoat for this event. This may be part of her arrangement with Mr Rochester, with her agreeing to accept the blame for any unexplained sounds or events in the house. Rochester asks Jane not to tell anyone of the night’s events, and the consequence is that a deeper intimacy develops between Rochester and Jane.[73] Grace comes to Jane’s attention the next day, sewing new curtains, their exchange is intense and challenging, as they test each other for the level of information the other holds. Grace warns Jane to lock her door, she appears to be in command of the situation and despite her role of servant does not respect Jane’s place in the hierarchy. The cook, who interrupts this exchange, has a difficult interaction with Grace, the cook suggests dinner is about to be served to the servants, Grace responds with an order of what and when she will eat. [74] This reaction is not

[71] Brontë, p. 126.
[72] Brontë, p. 127.
[73] Brontë, p. 176.
[74] Brontë, p. 181.

typical of servant eating arrangements, where the expectation is to eat as a group in the servant's hall, Grace seemingly has another agenda, she isolates herself and shuns the enjoyment and company of her fellow servants, spending 'only one hour' a day in their company.[75]

Jane fails to comprehend why Grace has not been dismissed by Rochester or charged by the police for setting the fire and wonders what secret Grace keeps or conversely holds against her master.[76] Rochester has manipulated and placed a burden on Grace, this raises the question of whether Grace also has a secret to hide. Rochester uses Grace to deceive Jane about the existence of his wife and Grace is prepared to be blamed and manipulated; the task she has undertaken is not simply the nurse for a mentally ill woman but as a source of deceit and lies to provide an alibi for Rochester's secrets. The mystery and atmosphere created by the fire and the ensuing silence from Grace regarding the event is a device to introduce the concept and secret of Betha Mason.

Another key moment in which Grace fulfils the role of scapegoat is when Bertha's brother visits and is attacked. Without directly blaming Grace, Rochester allows Jane to think that Grace is the culprit; Grace is essentially providing a shield behind which he protects his secrets. The household is woken by the noise, guests run to the landings, but are ushered away by Rochester saying 'a servant had the nightmare'.[77] Rochester creates a lie and evades the truth, Jane is not convinced it was only a dream, Rochester asks for her help. They climb the stairs, enter the room and Grace Poole's 'goblin laughter' greets them. The source of the cries for help lies

[75] Brontë, p. 191.
[76] Brontë, p. 181.
[77] Brontë, p. 239.

wounded and bloody; it is Mr Mason the house guest.[78] With Mason's wounds treated, he retires. Rochester however now must provide an explanation for Jane as she asks 'will Grace Poole live here still, sir?'[79] Rochester cleverly evades a direct answer, simply adding to the mystery of Grace and the power Mr Mason holds over him.

As the bigamous marriage fails, the reason Grace is employed and isolates herself is revealed, the person in her care is Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife. Grace Poole was a keeper from Grimsby Retreat, an asylum, and was hired to guard and contain Mrs Rochester. The novel is silent about how Rochester was able to locate and employ a person with Grace Poole's work experience and social background. There may be an intermediary, however only Mason and Rochester know the truth about Mrs Rochester. Although Dr Carter, who treats Mason's wounds, may possibly, through his medical colleagues, have helped to recruit Grace to her role, and may have done so without knowing the exact identity of Bertha Mason.[80] However, Rochester assigns her the duties but his frequent absence from the house indicates that Mrs Fairfax assumes this responsibility and is a fellow conspirator in the concealment of Mrs Rochester.

Although Grace is assigned the task as keeper and this is allegedly within her capabilities, she is under the management of Mrs Fairfax, who is unable or unwilling to provide the discipline she needs. Despite Grace's skill as an experienced keeper, her attention to 'the lunatic' at times fails and the consequence is she escapes to instil fear and harm amongst the residents of Thornfield.[81] Rochester infers her silence and skill can be bought as 'she will do much for money', Rochester says he will hire her

[78] Brontë, p. 243.
[79] Brontë, p. 250.
[80] Brontë, p. 245.
[81] Brontë, p. 357.

son, who is also a keeper at Grimsby Retreat.[82] This new scheme is fallible, Grace has previously failed in her duties, because of her inclination toward alcohol and the desperation and madness of Mrs Rochester. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, assert that Grace Poole is as 'companionless as Bertha and Jane, observing in the novel 'the women act as agents for men, as keepers of other women' [83]

Isolation in an attic room with a deranged Mrs Rochester, enhances a need for alcohol, perhaps already evident, in Grace, the nurse from the Grimsby Asylum. Alcohol is mentioned with Grace as the imbiber several times in the novel. For example, Grace requests a 'pint of porter' from the cook to be served with her dinner.[84] One drink too many from the 'private bottle of gin she kept by her', 'a common fault amongst nurses', as Grace sleeps off her gin, Mrs Rochester escapes from her cell, sets fire to the house and dies falling from the roof.[85] Grace allowed her relationship with alcohol to be stronger than her responsibilities as a nurse and keeper of Mrs Rochester. As many servants and keepers have experienced before her, the boredom, loneliness and isolation of her work leaves Grace in need of an escape from her duties, she chooses alcohol as the vehicle.

Grace is a vital, but solitary character in the novel, she is forgotten and isolated, until the crucial moment when all her skill is required, this is when she fails her master and disappears from sight. For Rochester, the consequence is the destruction of Thornfield and the exchange of one torment for another. The neglect, inaction and subterfuge of these two characters has disrupted the lives of the people around them

[82] Brontë, p. 347.
[83] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan M. Gubar, 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress', in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 336–371 (p 351). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn74x.14> [accessed 8 August 2022].
[84] Brontë, p. 181.
[85] Brontë, p. 492.

and they were instrumental in the death of Bertha Mason. Grace and Rochester shared a secret, that they thought was well managed by their lies and subterfuge, but this disrupted the relationships in the household. Grace was given a flexibility that other servants were unlikely to have gained, while Rochester was guilty of placing a burden on Grace that she was unable to control or bear. Grace failed in her duties and Rochester tried to subvert the truth and reality with his untenable plan to conduct a bigamous marriage to Jane. The negative outcome of the power given to Grace and her failure to fulfil her duties suggest that, for Charlotte Brontë, a disturbance in the balance between master and servant is disruptive. Yet, the trajectory of her heroine reveals a much more subversive message of rebellion and reward. What is permissible for the well-born, well-educated Jane is chastised in Grace. While Jane is afforded upward mobility and independence, Grace is placed back in her servant place. This is indicative of the complex engagement with servants and servitude in *Jane Eyre,* with Brontë simultaneously endorsing a hierarchical household structure of loyal service to a range of masters and challenging the power of masters and tyrants through Jane.

Tyranny and Rebellion: The Young Jane's Rejection of Servitude

Excavating the servant figures in *Jane Eyre* is an important part of my analysis. They are frequently ignored and overlooked, and the previous discussion has sought to highlight their role in the novel, frequently in the background but at times at the forefront of the action. Whether fulfilling a function or influencing the narrative, these characters are given names and often personalities, reinforcing my overall argument that the Brontë sisters did not just relegate their servant characters to the typical role of silent invisibility. In the second half of this chapter, I turn to the wider discourse of servitude that is prominent throughout *Jane Eyre.* Several characters attempt to hold

Jane in a submissive place, controlling her actions and thoughts. They use her sense of duty and status to mould her and attempt to control her free will. Judith Leggatt and Christopher Parkes suggest her tyrants want to turn her into their 'personal servant', while the regime at Lowood wants her to be a servant of the 'wage labour economy'.[86] Jane survives all her tyrants, some of them being defeated by mortality, some of them exposed and humiliated, and some of them tamed through their experiences. Jane herself struggles to navigate the complex bonds of love and duty, which on occasion result in a kind of servitude, but battles throughout to achieve freedom.

Jane is in many ways triumphant, transcending and rejecting the label of servant as she shapes her own place in the world. Yet this upward mobility, and perpetual refusal to be categorised as a servant, also points to a kind of inbuilt snobbery in Jane. She is both revolutionary in her rejection of tyranny and very much a product of her time in her belief that her birth and heritage as a gentlewoman entitle her to respect. Brontë's use of the rhetoric of servanthood in *Jane Eyre* is complex, positioning as it does this servanthood as something lesser and lower, something to fight against and reject. Despite her interactions with the servants, as I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, any suggestion that she may be a servant is immediately dismissed by Jane and as the heroine she is afforded opportunities that these servants lack. Their journey is static, while hers is dynamic and involves many falls and rises in fortune and position.

Jane Eyre, in the role of governess, has been the subject of much scholarly attention.[87] Terry Eagleton declares that Jane's role as the governess makes her a

[86] Judith Leggatt and Christopher Parke, 'From the Red Room to Rochester's Haircut: Mind Control in Jane Eyre', *English Studies in Canada*, 32.4 (December 2006), pp. 169-188. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A180271568/AONE?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=3bb89d09.> [accessed 23 August 2022]. (p. 169.)

[87] Mary Poovey, 'The Anathemized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre' *in Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019),126-163; Talairach-

servant, ‘trapped within a rigid social function which demands, industriousness, subservience, and self-sacrifice’, albeit as an upper servant.[88] In the novel, a tyrant, masquerading as a lady, has much to say about Jane as the governess. Blanche Ingram, who considers herself to be at the pinnacle of her class, describes Jane, the governess, as having ‘all the faults of her class’, relating cruel stories of her sibling’s treatment of their childhood governesses. Blanche takes great joy in belittling Jane while in the company of Mr Rochester. Blanche speaks of the power her mother utilised against the governesses, intent on ‘shifting the dead-weights from the house’.[89] Here my focus is not on this well-traversed territory about the liminal space of the governess, but on the novel’s wider rhetoric of servanthood and the way in which the novel oscillates between ideas of tyranny and revolt. I will first explore the young Jane’s instinctual rejection of tyranny before turning to the more complex relationships of her adulthood.

Jane’s class and position in the hierarchy of society is frequently highlighted by her interactions with the servants and family. An example is the red room incident; this culminates in Jane suffering a fit of unconsciousness after which she is treated by a kind and gentle apothecary, Mr Lloyd. Pointedly, an apothecary who is normally engaged to treat servants is called to Jane, rather than a doctor, who would treat the family.[90] Jane offers Mr Lloyd the reasons for her behaviour. He explains the alternative life that may have been her lot amongst the poor Eyre relations, to which

Vielmas, Laurence Routledge, ‘Portrait of a Governess, Disconnected, Poor, and Plain’: ‘Staging the Spectral Self in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre’*, *Brontë Studies: Journal of the Brontë Society*, 34.2 (2009), 127-137.

[88] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005). p.16.
ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=736576.> [accessed 9 August 2022]

[89] Brontë, p. 205.

[90] Brontë, p. 23.

Jane firmly declares that she 'should not like to belong to poor people'.[91] Jane is conscious that she would not exchange her freedom 'at the price of caste'.[92] Pell believes Jane's statement is 'ironic' and that she is aware that the 'noble poor' do not hold a place as an admirable 'mystery'.[93] Jane is affirming her position in society and placing herself above the poor and her birth family. Eagleton observes that when Jane is treated as a servant by the Reeds, her negative reaction and hatred prompted by their snobbery is 'shot through with shared smouldering class- assumptions about the poor'.[94]

Balancing what is, for a twenty-first century audience, a rather snobbish valuing of class hierarchies is the young Jane's rather revolutionary refusal to be cowed and controlled by the tyrants in her life, even while she acknowledges that she is vulnerable to their abuse of power. John Reed is the first male tyrant Jane encounters. John has little care for his mother or sisters, and despite his violent behaviour the servants do not intervene for fear of 'offending him'. [95] In the absence of his father, and indulged by his mother, he exerts his male power and privilege over the household although he is only a young boy of fourteen. At the beginning of the novel Jane hears him search for her, crudely changing her name to Joan as he calls out for the 'bad animal', this reductive term placing Jane even lower on a hierarchical scale than a servant.[96] Jane calls him 'Master Reed', and describes his physical and character failures, but also reveals her 'terror' and lack of defence against his abuse and commands, admitting that she is 'habitually obedient' to him.[97] John's verbal abuse decries her existence

[91] Brontë, p. 30.
[92] Brontë, p. 30.
[93] Pell, p. 403.
[94] Eagleton, p. 28.
[95] Brontë, p. 12.
[96] Brontë, p. 11.
[97] Brontë, p. 12.

and right to live in the house, he mocks her father‘s status and her lack of position and money, and reminds her of his position and that all she touches belongs to him.[98]

Eagleton suggests that Jane’s understanding of her place in the family as an intruder, enhances and confirms her alienation and fear.[99] John’s prolonged and aggressive strategy, releases a rage that overtakes Jane, flying from submission to rebellion in an instant, she strikes out at her oppressor.[100] The tyrant is subdued for a moment, but quickly returns to being a privileged and paternalistic bigot that echoes the behaviour of the man he is doomed to become. This intense exchange is more than a squabble between two small children; it is an example of Jane, the female, being oppressed by John, the male, who believes he is a higher class than Jane and is more powerful and dominant because of his gender and this position is his to claim. Nilay Erdem Ayyildiz explains John Reed holds this power as the ‘sole male heir’ to the family and therefore he has accepted and assumed the position of power.[101] Pell concludes that despite this Jane has sufficient understanding of the injustice of the situation and the punishment she unjustly receives for defending her position.[102] Jane, however, has realised she also has power, this time crudely and fleetingly released, but as she learns to take control of this gift, it will enable her to direct her power for both her protection and success.

An early form of this power is highlighted in Jane’s subsequent confrontation with her aunt, Mrs Reed, who is both the benefactor and the woman who controls the life of the young Jane. Her cruelty and carelessness are evident in her treatment of

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[98] Brontë, p. 13.
[99] Eagleton, p. 25.
[100] Brontë, p. 14.
[101] Nilay E. Ayyildiz, ‘From the Bottom to the Top: Class and Gender Struggle in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*’ *The Journal of Institute of Social Sciences*, 37 (2017) pp. 146-153. *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/bottom-top-class-gender-struggle-brontës-jane/docview/1916791716/se-2> (p. 148).
[102] Pell, p. 401.

the child, she dismisses and abandons her and is only too glad to rid the household of this petulant child. Before Jane is sent to school, she makes a critical assessment of Mrs Reed's character as she stands before her, describing her as an 'exact clever manager, who held the household under her control'.[103] Jane threatens to besmirch her reputation as a 'good woman' and feels triumphant.[104]

Accepting her aspirations and future are away from Gateshead and unknowingly exchanging one prison for another, Jane is sent to Lowood School in the care of another authoritarian rule maker, Mr Brocklehurst. At Lowood, a charity school, conditions are harsh, the pupils, all girls, are subject to incessant physical depravation, cruelty and the impending threat of eternal damnation, if they do not adhere strictly to the rules and regulations of this fearful institution. This tyrant figure is used by Brontë to offer a scathing critique of the hypocrisy and abuses of those who seek to elevate themselves through the humiliation of others.

Brocklehurst's method of care for Jane and the inmates of the institution is depravation, shame and disgrace. He demeans Jane by calling her a liar and orders her to stand on a stool in class, using this controlling method of punishment because she does not fit into the Lowood pattern of a compliant and submissive child; she is different and Brocklehurst despises difference.[105] Eagleton describes Brocklehurst as a man who 'justifies the eating of burnt porridge by an appeal to the torments of the early Christian martyrs'.[106] Brocklehurst is an example of a powerful Victorian man, he is part of the society that controls the thoughts and actions of the lower social classes and the female inmates of the institution, his lack of empathy as the Christian man he

[103] Brontë, p. 43.
[104] Brontë, p. 45.
[105] Brontë, p. 79.
[106] Eagleton, p. 15.

purports to be is hypocritical. John Peters believes Brocklehurst is a hypocrite because he is 'preaching one thing and doing another', denying the physical and embracing the spiritual.[107] Brocklehurst exemplifies the patriarchal figure; he believes it is a privilege of his status to control his servants, women and anyone under his authority. He demands absolute obedience and servitude. The inhabitants of Lowood are bullied into submission and are fearful of the consequences of displeasing him. He holds complete power over their lives even when they sleep. However, Jane is once again prepared to challenge the authority of a tyrant and her actions contribute to the downfall of this tyrant, of his evil behaviour, his regime is exposed and he is powerless. Pell considers her resistance shows a more measured 'intellectual' approach than the violent outburst Jane showered on John Reed.[108] Peters acknowledges that critical commentary views *Jane Eyre* as challenging norms of gender, religion and class and supporting a Christian belief of equality, with Jane seen by contemporary critics to be a threat to the established system.[109] Her resistance means that Brocklehurst no longer exerts power over Jane, she is free to enjoy the education she is offered at Lowood and will never again suffers at the hand of this particular tyrant.[110]

Jane, the rebellious child, emerges from Lowood as a young woman seeking her place in the world. Much of her instinctual childhood rebellion remains, although this has been tempered by her education and by the example of Miss Temple and Helen Burns who previous scholars have argued are key influences in instilling in Jane a belief in duty and a greater control over her emotions.[111] Helen encourages Jane to

[107] John G. Peters 'We Stood at God's Feet, Equal': Equality, Subversion, and Religion in *Jane Eyre'*, *Brontë Studies,* 29.1 (2004), 53-64, <https://doi.org/10.1179/bst.2004.29.1.53> (p.59).
[108] Pell, p. 403.
[109] Peters, p.55.
[110] Brontë, p. 99.
[111] Maria Lamonaca, 'Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*', *Studies in the Novel*, 34.3 (2002), pp. 245–63; Henry Staten, The Poisoned Gift of Forgiveness, in *Spirit Becomes Matter*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2014), pp. 31-75.

control her emotions and reject vengeance and believe in the Christian doctrine, Henry Staten reminding us that Helen believes in 'the salvation of *all* souls'.[112] Maria Lamonaca observes it is Helen who guides Jane to a stronger Christian path with her advice to read the Bible, this leading Jane to understand and accept the true meaning of forgiveness.[113] Helen suffers indignities at the hands of Brocklehurst and her death is hastened by the depravations at the school. Eagleton considers Helen both 'a hero and a martyr' and her name signifies 'both suffering and passion'.[114] Jane endeavours to display good behaviour, but this does not come easily to this strong and passionate child, she fights and rebels against the injustice imposed on herself and others, influenced by Helen but never losing her instinctual resistance to tyranny.

The Quest for Equality: Love, Power Imbalance, and the Rhetoric of Servanthood

Seeking freedom from Lowood, Jane calls for 'liberty'; this is her desire, but she believes her position in life means she has to modify this wonderful quest and seek 'a new servitude'.[115] Brontë choice of the word 'servitude' is telling, because it pauses Jane's progress and search for liberty and encourages the reader to consider Jane's state of freedom. Servitude means 'being a slave, being the property of someone or lacking in personal freedom'.[116] A servant, however, is a person engaged to wait on and obey the instructions of another person.[117] To serve, moreover, means to attend

[112] Staten, p. 36.
[113] Lamonaca, p. 253.
[114] Eagleton, p. 16.
[115] Brontë, p. 102.
[116] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2022), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176717>. [accessed 25 July 2022]. s.v. servitude.
[117] *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2022), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176648>. [accessed 25 July 2022].

'in a manner reminiscent of a servant'.[118] It may be maintained that Jane, therefore, considers herself a slave, to be subjugated by another, and consequently does she remain the servant or the slave? Jane questions herself. Following the eight years she has attended Lowood, is it true that all she desires is to 'serve elsewhere'? Jane tries to find a solution that will provide an opportunity for her to control her 'own will'.[119] Eagleton describes this as a 'refreshingly novel kind of passivity'.[120]

As a woman, Jane encounters two men who exert considerable influence and control over her. Her battle against tyranny is not complete, but both the learned stoicism she has imbued from Helen Burns and her complex feelings for Edward Rochester and St John Rivers—relationships where love of various kinds is a shaping power—make this part of Jane's struggle more fraught. Reading Rochester as a tyrant who attempts to subdue and control the spirited Jane is a very different view to the Byronic hero figure who has charmed generations of readers and beguiled many critics.[121] My reading of Jane's relationship with Rochester foregrounds his tyranny and his failure to empathise with Jane's vulnerable position.

Jane's social class is assumed by her new employer at their first encounter. A perplexed Mr Rochester gazes at the young woman before in him in the darkening lane. He struggles to find a label, a slot into which this woman will fit. The style and material of her clothing is the most obvious clue, 'not half- fine enough for a lady's

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s.v. servant.

[118] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2022), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176665>. [accessed 1 August 2022].
s.v.to serve.

[119] Brontë, p. 102.

[120] Eagleton, p. 26.

[121] Patsy Stoneman, 'Rochester and Heathcliff as Romantic Heroes', *Brontë Studies*, 36.1 (2011),111-118, <https//dx.doi:10.1179/147489310X12868722453744>; Mary A., Davis, ' ''On the Extreme Brink" with Charlotte Brontë: Revisiting *Jane Eyre's* Erotics of Power.' *Papers on Language and Literature*, 52.2 (2016),115-148. *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/on-extreme-brink-with-charlotte-brontë-revisiting/docview/1817047314/se-2> [accessed 4 February 2023].

maid'.[122] Robbins observes this is an example of Jane's 'close identification with servants' and now a 'distinction needs to be made', but the sentence falters and fades away.[123] Jane puts him out of his misery and declares herself as the governess. These few words uttered by Rochester provide an example of the social and professional stereotyping prevalent in Victorian society and displayed by an unwitting Rochester. Gilbert and Gubar, however, consider this as an indication of equality in their meeting, as they suggest Jane and Rochester start their connection as both 'master and servant and the prince and Cinderella'.[124] I do not agree with this categorisation of Rochester as a potential prince. Rochester is a sophisticated, well-travelled adulterer, Jane is a young woman, barely out of school, who is not worldly wise and does not understand the motive of the rogue sitting under this playful banter.

Rochester and Jane meet again at Thornfield, their meeting controlled by a superior and playful Mr Rochester. Although responsive to his commands to sit here or there, Jane is truthful and frank but not subservient or bowed by his questioning of her past or abilities. Rochester modifies his usual method of command for Jane, reflecting that he is used to the tone of his commands gaining a positive and prompt response. However, Jane says she 'obeys his directions'.[125] Jane appears to adopt the role of the servant by uttering she will obey him, yet his familiarity is evident when he speaks of her 'features and countenance', and his comments and critique of her paintings reveal that Rochester has noticed her and is interested to learn more about Jane, his servant.[126] Rochester seeks her company, converses with her and discusses the authority he holds over her because of his age and experience. Jane rejects this

[122] Brontë, p. 135.
[123] Robbins, p. 191.
[124] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 352.
[125] Brontë, p. 146.
[126] Brontë, p. 145.

idea. Eagleton observes that Jane displays her 'quietly self-sufficient independence of Rochester' in order to bind him to her and consequently her to him.[127] Gilbert and Gubar consider that Jane is able to see through Rochester and 'his daily disguise as master of Thornfield'.[128] Both sets of critics align Jane with having a sophisticated knowledge of men and love. In contrast, I believe she is attempting to test her own emotions and to understand her attraction to this man. I do not consider Jane to have an understanding of the situation that Rochester is allowing her to enter. His moral code is incomparable to that of a young woman who has never loved or previously entered into a physical relationship with a man.

Commands are a recurring topic of conversation for Rochester and Jane, with Jane thinking to herself that 'he pays me thirty pounds per annum for receiving his orders'.[129] She struggles with the knowledge that she is a 'paid subordinate', although Rochester amuses himself with this idea and declares he had forgotten that fact; he does not want to treat her as a subordinate.[130] Brontë, once again, choses to use a term that defines Jane's lack of freedom, subordinate meaning being subservient or dependent on another person or thing.[131] Rochester dismissing the word's use, elevates the status of his governess and places her within reach of his social class, but the exchange also highlights his complete lack of awareness of the burden of her dependency. He comes a little closer to understanding the complexity of Jane's position when they discuss being 'free born', Rochester declaring that even a freeborn person will commit to 'anything for a salary'.[132] He may be alluding to Grace Poole

[127] Eagleton, p. 18.
[128] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 353.
[129] Brontë, p. 157.
[130] Brontë, p. 157.
[131] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2022), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192878>. [accessed 25 July 2022]. s.v. subordinate.
[132] Brontë, p. 158.

undertaking work for him that perhaps no one else will do, or his marriage to Bertha Mason for financial gain.

Rochester and Jane develop a keen regard for each other, he admires her honesty, and she is intrigued by his conversation and opinions. Jane reveals she feels as if Rochester was part of her family rather than her master.[133] But Jane is evidentially a servant, within the servant hierarchy. This is established because she accepts a salary in exchange for her duties. She is unlikely to have challenged Rochester in this way, because of the class difference and the hierarchical structure that separated them, which is breached by the intimacy and frankness of their discussion. However, Rochester is toying with her emotions, he is attracted to her but knows the class difference between them will make it difficult for him to introduce her to society and if his motive for marriage is to gain wealth, as it was with Bertha Mason, then Jane is at this stage in her life a servant on thirty pounds a year and this will hardly enhance his lifestyle.

Alone with these thoughts, Jane rebukes herself for the foolish fantasy that Rochester would have emotional feelings for her ‘a novice and dependent’.[134] Jane’s sense of position and self has emerged, she now realises she is but a servant, however, she also denies her physical self-worth by painting a self-portrait and compares its plainness to her creation of the Miss Ingram portrait, who is ‘an accomplished lady of rank’.[135] This portrait reinforces Jane’s knowledge of her own situation and rank.

When Jane has an opportunity to help Rochester when Mr Mason is attacked, her words to him after the incident reveal her position, ‘I like to serve you, sir, and to

[133] Brontë, p. 171.
[134] Brontë, p. 186.
[135] Brontë, p. 187.

obey you in all that is right'.[136] Jane wants to serve Rochester and is being paid for this, but I believe she is alluding to serving him as a wife. Her statement of 'all that is right', may be considered to be her defence of justice and her instinct for the truth. Jane seeks, as Peel suggests, equality in all things, not given or earned but justified and real.[137] However, her loyalty to Rochester, for the moment, remains as a servant and a loving friend.

Rochester, however, has other intentions for Jane, he seeks a bride rather than a mistress. Peel suggests that Rochester considers having a mistress is no better than hiring a slave because they are both inferior and bring degradation to the owner.[138] Jane, incorrectly believing Rochester is to marry Miss Ingram, plans to leave her post as governess and go to Ireland. Rochester declares his desire for Jane to stay with him at Thornfield. He tells her he 'feigned courtship of Miss Ingram to make Jane jealous.[139] Rochester implores Jane to marry him using his charm and wit, but once she reveals her love for him, he wants to shackle her to him with marriage and possessions. Their courtship is notable, as it signals the return to the language of servant and master. Rochester makes the revolutionary statement that Jane has 'claimed your rank as my equal'.[140] Significantly, he notes that while she is 'his master', yet, 'you seem to submit'.[141] The hollowness of his rhetoric is exposed through his plan for the possession and control of Jane, which is voiced in a series of commands; 'You will give up your governessing slavery at once'.[142] The use of the word 'slavery' reflects the class attitude to the governess position and echoes John

[136] Brontë, p. 250.
[137] Peel, p. 417.
[138] Peel, p. 409.
[139] Brontë, p. 303.
[140] Brontë, p. 303.
[141] Brontë, p. 301.
[142] Brontë, p. 311.

Reed's attitude to Jane as her master and dependent. Jane's retort to Rochester begins to show a glimpse of her desire to control at least some part of her life, as she says 'Indeed, … sir, I shall not'.[143] Rochester, the master of games and deceit, has caught his prize by allowing Jane to believe she is his equal; he demands an immediate marriage and is prepared to deceive her to gain his goal. Although she desires him, Jane, rejects Rochester's offer of the accoutrements of jewels and fine clothes and rejects the chain he will put around her neck.[144]

The marriage is arranged, but stronger forces in the shape of Mr Mason stop the marriage at the altar rail and the mystery of Grace Poole is evident for all to see. Jane rejects the concept of living with Rochester outside the sanctity of marriage and escapes the scene.[145] Her determination to reject him is forged with steel as she cries 'Mr Rochester, I will *not* be yours'.[146] Eagleton observes that Jane does not condone Rochester's 'cavalier stance' towards his bigamous intentions and this displays his contempt of her moral code.[147] The scene where Jane rejects Rochester's suggestion that she become his mistress is one of Jane's most powerful moments in the novel. Jane rebels again, this time against Rochester and his lack of morality. Jane does not want to be a slave or a mistress, neither is acceptable. Pell suggests that Jane recalls Rochester's negative opinion of his previous mistresses and the degradation he felt for them, she does not want that feeling reflected into her life.[148] Jane rejects the possibility of servitude, she is seeking equality. Lamonaca highlights the religious significance of her rejection of both Rochester and St John Rivers.[149] Jane is strong,

[143] Brontë, p. 311.
[144] Brontë, p. 299. This may be considered not merely a chain to adorn her neck, rather as a chain to bind her to Rochester as his possession. As is the intention to clamp bracelets on her wrists.
[145] Brontë, p. 365.
[146] Brontë, p. 363. 'Not' is italicised in the novel.
[147] Eagleton, p. 20.
[148] Peel, 410.
[149] Lamonaca, p. 246.

she stands by her principles despite her romantic feelings for Rochester, the financial stability he offers, and the knowledge refusal will mean the loss of her home and job. Jane knows that to give in to Rochester's desire will make her even more dependent on him, the prospect of being his mistress essentially just another, more damaging, form of servitude.

While *Jane Eyre* is typically billed as a romance, the tyrannical behaviour of the men in Jane's life undermines this label. Reading Jane as a character who rejects servitude and rebels against tyranny of all kinds frames her relationship with her distant relative St John Rivers as parallel to that with Rochester. St John Rivers is cold and ambitious, he wants to reach the pinnacle of success in his life and does not care what he does to gain this or the damage he inflicts on others to grasp his objective. Jane candidly admits that St John Rivers is a good man, but he proclaims himself 'hard and cold'.[150] Evidentially, he initially appears as a kind and gentle Christian man, allowing her into his home against the advice of his servant Hannah.[151] However, St John emerges as another tyrant whose only desire is to take possession of and control the seemingly gullible and weak Jane. She submits to his teachings, yet admits that in doing so she must 'disown half my nature' as he attempts to train her in 'pursuits for which [she] had no natural vocation'.[152]

St John's Christian missionary aspirations in India are pressed on Jane as he urges her to become his wife and 'fellow-labourer'.[153] She waivers as he describes her as 'docile, courageous and very heroic', she tries to match his forceful desire to control her destiny.[154] Marriage to St John would diminish Jane, she will not become his wife

[150] Brontë, p. 453.
[151] Brontë, p. 389.
[152] Brontë, p. 460.
[153] Brontë, p. 464.
[154] Brontë, p. 465.

because she knows she would not be loved by him; however, her sacrifice of the mission would fulfil her desire for work and service.[155] Gilbert and Gubar claim that St John offers Jane a very different life to the passionate and pleasurable life with Rochester, rather he offers her a 'path of thorns and a marriage of spirituality'.[156] The concept of Jane living and working in India as his equal is unacceptable to him and he insists that she travel with him to India as his wife rather than his sister, despite Jane's eager offer. Eagleton suggests that St John admonishes her refusal because she is afraid of death, yet Jane refutes this by admitting her life is worth more to her than to 'throw it away'.[157] Thormählen considers St John to have committed the 'sin of spiritual pride' in claiming control of Jane and her life in God's name and he is driven by this.[158] St John is prepared to sacrifice himself and Jane for his divine ambitions. As she refuses his proposal, she feels his control seek the very 'marrow' of her bones as she refuses to give him her heart, she is only prepared to give her work for the mission.[159] Thormählem describes St John as a man of contradictions; he rescued Jane from certain death on the cold moors, yet now he proposes a life in India where death will follow quickly.[160]

Jane's rejection of St John is indicative of her continued resistance to control by others. She knows she will always be free in her thoughts and will have her 'natural unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness'.[161] Brontë uses the word 'unenslaved', therefore I question if Jane continues to consider herself enslaved in the external world and free in her heart and mind. But she believes that

[155] Brontë, p. 466.
[156] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 365.
[157] Eagleton, p. 24.
[158] Marianne Thormählem, *The Brontë's and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 209.
[159] Brontë, p. 468.
[160] Thormählem, p. 205
[161] Brontë, p. 470

as St John's wife, the fire inside her will be quelled and will consume her. Eagleton predicts that if Jane had travelled to India with St John, it would be a 'mixture of the alien and over-close'.[162] I consider Jane has closed her heart because this can only ever be for Rochester, but she seeks oblivion in the work St John offers, knowing it will precipitate her untimely death in India, but not at the price of giving her body in marriage to St John. Jane rejects him for the freedom of her mind and body. If St John Rivers was not the man who could treat Jane as an equal, was the fascinating Rochester her goal? Eagleton concludes that Jane refuses marriage to both St John Rivers and Rochester because one is a loveless match and the other an 'illicit passion', this is not what Jane or Brontë wants as her quest.[163]

Jane's eventual return to Rochester is perhaps the most complex and ambiguous moment in the novel, with the ending variously read as the triumph of romantic love and a return to servitude. Rochester is tamed and chained by his need for Jane. However, Gilbert and Gubar suggest it was not Jane's intention to subdue the world and Rochester, but to discard 'the disguise of master and servant and the prince and Cinderella' and to be equal with him.[164] Eagleton proposes Rochester is 'the novel's sacrificial offering to social convention' as Jane takes a 'subjugated role' yet enjoys the love and power of her relationship which Rochester provides.[165] Robbins, however, observes that at the opening of their meeting at Ferndean, Jane offers herself initially as a servant as she holds the tray and pretends ' the hireling' is offering her master the glass.[166] Jane has returned to her role as servant yet holds the power of her love for him.

[162] Eagleton, p. 21.
[163] Eagleton, p. 19.
[164] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 370.
[165] Eagleton, p. 32.
[166] Robbins, p. 191.

A broken Rochester is nursed back to health by his wife and servant Jane, Rochester admits he is ‘a poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand’, despite this Jane’s happiness is revealed as she dismisses any notion of sacrifice when caring for him.[167] She is the one that finally controls her own happiness by marrying the man she loves unreservedly and is treated as an equal. Domestic bliss appears to reign for now, but given his behaviour in the rest of the novel there is the threat that Rochester may rise from the ashes and yearn again to tame the spirit of Jane Eyre.

Here Brontë leaves Jane the orphan, the governess and finally the wife. The balance of master and servant, power and submission shift throughout her life. Jane finds she has the power of intellect and kindness; in her tyrants she sees the influence money and position has to control other people’s lives and in servants she sees the power of loyalty, friendship and the fear of the consequences of disobedience. Jane Eyre was more than a romantic girl besotted with the concept of free will and marriage, Jane employed the skills of obedience and resistance and chose her moment to defeat tyranny and deceit. Jane rises and gains her freedom, she rejects the concept of being a servant but frequently refers to Rochester as her master, she mingles with servants and some are confidantes and advisers. However, she does not rebel against the tyranny they are subjected to or against their masters on their behalf, she does not take them along on her quest for freedom. Rather she leaves them and becomes a keeper of servants herself.

As we leave Jane in control of her life and surroundings, others are experiencing the rise and fall of power and obedience, with similar frameworks and conflicts evident in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights.* In this much more radical

[167] Brontë, p. 513.

engagement with questions of servitude and slavery, servants and masters exchange places as they seek freedom from their personal and social servitude. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel dominated by the slavery of one class by another, in which servants take the words vengeance and treachery and name it as loyalty. In Emily Brontë's novel the subversive potential of a servant, hinted at in *Jane Eyre's* Grace Poole, becomes more prominent, with servants given not only autonomy and a voice, but also control of the narrative.

Chapter Three: Rising Servants and Falling Masters - The Unsettling Power of Wuthering Heights

Like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Hights* is a novel deeply preoccupied with questions of power and authority, servitude and submission, rebellion, and revolt. However, Emily Brontë's novel goes much further than her sister's in giving servants a genuine presence and voice. Graeme Tytler asserts that '*Wuthering Heights* is not like other nineteenth-century novels, because the servants 'show little of the perfunctoriness' epitomised in other fictional representations of relationships between masters and servants.[1] Additionally, Tytler suggests that Emily Brontë dissects the 'time honoured system' of servant and master and uses *Wuthering Heights* to enhance the reader's 'understanding of human nature'.[2] Does this mean the servants of Wuthering Heights have individuated personalities? And if so, do they display their personality so much that it overrides their primary function as a servant? Has Brontë decided to eclipse their role as servants by creating a world where they can interact and be a part of the narrative of the novel, to be more than a job description or a bit part in a novel about love and loss? My answer to all these questions is 'yes'. Not only does Emily Brontë individuate and empower some of her servant characters, as this chapter will highlight, but the wider novel is fundamentally preoccupied with the enslavement of a succession of characters by others. On multiple instances within the novel, torrid examples of slavery and masters, submission and cruelty, power and powerlessness, are driven across the backdrop of a hapless pair of star-crossed lovers who are used as puppets and a vehicle to display how power damages as well as bringing exceeding joy and freedom.

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[1] Graeme Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 <https://doi.org/10.1179/147489308X259587> (p. 44).

[2] Tytler. p. 45.

As with *Jane* Eyre, this a novel full of servants. Some of these remain shadowy background figures, subsumed in their function and not individuated. Some are fully realised characters with a three-dimensional life, in particular Joseph whose religious conviction leads him to regularly chastise his masters. One servant is given the power of recollection and the power to shape events as they unfold and in retrospect: Nelly Dean. Before turning to Nelly Dean and Joseph, two characters who disrupt the nineteenth century pattern of voiceless servants to be given agency and individuality, this chapter focuses on wider issues of master and servant power structures.

Cycles of Servitude: Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*

The main focus of this chapter is Nelly Dean and the radical way in which Emily Brontë transforms the figure of the servant from spectator to actor, function to multi-dimensional character. However, Nelly's steady rise to a position of security and respectability takes place against a chaotic backdrop of rises and falls. These not only impact on her position and security, shaping many of the choices she makes as will be seen in later in the chapter, but also foreground ideas of masters and servants, power and servitude. Social mobility is a key motif of nineteenth-century fiction, perhaps most evident in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* but also seen in Jane Eyre's eventual rise in fortune. While many commentators writing about *Wuthering Heights* have foregrounded the tragic love story of Heathcliff and Catherine, an equally fundamental aspect of the novel is what it reveals about the volatile social dynamics of nineteenth-century society. On the one hand Emily Brontë presents readers with an image of gentrified continuity and stability in the Lintons and their estate Thrushcross Grange, but on the other she carries readers into the contested space of Wuthering Heights itself, which becomes a battleground of power and vengeance. Eagleton

positions Heathcliff as an integral part of this conflict being 'the triumph of the oppressed over capitalism and the triumph of capitalism over the oppressed', with Heathcliff eventually suffering the loss of his power and happiness.[3]

What is significant for my focus on servants and masters is the way in which each rise in power results in the servitude of someone else. Heathcliff, the adopted son, becomes servant to Hindley. In turn, Heathcliff reduces Hindley's heir Hareton to a servant. Terry Eagleton suggests that Heathcliff employs the 'capitalist brutality' that created the Linton fortune to destroy the Earnshaw yeoman ideal, but with the intention of decimating Hareton Earnshaw, Wuthering Heights and ultimately Thrushcross Grange.[4] Heathcliff's power fails him and eventually his obsession for Catherine Earnshaw destroys him. This battleground of male power and control also reduces women to pawns, the vulnerable position of women and their lack of agency highlighted by Heathcliff's abuse of Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton's abduction. This section begins by exploring the rises and falls of Heathcliff, Hindley, and Hareton, before touching on what the novel reveals about gender servitude.

As with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* uses the rhetoric of servanthood and slavery to make a powerful statement about the fundamental human need for security and dignity, and the distortions of character and behaviour that result when this need is perverted and denied. The Introduction of this thesis highlighted the Brontës' awareness of and sympathy for the abolition movement and the preceding chapter on *Jane Eyre* explored Jane's fight to defend herself against the shadow of slavery through her encounters with her tyrants. In *Wuthering Heights* the spectre of slavery is even more pronounced through Heathcliff, whose heritage is foreshadowed when

[3] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power a Marxist Study of the Brontës*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230509726> (p. 112)
[4] Eagleton, p. 112.

he is described as being ‘as dark almost as if it came from the devil’; this may be intended to describe his features or his heart, but may also be understood as a reference to how otherness was perceived at this time, Heathcliff represents the oppressed and becomes the oppressor.[5] Heathcliff’s darkness is again emphasized by Nelly Dean on his return to the district, she spies him in the house porch and describes him as ‘ a tall man dressed in dark clothes, with dark face and hair’.[6] Humphrey Gawthorp makes a compelling argument in the pursuit of references to slavery in the novels and I will not be repeating these references in totality here, but Heathcliff’s oscillating journey between slavery and power, a journey mirrored by those of Hindley and Hareton, bring questions of servitude and slavery to the forefront of the discussion.[7]

Heathcliff’s early history foregrounds the motif of slavery that is also present in *Jane Eyre*. Gawthorp notes that although there are no direct references to Africa or West Africa in *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*, slavery is implied specifically in the use of scenarios and scenes involving ‘brutality, exploitation and depravation’.[8] Gawthorp further argues that both Brontë sisters are ‘impeaching’ a male orientated organisation that supports slavery and the domination of women and children.[9] Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern notes that Heathcliff’s ‘otherness’ is demonstrated several times in the novel, when he is described as a ‘gypsy’, his arrival in the Earnshaw household is symbolic, when Heathcliff revealed as the children’s gift from their father’s journey to Liverpool, instead of the whip and fiddle they had been promised, both symbols of the

[5] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p.36.
[6] Brontë, p. 93.
[7] Gawthorp, p. 282.
[8] Gawthrop, p. 281.
[9] Gawthrop, p. 281.

'cruelty and indolence' created by 'institutional slavery'.[10] Later, as Nelly Dean guides a desperate and dirty Heathcliff to reflect on the possibility of his noble birth, his otherness is revealed and accentuated when she suggests he may be the offspring of an Indian Queen or the Emperor of China.[11]

While the young Heathcliff's transition from the port of Liverpool to Wuthering Heights is a marked rise in fortune, family reactions to this small, dark child continually other him and his position in the household is precarious, dependent entirely on the goodwill of his benefactor, Mr Earnshaw. Heathcliff is labelled as 'it' several times during his initial meeting with the Earnshaw family, no pronoun or identity is assigned to him, the naming is to come, as the family reject him that night, Nelly finds 'it' a place to sleep.[12] Nelly's initial emotion towards Heathcliff is hate, as is Hindley's, in contrast, after some initial spitting and bad behaviour, Catherine is enchanted with him and cannot bear to be apart from him.[13] What follows is a golden season in Heathcliff's life as he finds freedom and affection in his bond with the daughter of the house.

In this hierarchical and patriarchal environment, however, it is the hate that the son of the house, Hindley, feels towards what he regards as in intruder, that is the defining factor in Heathcliff's life. When Hindley becomes master of Wuthering Heights following his father's death, his hate for Heathcliff increases, and he forces him to live amongst the servants and to work in the fields, whips him for not attending church, stops the curate from providing pastoral care and forces him to labour 'like any other lad on the farm'.[14] Heathcliff is no longer treated as the master's son, but as a servant

[10] Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern, Wuthering Heights and the Liverpool Slave Trade', *ELH,* 62.1 (1995), 171-196 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030265> [accessed 12 October 2022] (p. 172).
[11] Brontë, p. 58.
[12] Brontë, p. 37.
[13] Brontë, p. 37.
[14] Brontë, p. 46.

and this is the first instance in the novel where a character manifests power over another by reducing him or her to a position of servitude. It is as if being a literal servant is the worst fate that an entitled master like Hindley can imagine and through this Emily Brontë is constantly challenging and critiquing the hierarchies of nineteenth century society.

Heathcliff is a neglected and angry young boy, he does not care for his own appearance or cleanliness, he has no education and has only the work on the land to fill his life. He is considered a servant and is named as a servant by Hindley as he invites him to greet Catherine, as she arrives back from her prolonged visit to the Linton household.[15] By placing Heathcliff in the class of servant, Hindley is displaying his loathing and jealousy, he is emphasising his own status as master and Heathcliff as an interloper, by placing him in the servant category, he can assert power over him and in turn make Heathcliff powerless. Hindley, furthermore, treats Heathcliff badly at the bidding of his wife, Frances, who dislikes Heathcliff and Hindley responds accordingly.

This pattern of behaviour is replicated later in the novel when Heathcliff returns to the district after an absence of three years. Hindley's behaviour is mirrored by Edgar Linton, who is now married to Catherine Earnshaw and who sees Heathcliff as both an outsider who is not of his own class and a threat. Edgar speaks of the 'plough-boy's' return, his words betraying his class prejudice and contempt.[16] As a disgruntled Edgar allows Heathcliff into the house, he suggests that he is to be shown into the kitchen, by setting the scene, he places Heathcliff on the social level assigned to the servants not as a valued member of his family, displaying his own position and power.

[15] Brontë, p. 54.
[16] Brontë, p. 95.

Catherine insists he is to be shown into the parlour, the place for family and friends, disregarding Edgars display of authority.[17] It is apparent by this exchange that Catherine and Edgar have differing opinions on Heathcliff's position in the hierarchy of the house, this is further emphasised by the discussion of tables. Catherine pointedly asks Nelly to set a table for them set apart from 'the gentry', that particular one reserved for Edgar and Isabella, and a table for the 'lower orders'; Catherine and Heathcliff.[18] This term may have been used by Catherine to highlight her awareness of her own fluid position in the household or disparage Edgar for his gentrified manners. Fernandez considers this request as Catherine 'mockingly embracing servant status'.[19] Catherine may consider herself to be able to be in all the levels of hierarchy and she holds little regard for her social status when it comes to Heathcliff, she will do anything for him. At the time in Victorian England, social stratification was considered to be the division of the people into three distinct groups; lower, middle and upper class.[20] Despite this attempt by Catherine to make light of the situation, Edgar resists her pleas and commands her not to greet a 'runaway servant as a brother'.[21] Edgar the jealous and cautious husband sees the effect Heathcliff has on his wife and uses his class and position in an attempt to reduce and ridicule his rival.

What Edgar does not realise is that Heathcliff has used his three years' absence to raise his own position through the acquisition of wealth. Of significance to my argument is what this reveals about the cyclical pattern of rises and falls at the heart of the narrative. There is no doubt that Hindley abuses his position, on one occasion

[17] Brontë, p. 95.
[18] Brontë, p. 95.
[19] Fernandez, p. 57.
[20] Oxford English Dictionary Online, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, November 2022), <https: www.oed.com/view/Entry/132334> [accessed 21 November 2022]. s.v. orders.
The lower class or lower orders were the working class or the poor, the Oxford English Dictionary states it was frequently used as a 'derogatory or humorous' term.
[21] Brontë, p. 96.

thrashing Heathcliff so forcefully that he becomes very unwell and unable to eat. This is a direct trigger for Heathcliff's determination to reverse their positions, swearing his revenge on Hindley, saying 'I don't care how long I wait, if I can do it at last'.[22] The power over Heathcliff belongs to Hindley, this power is what Heathcliff seeks and will gain by using treachery and deceit.

Tytler claims Heathcliff has a 'master complex' and is even more psychologically unstable than Hindley.[23] What is of particular note to my argument is the way in which he repeats the pattern of his own servitude, reducing not only Hindley but Hindley's son Hareton to his own former role of servant and envisioning a future in which his child Linton becomes the master of the estates over Hareton.[24] Heathcliff becomes the master of Wuthering Heights after Hindley dies destitute, having gambled his estate away. At Hindley's funeral Nelly perceives a look of triumph on Heathcliff's face as the coffin is carried away, he has finally executed revenge on Hindley.[25] With no one willing or able to save him, Hareton Earnshaw remains at Wuthering Heights and in the care of Heathcliff, who treats him as a slave.[26] Fernandez acknowledges Brontë's creation of this slave, as Heathcliff ensures Hareton 'lives in his own house as a servant deprived of the advantages of wages'.[27] Heathcliff the slave has become the master and the master's son and rightful heir, Hareton, has become the slave. Heathcliff takes revenge on the boy just as he did on Hindley and Edgar. Mirroring the cruelty he received from Hindley he inflicts the same degrading treatment on Hareton. Carolyn Steedman explains Hareton is kept and treated as a beast, Heathcliff refuses

[22] Brontë, p. 61.
[23] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 (p. 47).
[24] Brontë, p. 208. 'I want the triumph of seeing my descendent fairly lord of their estate: my child hiring their children, to till their father's land for wages'.
[25] Brontë, p. 187.
[26] Brontë, p. 188.
[27] Fernandez, p. 57.

to provide the boy with an education, he is a 'brutish country lout'.[28] This provides an insight into Heathcliff's moral compass, it is displayed earlier in the narrative; in an exchange with Catherine, Heathcliff responds to her retort about revenge with the following statement; 'The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him, they crush those beneath them'.[29] Heathcliff is broken and is prepared to act exactly as he wishes with no conscience about the damage he inflicts.

This cycle of tyrant and slave is only broken after Heathcliff's death. Far from being crushed by Heathcliff's neglect and oppression, Hareton only needs a touch of gentleness and love to thrive. This is given to him by Cathy Linton, who initially treats him as an oaf and farm boy, but gradually accepts the young man as a friend and teaches him to read. Terry Eagleton considers this gift of reading to be an opportunity for Hareton to gain equality.[30] Eagleton observes that Hareton has 'wrestled back his birth right' in gaining control of Wuthering Heights[31] Hareton, however rejects it and enjoys life at Thrushcross Grange. His cycle through class from heir to the estate, to servant, to slave and his return as master is complete, the cycle has stopped with him.

Wuthering Heights is as much about gender hierarchy and oppression as it is about the inequities and tyrannies of class. This is evident, in particular, in the journey of Isabella Linton from freedom, to chains, to eventual escape. Heathcliff seeks revenge on the Linton family for Edgar's marriage to Catherine Earnshaw by eloping with Edgar's sister Isabella with the long-term goal of eventually taking control of the Linton money and estate. His treatment of her is unforgiveable, highlighting that the position of a married woman in the nineteenth century had almost as few protections

[28] Carolyn Steedman, Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.195.
[29] Brontë, p. 112.
[30] Eagleton, p. 118.
[31] Eagleton, p. 113.

and rights as that of a slave. Heathcliff dominates Isabella, insinuating she is mad because she revolts against his violence, and creating the situation that she is in need of his protection. He tells Nelly she is 'almost at the point that would suit me, and as her legal protector he will retain her in custody'.[32] He commands Nelly to remember Isabella's language towards him should it be needed in a court of law. In this scene, Heathcliff judges Isabella to be a madwoman and that he is not beyond using his power as a nineteenth century wealthy man to lock up his wife, a trait seen in Edward Rochester as he locks away the mad Bertha Mason. Emily Brontë, however, against the expectations of a paternalistic society who can turn away from another yet secluded wife, pronounced as mad, allows Isabella to escape, to leave the control of her master.

This is part of the wider pattern of subversion evident in the novel and seen in the subsequent section on Nelly Dean. Isabella runs to Nelly for help then onto the south pregnant with Heathcliff's son. Isabella has taken back her power, this young woman who was once considerably affluent and free, succumbed to the desires kindled by the vengeful Heathcliff, who abused her, treated her with contempt and threatened her with the madhouse, she stays with him as he abuses her over and over again. Judith E. Pike suggests Isabella became aware of the change in her class status as she is 'reduced to the level of a servant' and her perception of the loss of her 'former identity'.[33] However, she escapes, regains her freedom and raises her child as a single mother. We are not privy to her life in the south, she dies parted from her family and probably alone, however she is free of her domineering and cruel husband Heathcliff. While Isabella's life and station is very different to that of Nelly, their stories overlap in

[32] Brontë, p. 151.

[33] Judith, E., Pike, "My Name *Was* Isabella Linton': Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.3 (2009), 347–83. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1525/ncl.2009.64.3.347> (p.360).

that both need to summon courage and resilience to ensure their own security. For Nelly, the challenge is perhaps even greater in that she has to overcome the double disadvantage of both her gender and her class status.

Breaking the Mold: Emily Brontë's Radical Depiction of Servants

As with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* is a novel in which servants play a significant role. Indeed, in Emily Brontë's novel the servant characters are not merely functionaries or observers but active participants in both their own stories and those of their 'masters'. The differences between the servant characters in *Wuthering Heights* are to a large extent the product of the place where they serve. There is a marked difference between the servants at Wuthering Heights and those at Thrushcross Grange in terms of their response to authority and the approach to the roles they undertake. Tytler suggests that if servants want to 'remain in service' they must obey their masters, however the co-operation of each servant is necessary in order for the system of master and servant to function.[34] This obedience is part of the contract between master and servant, despite the use and abuse of the master's power.

At Wuthering Heights, a small team of servants are employed, their roles are more open to change, their relationship with the Earnshaw family is closer and less formal, and their communication with each other and with the family is intimate and does not follow the conventional expectations of servanthood. For example, Joseph, who works outside, has a multifaceted role as a physical farm worker, and alongside this task he has taken it upon himself to scold and worry the entire household with

[34] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53. (p. 44).

evangelist threats of their eternal damnation. Conversely, the servants at Thrushcross Grange operate quickly and in orderly fashion; this is evident as they quell the furore created as Heathcliff and Catherine are caught spying in the window. Robert lights the way with his lantern, John locks the door with the chain and Jenny brings warm water and washes Catherine's feet, all this activity undertaken without a word of protest.[35] It is only Mary, a maid at Thrushcross Grange, 'A thoughtless girl', who subverts this trend; she appears at the Grange in an agitated state having clearly lost her composure, as she divulges the scandal of Isabella eloping with Heathcliff.[36] But this display of concern and worry for her mistress is expected of a faithful servant. However not all the servants of Wuthering Heights can be labelled as thoughtless or merely functional, one in particular appears to be the epitome of servanthood, she is Nelly Dean.

Wuthering Heights is narrated by a character who holds and executes many roles, she is a nurse, housekeeper, friend and keeper of secrets; Nelly Dean, is the woman who displays contrasting aspects of her character in different sections of the novel. I consider her not simply the narrator, the lens through which the lives and tribulations of her 'masters' can be accessed, but also as a multi-dimensional character in her own right, an accumulator of wealth and property, a manipulator of events and an influential servant with the power to both withhold and reveal secrets. Nelly manufactures a position of security and power; she employs both secrecy and truth to execute her will on the characters in the novel, until they become vulnerable and broken. James Hafley believes Nelly to be the antagonist of the novel, describing her as 'one of the consummate villains of English literature'.[37] In this discussion of

[35] Brontë, p. 50.
[36] Brontë, p. 131.
[37] James Hafley, 'The Villain of *Wuthering Heights*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 13.3 (1958),199-215 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044379> [accessed 31 August 2022] (p. 199).

Nelly I will initially describe her duties and her position in the novel, her interactions and the multifaceted character she portrays. Then I will discuss the other servants and how they interact with the owners of Wuthering Heights, home to the Earnshaw family and the Linton family home of Thrushcross Grange. Throughout I will be profiling relationships of power and servitude.

In contrast to the rather fixed, hierarchical world of *Jane Eyre*, in which only Jane demonstrates genuine social mobility, in *Wuthering Heights* there is much more fluidity, with masters becoming servants, and servants becoming masters, as I have discussed in the previous section. This is both disruptive but also in some ways an example of the social and class discontent that framed the time period; political reform and suffrage was sought by the Chartist Movement, a working-class group that was active in Britain between 1838 and 1848. As I foreground in the Introduction to this thesis, the Chartists supported work strikes and marches for freedom and equality.[38] Tellingly, the one character whose upward trajectory is steady is the one who plays the game of advancement with both skill and outward respect for the figure of the 'master'. Nelly Dean is a revolutionary depiction of a servant for the time in which Emily Brontë was writing, a servant who secures a comfortable place in the world and who is given voice and agency.

Nelly: Performing the Faithful Servant

During the time frame described in the novel (1771-1802), Nelly works at both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Brontë introduces Nelly in the initial pages of the novel. She is described by Lockwood, who is the tenant at Thrushcross

[38] Jessica Brain, 'The Chartist Movement' *Historic UK.*
< https://www.The Chartist Movement - Historic UK (historic-uk.com)> [accessed 11 November 2022]

Grange, as 'the housekeeper, a matronly lady' who embraces strict boundaries regarding the routine of when dinner is served.[39] Tytler argues that this act is a 'symbolic caricature' of the fractious relationships between masters and servants in the novel.[40] This may be an accurate consideration, however, I argue that this act immediately conjures a picture of a stringent disciplinarian, who adheres to the rules and routines of the house and manages the people she is charged to care for. Nelly reveals her history and her involvement with the Earnshaw family to Lockwood. It transpires that her mother worked as a nursemaid to the Earnshaw children at Wuthering Heights and consequently Nelly grows up alongside Catherine and Hindley Earnshaw, and the orphan Heathcliff, this early interaction breaking down some of the social barriers between the children. The Earnshaw children befriend her, she works in the fields and prepares herself for 'anything that anybody would set me to'.[41] From the outset Nelly is aware of her marginal position and need to foster good relationships in order to maintain her security. Nelly wants to be indispensable to her master, she makes herself available and acts as a faithful servant. Her work and devotion are beyond reproach at surface level, but beneath is a woman who is intent on gaining a secure and safe future, using whatever method and resources she can manufacture.

Nelly is seemingly like many other servants who are reliant on the whims and fancies of their masters, but she is remarkable in that she ensures her masters and mistresses unwittingly become the architects of her success, at times at their own expense. Nelly creates the illusion of herself as the decent and reliable old retainer to the Earnshaw family, for whom she has worked for a number of years.[42] Jean Fernandez suggests Nelly is the personification of the 'respectable, literate, unwed,

[39] Brontë, p. 9.
[40] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53, (p. 47).
[41] Brontë, p. 35.
[42] Brontë, p. 33.

women servants' whose purpose in life is to care for the family and offer them herself in service throughout her life.[43] Fernandez also contends that this group of servants is an example of the integration required by a society keen to offer the values of 'thrift, sobriety and moderation' to the labour elite.[44] I consider, however, that for Nelly, this is a pretence and her true intention is to make herself indispensable to the Earnshaw and Linton families, and to gain property and power through her actions and in some instances her inaction.

Nelly's first role in the Earnshaw household is as a nurserymaid and then housemaid. Pride in her own ability as a housemaid evokes a memory of her old master Mr Earnshaw as Nelly considers the 'speckless purity of my particular care' a clean and spotless floor and shining utensils and mugs, he would have offered her a shilling and called her a 'cant lass'.[45] At that moment the memory of him and his love for Heathcliff, induces her to offer kindness and help to a rejected and dirty Heathcliff, her caring and loving nature as the faithful servant awakes in her a need to support and protect him from both Catherine and Hindley.

Nelly's position is vulnerable to both who is in charge of the household and how this 'master' behaves. When he becomes the new master of Wuthering Heights, Hindley dismisses Nelly Dean and Joseph to live in the 'back-kitchen' and to allow only himself and his wife to occupy the house.[46] Hindley's treatment of servants is neither fair nor kind, and he clearly wants them all in, what he considers to be, their proper place. Hindley, for now at least, dismisses the relationship he has with his lifelong servants, as the new master he abandons the empathy displayed by his father for

[43] Jean Fernandez, *Victorian Servants, class and the politics of literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 54.
[44] Fernandez, p. 55.
[45] Brontë, p. 55.
[46] Brontë, p. 46.

Nelly and Joseph and replaces it with indifference. Abbott views this act by Hindley, as replacing, Nelly, his childhood friend and foster-sister, with his new wife as he places her in the back-kitchen and assigns her to the status of servant, stating that Nelly has 'lost both class status and her familial role'.[47] Nelly's lack of power is evident, this moment may be considered the catalyst for Nelly to consider her own future and begin her scheme of self-protection, because it is apparent to her no-one else will secure her future.

Nelly's desire for an improved future and her devotion to the Earnshaw family is evident as she willingly accepts the role of nursemaid to Hareton Earnshaw, Hindley's first and only child. As soon as the child is born, she affectionately describes him as 'my bonny little nursling'.[48] Later Hindley's wife dies of consumption and he is distraught with grief, Nelly's dedication to him endures the tyranny and bad behaviour that manifests itself as a consequence of his loss. Unlike the other servants who falter under his oppression and leave the service of the Earnshaw family, Nelly remarks that it is only Joseph and herself who remain.[49] It is an expected and essential part of Nelly's role as servant to be loyal to her masters and their families. However, Nelly's loyalty and allegiances are granted to the people who are of most benefit to her goal of self-preservation and success. Therefore, her loyalties change, as she forms alliances with the rising stars of the Linton and Earnshaw family. Alongside her persistent loyalty to Hindley is her disapproval of the 'arrogant' young Catherine Earnshaw. Nelly admits 'I own I did not like her', and despite her criticism and attempts at modifying Catherine's wilful nature, Catherine remains loyal to her.[50] It is, however,

[47] Megan E, Abbott, 'The Servants Gaze: Nelly Dean's Rise to Power in Wuthering Heights'. Women's Rights Law Reporter, 18.2 (1997), 108-128, (p. 118).
[48] Brontë, p. 64.
[49] Brontë, p. 66.
[50] Brontë, p. 66.

Nelly who provides nursing care and compassion when Catherine suffers a delirious period after becoming caught in a storm. Nelly on this occasion considers herself to be ‘not a gentle nurse’ and eventually her charge is spirited away to Thrushcross Grange in the care of the Linton family.[51]

Nelly’s shifting loyalties and the way in which external forces play their part in shaping these loyalties are evident in Nelly’s transition from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange. She displays the bond and affection she feels for her ‘bonny little nursling’, Hareton, when at five years old she is compelled by the tempestuous Catherine Earnshaw to leave him and Wuthering Heights behind and follow her to Thrushcross Grange when she marries Edgar Linton.[52] Nelly refuses, and this results in a struggle to extract Nelly from Wuthering Heights. Her master Hindley Earnshaw orders her to leave because ‘he wants no women in the house’, conversely Edgar Linton offers her ‘munificent wages’ to work at Thrushcross Grange.[53] One master rejects her and the other offers money for the body of Nelly Dean, who becomes a piece of property that can be bought or rejected. Despite her desire to stay, Nelly appears to have no power or choice, she must follow her master’s command. Nelly laments in her sorrow as she thinks of Hareton and wonders if he will remember his Nelly Dean; ‘he was ever more than all the world to her, and she to him!’.[54] Nelly reveals not only her loyalty but tenderness and love for the baby she cares for from birth, but a stronger emotion overcomes her, that of her duty and the resolve of Catherine Earnshaw, who Nelly believes would be allowed ‘to trample us like slaves’ if it pleased her.[55] In this statement I believe Nelly is reflecting on her position as a

[51] Brontë, p. 88.
[52] Brontë, p. 89.
[53] Brontë, p. 89.
[54] Brontë, p. 89.
[55] Brontë, p. 89.

servant, and her fiercely held abhorrence of being classed or treated as a slave, is it therefore safe to consider slavery to have been her terror? The reference to slavery in *Wuthering Heights* is parallel to the heroine of *Jane Eyre,* who repeatedly rejects the label of slave when placed in a vulnerable position by her tyrants: John Reed, Edward Rochester and St John Rivers. Nelly uses the term in much the same way, she rejects it, but she is acknowledging that her position as a servant is dependent on her master's impulse on a particular day and on a particular circumstance, the security of her future employment is always at play.

Nelly resumes the role of faithful servant to the newly married Edgar and Catherine and so as 'not to grieve a kind master' learns to live peacefully alongside the others at Thrushcross Grange.[56] Underneath this façade, however, a sense of her own precarity lingers and the eruption of unpredictability into her ordered existence creates anxiety. Harmony is maintained until Heathcliff returns to the district and in doing so reignites emotions within the hearts of the family that ultimately culminates in tragedy. Nelly in her misguided and misplaced loyalty to Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, has a causative role to play in the events.

Heathcliff's return unsettles the household, and a troubled Nelly believes that it would have been 'better if he had remained away'.[57] His initial visit, and Edgar's petty attempt to reduce him to the position of servant, as discussed in earlier in the chapter, triggers a series of events that Nelly has no control over; she knows this will change an already precipitous situation. She understands the Lintons are simply soothing Catherine and are not as weak and lacking character as Catherine believes. Attempting to gain some control, that night she takes Catherine into her confidence

[56] Brontë, p. 92.
[57] Brontë, p. 98.

and tries to caution her on her behaviour towards the Lintons, Nelly uses her ability to change her demeanour, she speaks with Catherine more as an older sister, rather than a servant, she explains the consequences of her behaviour.[58] Catherine allows herself to share information with Nelly regarding the events between Heathcliff and Hindley Earnshaw, the gambling and his intention to reside at Wuthering Heights as a lodger. Nelly is collecting and processing this information to use for or against a situation. She is fearful of Heathcliff's visit because she has no control over him and knows he is capable of damaging her secure future in the Linton household, he is capable of taking Catherine away, if that happened, Nelly is unsure if she would be allowed to follow. She understands the chaos that shadows Heathcliff and is witness to the way in which this chaos negatively impacts Isabella, as has been previously explored.

There is a stubborn and obtuse aspect to Nelly's character, evident in her inaction in Heathcliff's act of revenge when he absconds with Isabella Linton. For Nelly this may have been a chance to redeem herself, but she fails, perhaps deliberately, she does not inform the family of Isabella's escape, rather holding her own counsel until someone else discovers Isabella's absence.[59] Her justification for not speaking the truth is because she does not want to upset her master, especially in his present state of distress. She is protecting herself from another catastrophe, providing Heathcliff with the time and space to escape with Isabella. An example of Nelly's attitude towards discretion comes in the guise of a letter from Isabella, now Mrs Heathcliff, to Nelly detailing the events of her elopement and her subsequent arrival at Wuthering Heights and seeks forgiveness from her family. At the end of the letter, Isabella implores Nelly not to tell anyone at Thrushcross Grange of the letter's

[58] Brontë, p. 98.
[59] Brontë, p. 131.

contents. However, as expected, the allegedly faithful Nelly promptly tells Edgar Linton.[60] Nelly is sent to Wuthering Heights to inform Isabella of Edgar's negative reply.

Nelly considers the approach she will take as she delivers Edgar's reply, her kindness appears for a fleeting moment as she attempts to soften the message for Isabella, but she is compelled by the scene that greets her to 'speak the truth at once'.[61] It is Heathcliff who commands Nelly's attention as she advises him of Catherine's mental and physical incapacity, Heathcliff implores Nelly to arrange a meeting with Catherine, Nelly now pleads for her mistress to be left in peace, she has witnessed Heathcliff's cruelty and understands his intention is to meet Catherine even if he has to kill Edgar. But Nelly is trapped, Heathcliff will not relent, she has met a power greater than herself, the physical and insane power of Heathcliff. He asks Nelly to be his friend as before and help him visit Catherine. Nelly submits and agrees to commit an act of treachery against her master and pass information between Heathcliff and Catherine.[62] James Hafley believes Nelly may have been forced to acquiesce but gives no indication of the force, but her action will see the demise of Catherine Earnshaw because her actions prevent Catherine's recovery.[63] Catherine and Heathcliff meet, Edgar discovers them clinging to each other in the bedroom, Catherine falls into a faint and Nelly in true sardonic fashion thinks to herself, it is better that Catherine 'should be dead, than lingering a burden, and a misery maker to all about her'.[64] Nelly is clearly shocked by the scene she has witnessed, however, the power Heathcliff holds over her remains and perhaps a sense of apprehension dwells inside Nelly at Heathcliff's propensity for violence and destruction. Is this a moment

[60] Brontë, p. 145.
[61] Brontë, p. 146.
[62] Brontë, p. 153.
[63] Hafley, p. 209.
[64] Brontë, p. 164.

when Nelly has overplayed her hand or will Catherine's death benefit Nelly and will she become indispensable to the Lintons?

The fragility of Catherine's life provides Nelly with an opportunity to reign supreme in her servant role, Catherine's daughter, named for her mother, is born and Catherine dies within hours. As the significance of the tragedy unfolds, Nelly ensures she is seen as a vital and faithful servant; she arranges a nursery and care for the baby and tends to her master in his grief. She also communicates with Heathcliff and arranges a moment for him to visit Catherine's dead body. Nelly speaks of the child, whom she describes as 'An unwelcome infant she was, poor thing!', remarking it did not matter how much the baby cried, the people around her are so distressed by Catherine's death, she is left alone for some hours without care.[65] As if to seal the disaster of her own making, Nelly twists a lock of hair from Heathcliff and Catherine together and places it in the locket around the dead woman's neck. Hafley labels Nelly the 'agent of the tragedy'.[66]

Catherine's death leaves Thrushcross Grange without a mistress, and this provides an opening for Nelly to gain further power and agency. Hafley observes that Nelly has already aspired to the status of mistress at Thrushcross Grange, seen when she orders another servant to take away Catherine's child when Isabella returns to Thrushcross Grange and is upset by the sight of the child.[67] Significantly, Nelly appears to not only take on the role of mistress but also differentiate herself from the other servants: 'I range the bell, and committed it to a servant's care'.[68] The death of Hindley Earnshaw and the subsequent loss of Wuthering Heights to Heathcliff exposes

[65] Brontë, p. 166.
[66] Hafley, p. 209.
[67] Hafley, p. 209.
[68] Brontë, p. 173.

the next generation of Earnshaws and Lintons to Nelly's gaze and care, they prove to be useful for Nelly's purpose of acquiring power.

Nelly is provided with opportunities to redeem herself from her previous misdemeanours to be a faithful servant to Edgar Linton. Nelly and young Catherine under duress from Heathcliff visit Wuthering Heights, here he reveals his plan to Nelly of arranging a marriage between Heathcliff and Isabella's son Linton to Catherine, thus securing the Linton family property for himself on the boy's death, she rejects the plot, out of loyalty to Edgar Linton.[69] Using her control and dominance of Catherine, Nelly stops any contact between Linton and Catherine, but eventually relents, which is an unexpected display of both affection and a softness towards the young girl.[70] But Nelly returns to her malicious form as she finds a bundle of letters exchanged between Catherine and Linton. She firmly intervenes and burns them, sending her own message to Linton to stop the correspondence. Nelly is in command, she has tried a gentle and caring approach but ultimately, her will to control the possibility of a marriage between the pair, exceeds the limits of her kindness.[71] But again Nelly relents, this behaviour is out of character considering her resolve and cunning concerning various other scenarios that have been equally as challenging. However, while Nelly is recuperating from a prolonged illness, Catherine visits Linton at Wuthering Heights, Catherine confesses this to Nelly and begs for her not to tell the secret to Edgar, and of course Nelly tells Edgar the truth. This is the act of a faithful servant defending her master's child, but ultimately protecting her own best asset, her continued employment at Thrushcross Grange.

[69] Brontë, p. 215.
[70] Brontë, p. 224.
[71] Brontë, p. 226.

Nelly the Narrator: Power and Agency

Nelly's role as a key narrative voice in *Wuthering Heights* is complex. On the one hand some critics have downplayed her role, focusing on Lockwood's frame narrative as the dominant and controlling voice. Carl R. Woodring merits Lockwood with continuing the story in Nelly's own words, 'only a little condensed' and argues that all of the narrative is filtered through Lockwood.[72] Wooding continues in this manner by suggesting that Nelly may not have specifically remembered who said what to whom many decades previously and that Lockwood has 'supplied the appropriate words.[73] The Wooding paper was written in 1957 and assumes that Lockwood, being an educated man, is impelled to write the history from his viewpoint. In comparison, Wooding states Nelly 'imprints' some areas of the narrative with her own viewpoints and disposition.[74] In contrast, Shunami argues that it is apparent that Lockwood 'acts as her filter' but 'the account is Nelly's'.[75]

My approach positions Nelly as an autonomous narrator whose voice is distinctive and whose perspective comes through clearly and strongly. Nelly recalls the history of the families from memory, this is an oral history, she is not recounting from her diary, notes or newspaper articles. Nelly recounts and places herself in the history because she was there, she witnessed the events, she adds authenticity and value to her account by this very fact. The retelling of history and stories using the mode of oral communication is passing on knowledge, creating an understanding and sharing your recollections of the event. In defence of Nelly Dean, she has no other

[72] Carl R. Woodring, 'The Narrators of Wuthering Heights', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11.4 (1957) 298-305 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044458> [accessed 28 September 2022] (p. 299).
[73] Woodring, p. 300.
[74] Woodring, p. 304.
[75] Gideon Shunami, 'The Unreliable Narrator in Wuthering Heights', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Mar., 1973, 27.4 (1973), 449-468 <https:// www.jstor.org/stable/2933519> [accessed 16 September 2022] (p. 464).

method at her disposal, but she has used this opportunity to create and confirm her own good behaviour and actions in such a harrowing and unhappy chain of events. I consider that an element of bias is evident in her narration. Nelly wants to be seen as the matriarch of the family and may be embellishing the story to lead Lockwood in this direction.

Fernandez proposes that Nelly is 'a mobile servant' whose narrative is possible because of her action to 'move in and out of public and private spaces' never allowing herself to be a 'character' within the narrative, she cannot be 'fixed' into a position by Lockwood or any another character.[76] This is reflected in her inability to be effectively categorised as a servant, she is many things in each corner of the narrative. Megan Abbott proposes that Nelly may have little agency as a servant but as a narrator has 'ultimate control' of the story and its outcome and suggests Nelly may be the source of the narrative. Abbott argues that Nelly creates the story and exposes what she ultimately 'makes the reader see'.[77] In addition to Abbott's observations, Bruce Robbins claims 'The teller of a tale holds the power'.[78] Nelly holds the power, Emily Brontë has given this meagre housemaid a voice to tell the story of the dysfunctional Earnshaw and Linton households. This is an unexpected and innovative action, the vision of the silent ghost of servants floating in the background as window dressing for a narrative is shattered by Brontë's Nelly Dean. Here is a woman of limited education and resources who is given the stage to tell the story as she wishes, with additions and deletions as she wishes. Nelly is centre stage, she is the one holding the power

[76] Fernandez, p. 65.
[77] Abbott, p. 108.
[78] Bruce Robbins, *The Servants Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), (p. 91).

of the story, she creates the illusion and the reader is persuaded to believe her because she is the faithful, if not silent, servant.

The reader is drawn into the web that Nelly, as the narrator, fashions for Lockwood, as she weaves the story of the events and people that form the novel. Thomas A. Volger suggests that Nelly has the 'authority' to narrate the story because she was a witness to the events and 'experienced it all'.[79] He also comments that Nelly tells the story without becoming part of it.[80] This analysis regards Nelly somewhat differently. I acknowledge her role as witness, but she is also given power and agency. She has a distinctive style of storytelling which she reveals to Lockwood, as she insists; 'if I am to follow my story in true gossip's fashion, I had better go on'.[81] Nelly's sentence holds a number of complex themes. She uses the words 'my story', for what she is about to reveal, setting herself front and centre, not just as a witness to events but an active participant and presenting the story as hers to tell. Secondly, she titles herself a gossip, this may be interpreted that her story has little weight, and she is simply relaying it as the village gossip would be expected to do, however a gossip can change and embellish a story, thus providing her with the avenue to control and create the story. These few words are in contrast to an exchange earlier in their discourse, as Lockwood fears 'she is not a gossip' and is impelled to encourage her to reveal the story.[82]

In addition to gaining access to the security offered by money and property, Nelly has accumulated a limited cultivated style of behaviour and the ability to read, she is vainly proud of this skill and is not too demure to embellish and declare her

[79] Thomas A. Volger, 'Story and History in *Wuthering Heights'*, in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Thomas A. Volger (New Jersey: Spectrum Books,1968), 78-99 (p. 83).
[80] Volger, p. 84.
[81] Brontë, p. 63.
[82] Brontë, p. 33.

capabilities. Lockwood's admiration for her behaviour and literacy is evident as he offers her compliments such as; 'no marks of the manners…peculiar to your class…you have thought a great deal more than the generality of servants think'.[83] This provokes a conceited response from Nelly as she declares her own literacy is admirable and she has 'read more than you can fancy…you could not open a book in this library I have not looked into'.[84] Gideon Shunami, expands on this consideration, as he is sceptical of Nelly's attempts to impress Lockwood with her wisdom and intellect. Shunami raises doubts, not only about the sincerity of her narrative, but if she would have had the time for learning after her 'various household duties, prolonged conversations with characters and ceaseless investigations of their activities'.[85] In addition Tytler believes Nelly to have a limited intellect and reveals this through her misleading narrative.[86] I acknowledge both Shunami and Tytler have doubts about her education and intellect, however, my view is Nelly wants to appear conversant with the family history, however, she also wants to embellish her own talents and intellectual capacity, this is because she wants to add authenticity and display her ability to observe the events, remember, and narrate the story. Moreover, these skills position her social status on a different level to that of a simple servant woman, to that of a valued member of the family, who has been provided with an education and learned the correct behaviours and manners associated with the gentry.

This is Nelly, who has many faces some loyal and loving, some spiteful and deceitful, yet she is prepared to disclose the dark and grimy history of her master and

[83] Brontë, p. 63.
[84] Brontë, p. 63.
[85] Shunami, p.463.
[86] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 (p. 48).

his family, to anyone who is devious enough to flatter and encourage her to continue with the flow of the narrative.

Nelly the Manipulator and Traitor

Inside Nelly Dean, the caring nursemaid, efficient housekeeper and memory keeper for the families, breathes another Nelly Dean. Brontë has chosen to present Nelly as a servant with the ability to assert power over her masters, she has given her a voice and the agency to act. I contend that Nelly uses these attributes to influence various situations that ensures her employment tenure and future security. Hafley claims the 'real greed' in Nelly is the motivation for her to progress her standing in the Earnshaw family.[87] Nelly considers herself to be on the same social level as the Earnshaws, she eats and socialises with the family, however, Heathcliff's arrival usurps her favoured position and subsequently she exerts power to harm the young boy. Her deliberate act of allowing Heathcliff to sleep his first night at Wuthering Heights, on the landing 'hoping it might be gone on the morrow', an act for which she is admonished and temporarily sent away from the house, illustrates this.[88] This exclusion, Hafley concludes, and the realisation 'she is not one of the Earnshaws', is the reason she despises Heathcliff. [89]

Nelly continues her search for advantageous alliances and Edgar Linton becomes a suitable subject. As the heir to Thrushcross Grange, Edgar Linton, is a viable husband for Catherine Earnshaw, he can provide a social position and financial security than her beloved Heathcliff, consequently Catherine allows Edgar to begin a

[87] Hafley, p. 202.
[88] Brontë, p. 37.
[89] Hafley, p. 202.

courtship. Accepting an opportunity to serve Hindley, Nelly is in attendance at their meetings together, additionally this allows her to observe them and gain information for her own devices. However, even in the clutches of Catherine Earnshaw, Nelly has sufficient agency to have a choice in at least some of the decisions in her life. Nevertheless, she is placed firmly both physically and verbally back into servanthood by Catherine, as she attempts to clean and dust the house in the presence of her mistress and her guests, she is in the room, however at her master's orders, so she can be a "third party" whenever Edgar Linton visits. Nelly is ever diligent in her duty, no matter what force she meets along the way.[90] This third-party role, indicates agency and choice, Nelly is now acting as a spy for Hindley Earnshaw. She has accepted this role because it is an instruction from her master, but chiefly because it provides an element of power for Nelly, who can filter the information, allow its direct passage to him or retain what she hears and sees, to use for her own gain and protection.

Although Nelly believes herself to be the devoted servant, she also considers the affect this has on her own security and future stability. Her initial response is to declare her allegiance to her master Edgar Linton, and she plans to watch Heathcliff and his scheming as she silently wishes for some intervention that can free the district of Heathcliff and bring peace back to the two houses.[91] Witnessing a confrontation between Catherine and Heathcliff and his explicit physical gestures towards Isabella, Nelly takes action and informs her master Edgar of Heathcliff's activities. Edgar tells him to leave the house, the eviction fails and the climax is Heathcliff leaves, Edgar is humiliated and Catherine distraught.[92] For her own intent in the chaos of the scene

[90] Brontë, p. 71. Catherine pinches Nelly's arm until she cries out, produces a bruise and a stern rebuke from her servant.
[91] Brontë, p. 107.
[92] Brontë, p. 115.

and for the protection of Edgar, Nelly admits she framed ‘a bit of a lie’.[93] Catherine instructs Nelly to tell Edgar that the sorry scene has made her very sick and she must not be driven to a distraught state again, yet her words are not received well by Nelly, she believes Catherine has the power to control her fits of anguish and she makes the decision not to pass this message to Edgar.[94] Nelly, however, reverts to her preferred servant style of acquiring knowledge about the family by eavesdropping on Catherine and Edgar’s conversation. Edgar defies Catherine to see Heathcliff again and she drops into a stupor for which Nelly appears to hold no regard or sympathy. Nelly, employs her cynical characteristic of filtering information, on this occasion she breaks Catherine’s secret as she reveals Catherine’s ability and intention to lose control of herself in Edgar’s presence.[95]

Nelly increasingly becomes a selective partisan, taking sides, making decisions about what to reveal and what to withhold, who to help and who to blame. She also constantly works to protect her own interests by excusing her own behaviour, deflecting blame onto others and trying to ensure that her status as faithful servant is preserved. This is seen in the sequence of events after Catherine locks herself away and refuses to eat for several days. Cynically and ultimately fatally, Nelly chooses not to pass this information on to Edgar. The balance of power between Nelly and Catherine has shifted, as Catherine has reverted to madness, while Nelly remains calm and fails to stop Catherine’s tortured performance. As an anxious Edgar finally discovers his wife’s demeanour, protecting herself Nelly tries to disguise her collusion,

[93] Brontë, p. 116.
[94] Brontë, p. 117.
[95] Brontë, p. 118.

diagnosing the behaviour as ‘it is nothing’, he admonishes Nelly and says he will deal with her later.[96]

Nelly’s pattern of self-preservation is seen in her subsequent argument with her master. When he accuses her of being heartless, she pleads that she is a faithful servant and exposes his preference for a quiet life in which he is not troubled by uncomfortable details. In a line that reveals her contempt for him, Nelly declares that ‘You had rather hear nothing about it, I suppose then, Mr Linton?’ With this Catherine rouses herself from her stupor, realising what Nelly has done, she accuses her of ‘playing traitor’.[97] However, Abbott suggests Edgar needs Nelly to watch Catherine despite her deceitful behaviour.[98] Tytler considers Nelly uses the protection provided by her mode of employment to allow herself the liberty she exercises over her own behaviour, he also believes during the times she is exposed for her failures, she ‘takes shelter in being a servant’.[99]

The encounter between the Lintons and Nelly betrays her position within the family. Nelly has behaved as an authoritarian mistress attempting to control a belligerent child, in this case Catherine, yet she has deliberately hidden and filtered facts and occurrences from her master’s knowledge, who enabled with this knowledge may have been able to manage the situation. She has tried to control the agenda and the consequences; her power play has failed. She also failed both the Lintons and her own reputation, what would have been handled delicately and positively by a capable servant was mismanaged, the situation was obviously beyond Nelly’s capabilities, because the people she tried to control did not behave as she wanted or expected, in

[96] Brontë, p. 127.
[97] Brontë, p. 128.
[98] Abbott, p. 126
[99] Tytler, ‘Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 (p. 49).

this instance she was neither a faithful nor diligent servant. It is highly likely that at this point Nelly feels a sense of panic and fear at the exposure of her deceit, she risks the loss of her employment and home, gaining another position in a household such as the Lintons would have been difficult without a 'character' and Nelly may face the humiliating fate of the workhouse. Despite the exposure Nelly continues with control, she continues to interfere and manipulate the situation in the house.

Nelly is a defiant servant, her deliberate actions of ignoring directions have a significant effect on her master's health and security. I consider her intimate knowledge of the family influences the way she behaves and acts as a servant. Tytler considers she is disobedient to Hindley Earnshaw, as he directs her to keep Catherine and Heathcliff locked out of Wuthering Heights overnight, this however may be seen as her concern for their welfare and health.[100] But that decision was made with her knowledge of Catherine and Heathcliff's close relationship. An example of her questionable ethics is displayed as Catherine Earnshaw reveals her desire to marry Edgar Linton and of her powerful love for Heathcliff, as Heathcliff hides from sight and listens to the conversation. Nelly hears him leave but she is aware he has heard enough of the conversation to create a fissure between the lovers. Nelly chooses not to warn Catherine of his presence, but rather allows herself a moment of doubt, this may appear to save her own integrity, as Catherine questions her as to the level of knowledge Heathcliff has of love and her feelings, Nelly replies 'I have no reason that he should not know, as well as you'.[101] However a moment later Nelly whispers to Catherine that Heathcliff did indeed hear some of this crucial conversation.[102] James Hafley quotes V.S. Pritchett as he names Nelly as the 'obdurate architect of the

[100] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 (p. 47).
[101] Brontë, p. 81.
[102] Brontë, p. 83.

tragedy', because if she had told Catherine that Heathcliff had overheard the confession, the 'tragic climax' would have been avoided.[103]

Tytler considers Nelly reveals on many occasions throughout the text her 'lies, secretiveness and other forms of dishonesty' that brings into focus her 'lack of moral integrity'.[104] He also proposes these traits reflect her role as a servant and furthermore she 'drifted into' the job and consequently only wanted to work at Thrushcross Grange or Wuthering Heights. Does this imply that Nelly does not view servanthood as a choice or a professional calling, rather does she see her role as an avenue to use power and position for personal progress? I suggest Nelly transitions between two poles; one as a manipulator for the purpose of her own security and secondly loyal servant, this is because her conscience tells her that is the correct behaviour of a servant, Nelly may continue to be influenced by the example set by her mother as a young girl. Nelly can be initially disadvantaged by a chain of events that she has no control over, but she eventually benefits from these events, however, as she examines her conscience, she may incorrectly and conveniently perceive herself as doing the right thing. This questions her ability to make decisions that are good for her masters because these two factors are always at play. Hafley reminds us of Nelly's fleeting 'harsh judgement on herself', as she momentarily considers her actions to be that of a neglectful and untruthful servant and she was the cause of the sorrows and 'all the misfortunes of her masters'.[105] Nelly may have acknowledged this failing, but it certainly did not change the course of events that she precipitated. Nelly abused the power that was erroneously given to her by a dysfunctional and highly emotional set of masters and

[103] Hafley, p. 200.
[104] Tytler, 'Masters and Servants in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 44-53 (p. 48).
[105] Hafley, p. 212.

mistresses, who thought they were being attended to by a faithful servant, but were being manipulated by Nelly Dean, the misguided and faithless servant.

The creation of Nelly Dean is one of Emily Brontë's triumphs, for this seemingly straightforward and typical character becomes as complex and mysterious as the novel itself. This upends stereotypical nineteenth century literary representations of servants as silent, loyal, and one-dimensional. Nelly is in many ways the perfect servant, attending to the physical needs of her masters and navigating the complex power dynamics of two households successfully. But she is also given complex motivations, seeking to secure her own position by manipulating others. She leverages a seemingly vulnerable and powerless position as servant into a position of considerable trust and power. In surviving the many deaths and reversals of fortune that her masters encounter, Nelly also lives to tell their story. In telling this story she is also sharing her own triumphant rise, revealing far more than she intends or perhaps is consciously aware of, of her own role in the unfolding events. Whether we regard her as villain or victor, Nelly has a voice and agency that so many other servant figures lack and this works to disrupt hierarchies of power and position.

Zillah: The Expendable Servant

Nelly's employment with the Lintons means she does not have direct knowledge of the events at Wuthering Heights. She, therefore, engages with Zillah who is employed by Heathcliff as housemaid at Wuthering Heights. This 'stout housewife' rescues a terrified and confused Lockwood from the jaws of hounds and the cruelty of Heathcliff, her mode of handling Lockwood is gruff, she pours water on him to revive him and

finds him a bed in this unwelcoming household.[106] She tells Lockwood she has only lived at Wuthering Heights for ‘a year or two’, but the strange happenings have failed to stir her curiosity for the source of the trauma.[107] But her good deed is condemned by Heathcliff as he discovers Lockwood in Catherine’s old room, he threatens to have the culprit thrown out of the house, Lockwood admits it was Zillah, suggesting she wanted to find out if the room was haunted.[108] Heathcliff continues his cursing of Zillah, her reaction is to lift the corner of her apron and ‘heave an indignant groan’ at the admonishment she receives.[109]

Although Zillah is the fount of her knowledge about the events at Wuthering Heights, Nelly describes Zillah ‘as a narrow minded, selfish woman’, this is because she was instructed not to care for Cathy and dutifully and reluctantly follows that order.[110] Despite her pity for Cathy, Zillah’s reason for her lack of help was she ‘didn’t wish to lose my place’.[111] Zillah may be considered selfish and deceitful; she is accused of leaving her duties and visiting the local town in Heathcliff’s absence; this, however, can hardly be considered a capital offence in comparison to Nelly’s treachery.[112] Nelly the housemaid has a different ambition for her future, whereas Zillah has a dim focus for her prospects, this is evident in her comments to Nelly. Zillah alludes to her position in life as poor, as are Cathy and Nelly, adding she is ‘saving a little’, this must infer she considers her future and the money she may need to support herself when and if she cannot work.[113] However, Zillah is as vulnerable as any other servant working in conditions and situations created by unstable and volatile

[106] Brontë, p. 18.
[107] Brontë, p. 19.
[108] Brontë, p. 26.
[109] Brontë, p. 30.
[110] Brontë, p. 292.
[111] Brontë, p. 293.
[112] Brontë, p. 237.
[113] Brontë, p. 295.

employers. As with the others in this household their employment may be curtailed for the slightest perceived indiscretion or mistake. Added to this is an aspect of jealousy from Nelly, whose place she takes in the care of those remaining at Wuthering Heights. Zillah is employed by Heathcliff, with whom Nelly conducts a tenuous and unpredictable relationship throughout the novel. Eventually Zillah leaves her employment, there is no indication of her fate, she is, at Heathcliff's request, replaced by Nelly.[114] Zillah disappears from the pages, Brontë disposes of her. She has executed her role as an informant to Nelly and creates questions about the fate of housemaids who grow too old to perform their duties. Zillah performed her function and is lost from sight, thus Brontë makes her simply another servant. Zillah is certainly given a voice and a personality, but does not transcend her role as Nelly does. Emily Brontë could be reverting to a more stereotypical depiction of a servant with Zillah, or her exit from the novel could be regarded as another moment of triumphant power from Nelly.

Joseph: Servant of God

In a different way to Nelly, Joseph is simultaneously a loyal and disruptive presence in the novel, a man of God whose faith both leads him to perform his duties faithfully but also ensures a radical world view in which only God is master and earthly masters are to be served but also encouraged in the way of the Lord. James Quinnell argues that Joseph is seen by many readers as the object of 'satire and ridicule'. He also suggests that Nelly's narrative concerning him is incorrect.[115] Quinnell quotes

[114] Brontë, p. 309.

[115] James Quinnell. ''It is well that he does remain there': The Importance of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights'*, Brontë Studies, 43.3 (2018),198-208, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1080/14748932.2018.1464800> (p. 198).

Marianne Thormählem, as she describes Joseph as a 'caricature of a Calvinist'.[116] Brontë depicts Joseph as a hardworking, loyal servant, who is consumed with a religious passion and who is prone to uttering exhortations praising God. An example of his religious appetite is the three-hour sermon he gives to the young and disgruntled Earnshaw children, as the measure of his ability to preach the Lord's word.[117] I consider him to be the moral conscience of the narrative. Tytler comments that despite her many admonishments and abuse of Joseph, Catherine thought of him an 'utterly reliable servant', she relates this during her delusional episode; she recalls his diligence in waiting late into the night for her to come home, so he can secure the gate.[118] Quinnell sees Joseph as the 'guardian of the house' especially when the other characters are flitting in and out, he is 'the last man standing' at Wuthering Heights.[119] However, Tytler also states that Joseph is considered by some academics to be a 'fundamentally unsympathetic character'.[120] In exploring Joseph as a significant servant figure in *Wuthering Heights*, I foreground both his beliefs and function in order to advance my argument about the novel's expansion of servant roles and characters beyond the stereotypical and silent.

Joseph is described by Lockwood as a 'very old man' though 'hale and sinewy', Joseph's first recorded words are pleading for the 'Lord's help', although Lockwood feels assured this was not directed at himself.[121] His 'vinegar faced' words, in their next meeting, are spoken in the Yorkshire dialect so suited to this churlish old man.[122] Quinell implies Nelly's desire to accentuate Joseph's dialect in her narrative is

[116] Quinnell, p. 199.
[117] Brontë, p. 21.
[118] Graeme Tytler 'The Presentation of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights', Brontë Studies*, 43.3 (2018),188-197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2018.1464799> (p. 195).
[119] Quinnell, p. 199.
[120] Tytler, 'The Presentation of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights'*, *Brontë Studies*, 43.3 (2018),188-197 (p. 188).
[121] Brontë, p. 4.
[122] Brontë, p. 9.

deliberate; it places a barrier of 'snobbery and distain' as a signal of her perception of the class distinction between them.[123] Irene Wiltshire observes that the dialect given to each character by Brontë is dependent on their particular 'station in life' and on their ambitions, however, Wiltshire is correct when she notes that all the Yorkshire bred participants would have used their local voice, and I would add to this, the use of particular words and names peculiar to the region and district along with phrases and intonations.[124]

For Joseph, what he perceives as his Christian duty will always come before earthly relationships, even those towards his earthly 'masters'. Joseph fails to offer kindness and hospitality to those he regards as weak and failing. I suggest Joseph lives by a high moral code and finds it difficult to sympathise with those whom he considers to have made grave errors of judgement and conduct, because they do not follow the religious guidance and moral code prescribed by the church or in this case himself. Judith Struchiner, reminds us that the Earnshaws and Lintons are 'on the broad road to damnation' and Joseph who has given the Earnshaws sixty years of service, believes he is the only one who can set them on the right road again.[125]Tytler notes it is his religious fervour that has powered his loyalty to the Earnshaw family since the 1740s.[126] Joseph displays the continuity of his loyalty to the Earnshaws by his treatment of Hareton, he ensues the child is safely put to bed while Hindley is too drunk or crazed to care what happens to him, his tenderness and care is described by Quinnell as an avenue to reconsider Joseph's character.[127] Joseph indulges the boy,

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[123] Quinnell, p. 200.
[124] Irene Wiltshire Speech in '*Wuthering Heights*: Joseph's Dialect and Charlotte's Emendations', *Brontë Studies*, 30.1 (2005),19-29, <https://doi.org/10.1179/147489304x18821> (p. 19).
[125] Judith Stuchiner, 'The Servant Speaks: Joseph's Version of Wuthering Heights', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews,* 26.3 (2013), 191-196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2013.805111> (p. 191).
[126] Tytler, 'The Presentation of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights'*, *Brontë Studies*, 43.3 (2018),188-197 (p. 190).
[127] Quinnell, p. 203.

because his is ‘the head of the old family’, he teaches him to have ‘pride in his name’, this is in contradiction to Joseph allowing Hareton to behave against the moral code Joseph worships, however, he blames Heathcliff for Hareton’s downfall.[128]

Acting as the loyal servant, no matter who titles themselves as his master, is Joseph’s burden. When Heathcliff instructs him to go to Thrushcross Grange to collect Linton, Nelly describes the self-righteous expression on Joseph’s face, dressed in his Sunday best clothing with a resolute manner as he bangs his stick down and proclaims ‘Noa!’ at Edgar’s refusal to allow him to take the boy.[129] Tytler considers this act can also be viewed as Joseph executing his master’s will because of his fear of Heathcliff’s vengeful temper, rather than loyalty.[130] However, for a moment in the narrative, a fracture in his loyalty is evident; Heathcliff demands respect from the servants for a feeble and complaining Linton, Joseph, therefore, cannot show the distain he feels for the boy for fear of retribution from Heathcliff.[131] Isabella similarly does not gain his respect or kindness; in her letter to Nelly she complains of Joseph’s rudeness and his ‘malignant squint’ as he peers at her through the candle lit night.[132]

Struchiner views Joseph as a man of ‘emotional complexity’ who provides an example of the ‘life for an eighteenth-century domestic servant’.[133] Consequently for Joseph, life is not all work and Bible thumping, rather at times he allows himself a little pleasure in his life; as Nelly finds him comfortable next to the fire, with an ale, oatcakes and his tobacco pipe at hand, this leisure time is at the cost of a weeping Linton calling for Joseph to stoke the fire with coal, Joseph ignores his pleas and continues to enjoy

[128] Brontë, p. 197.
[129] Brontë, p. 202.
[130] Tytler, ‘The Presentation of Joseph in *Wuthering Heights’*, *Brontë Studies*, 43.3 (2018),188-197 p. 191.
[131] Brontë, p. 209.
[132] Brontë, p. 137.
[133] Stuchiner, p. 191.

his pipe.[134] He may have not responded as his personal time may not have been honoured and he 'took' the time. He was probably tired, his physically demanding work on the farm may have exhausted him, Joseph is now in his eighth decade and deservedly needs rest. This absence of care may also be considered that his disregard for Linton was because he was not Earnshaw blood or his master.

Joseph's faith in the Earnshaw family is tested almost to the limit: when at Cathy's insistence, Hareton digs an area of garden for planting, in the process Joseph's currant and gooseberry bushes are dug out and replaced with a flower bed. Joseph is infuriated, his tirade of threats to leave the house and take his property and books to the garret are on this occasion momentarily heard, but in true Earnshaw and Heathcliff style the situation quickly deteriorates into them fighting and screaming at each other about money, property and power and Joseph is ignored.[135] Quinnell views Joseph's threats as an opportunity to place himself in the 'quiet contemplation' he would have in the attic surrounded by his books, and in pursuit of this wish, he is prepared to leave his duties as a servant behind.[136] His outrage is not simply about the destruction of the bushes, Joseph is wounded by Hareton's actions and is fearful of his closeness to Catherine, perhaps he is jealous that Hareton, who he cared for, has another interest, another person to trust and someone for whom Joseph has little respect, he adds to her damnation as he says she has bewitched Hareton.[137] Joseph is clearly exasperated as he watches his master weaken and with it the disintegration of any fragment of normality at Wuthering Heights.

[134] Brontë, p. 236.
[135] Brontë, pp.317-320.
[136] Quinnell, p. 202.
[137] Brontë, p. 319.

Nelly considers Joseph's purpose in life is to throw scorn and ridicule on the souls of the sinners who inhabit the countryside, this is demonstrated as the servants from Wuthering Heights, apart from Nelly and Joseph, are driven away by Hindley's appalling behaviour, she states; Joseph's intent and 'vocation is to be where he had plenty of wickedness to reprove'.[138] This may appear to suggest a conflict between his duty as a servant and the duty he offers to God. I believe he considers them as one and the same, he is doing God's work on earth to save his master's soul and at the same time to ensure their financial success on earth, he is caring for their land and property. However, Nelly does consider Joseph has at least one redeeming characteristic; while she attempts to convince Isabella of Heathcliff's tyranny, she relates Joseph's description of the scenario between Hindley and Heathcliff, Isabella rejects the story, but in defense of Joseph and possibly to add credence to her tale; Nelly concedes him to be 'an old rascal, but no liar'.[139]

As devastation slices through the Earnshaws and Lintons family and sorrow cloaks him, Joseph continues to toil in the fields, he takes livestock into Gimmerton for sale and ensures the estate functions despite the neglect of his masters. Struchiner reflects on the class system that supports this devotion and requires the 'unquestionable loyalty of its servants'.[140] Joseph's loyalty to the continuity of the Earnshaws and Wuthering Heights is evident, as he rejoices at the moment of Heathcliff's death, that 'the ancient had been restored to their rights'.[141]

I suggest Joseph is ignored and dismissed not because of the dialect that flavours his words, but because his voice is disregarded, his invocation of hell and

[138] Brontë, p. 66.
[139] Brontë, p. 104.
[140] Struchiner, p. 195.
[141] Brontë, p. 335.

damnation appear to have little significance for the recipients of his vengeance. His fate seems to be dismissed as a religious zealot; however, Joseph survives when all around him fall. I conclude Joseph remains in his post out of loyalty to the Earnshaw family and Wuthering Heights, despite his desire to retreat to the attic, I suggest he has nowhere else to go, a man of his advanced age, will possibly not secure a job in another household, therefore, he suffers under the same trepidation that the other servants at Wuthering Heights hold; that of a fragile and uncertain future at the command of an unstable employer.

Conclusion

Nelly Dean, purveyor of truth and lies, is at the heart of *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly is no ordinary servant. In her, Emily Brontë has created a servant who makes strategic moves to enhance her own position and power. Nelly executes this ambition under the guise and framework of a nineteenth-century rural housemaid. Merely saying this however, underestimates the damage she commits in the name of service and respect. Her manipulation and treachery are in direct conflict with the facade of the faithful servant she displays to the families she serves. It may be contended that the stability of her employment and home was precarious and dependent on the goodwill and temper of her master and Nelly had little choice but to commit indiscretions to protect her way of life. Brontë gives notice to the masters of these households that their servants have voice and agency, Nelly is the servant who has ambition and emotion and they sit just below the surface waiting for release to wreak havoc or peace. However, alongside Nelly is the equally manipulating and treacherous Heathcliff, whose journey through life is measured by his cyclical rising and falling through the class system of master and servant. Heathcliff continues this cycle by

inflicting the same fate on Hareton and Hindley, as they experience being diminished by the power of their master.

Joseph the servant displays his faith to God and family, toiling in the fields and attempting to provide a stable background to the machinations of the decaying families of Linton and Earnshaw. His faith drives him onward, his devotion to God comes first above his master, he is willing to display his faith as he chastises his masters and his fellow servants for their depraved and faithless lives. The prospect of freedom urges on the proud and privileged Isabella as she realises marriage and gender has stripped her of power, when she suffers the ignominious fate of physical, financial and intellectual servitude at the hands of Heathcliff, her husband. But Brontë releases Isabella into freedom and motherhood and returns her power as a woman. Emily Brontë offers a glimmer of hope for the future for these desolate families; she leaves the reader with Hareton and Cathy the last generation of Lintons and Earnshaws. But standing in plain sight is Nelly Dean, who appears to have achieved her ambition as she holds control over the estate and household.[142] In Nelly, Emily Brontë creates a servant figure who not only rejects the silence of the typical servant, but who uses her skills and ambition to shape the lives of those around her and secure her own future.

[142] Brontë, p. 309.

Conclusion

To twenty-first century audiences, servants are a familiar feature of English costume drama. From Rose Buck in *Upstairs Downstairs* to Mr Carson in *Downton Abbey,* these servants not only provide part of the period backdrop, but are also given voices and narratives of their own.[1] 'Downstairs' is as important as 'upstairs' in these contemporary re-imaginings of the past. Julia Nash writes that, likewise, modern adaptations of novels from writers such as Jane Austen, give ‘greater visibility’ to servants than the original narratives.[2] Autumn de Wilde's 2020 *Emma* is a case in point, with the servants in the film made visible as they move screens, pick up clothes, and gently scold their masters and mistresses.[3] In de Wilde's film the servants are mostly silent, fulfilling a role or a function, and relying on their expressions to convey emotions and reactions.

This points to the lack of visibility of servants in the nineteenth-century novel. Anne Brontë’s novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* provides an example of this:

> Presently, however, the door was gently opened and someone entered the room. I trusted it was only a servant, and did not stir.[4]
>
> ...the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy from the cupboard in the black oak side-board...[5]

[1] *Upstairs, Downstairs*, created by Jean Marsh, Eileen Atkins, John Hawkesworth, and John Whitney (ITV, 1971-1975); *Downton Abbey*, created by Julian Fellowes (ITV, 2010-2015).
[2] Julie Nash, *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge: 2017), p. 115.
[3] *Emma*, dir. by Autumn de Wilde (Focus Features and Universal Pictures, 2020).
[4] Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 10.
[5] Anne Brontë, p. 158.

The first quotation dismisses, silences, and ignores the servant, no engagement, conversation or acknowledgement is deemed necessary by the protagonist. The expectation is that the mistress does not need to do anything, just wait to hear or watch the servant. The second quote acknowledges the servant has performed a function; however, the black oak side-board receives more description and focus than the servant. This scene typifies the indifference displayed towards the servant characters in most nineteenth-century fiction. The invisibility within the performance of servanthood directed my attention to how the representation of fictional servant life compared with the reality of working as a servant and to whether novelists during the early to mid-Victorian period depicted their servant characters in a similar framework.

To understand reality compared to the fictional representation of servants, and inspired by historical theories of the importance of the history from below, I researched newspaper, national and county archives in the UK searching for job descriptions and advertisements, letters, estate and census records and diaries concerning the employment of servants. I looked at the household management manuals produced for employers and servants, biographies and scholarly articles. Using this information, I examined the reality of working as a servant in Victorian England. I accessed an array of opinions on the type of work and treatment experienced by servants. This historical analysis forms Chapter One of the thesis. Opinions change and dim with time but the following two quotations reveal the purpose of servant life. Kathryn Ledbetter quotes from *Common Sense for Housemaids* published in 1853 as a guide for mistresses as well as housemaids:' the housemaid exists solely to achieve her most important task, that of cleaning the house from top to bottom so she can gasp with satisfaction the words "Sublime"'.[6] A more critical viewpoint is heard as Bruce Robbins quotes

[6] Kathryn Ledbetter, 'Regulating Servants in Victorian Women's Print Media' *Women, Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1839-1900s: The Victorian Period*, ed. by Alexis Easley et al. (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 32-45. <https://doi-org/10.1515/9781474433921-066> (p.32).

Thorstein Veblen, who observes 'the chief use of servants is the evidence they afford of the master's ability to pay'.[7]

In my Introduction, I highlighted the dearth of scholarship about servant characters in nineteenth-century novels. Chapters Two and Three of my thesis contend that Charlotte and, particularly, Emily Brontë's representations of servants are radical for the period because they allowed many of their servant figures to have a voice, autonomy, and independence of thought and actions. The Brontës challenged perceived and accepted representations of servants. Some of the Brontë characters were controlled and manipulated by their masters' actions, while some protagonists created scenarios of deceit and self-interest. In this framework the Brontës shaped characters that exemplified their opinion and knowledge of contemporary social and Christian morals and ethics. Using key issues pertinent to contemporary Victorian political reform, the Brontës wrote of slavery, gender imbalance and enfranchisement, they created awareness and public focus on issues that were relevant to the social and revolutionary change sweeping Europe at the time. The Brontës allowed their characters to exemplify a time of change, of radical social reform and the moment a servant was given voice.

The servants of *Jane Eyre* are treated and presented differently to the invisible servants of most nineteenth-century fiction. They are visible characters who have names and, with the exception of Grace Poole, mostly occupy a space because of their servant function. Their attitudes and outlook are a product of their social and cultural position. They are kept in place in front of their master; however this group of servants do not have the ability to rise above this position, they are static and will remain in place. Charlotte Brontë does not give insights into their personal lives when

[7] Robbins. p. 16.

they are not functioning as a servant. This is because the story is filtered through Jane who rejects the label of servant, she considers herself a lady who is educated and differentiates herself from the servants. Her first-person narrative keeps them in their place, she does not have the capacity or desire to see them outside their place. This contrasts with the more radical aspects of the novel which is Jane's rejection of tyranny and slavery and the trap set by Rochester for her servitude.

Wuthering Heights is even more radical than *Jane Eyre*. It too is embedded in a discourse of the importance of defending your freedom in the face of tyranny. The depiction of Jane Eyre and Heathcliff have similarities, both have a fundamental rejection of tyranny, and both rise from their positions and class. Heathcliff, however, rises to fall again. Jane treats people consistently, behaving like the lady she believes herself to be, and her journey is ultimately one of upward mobility. The servants of *Wuthering Heights* also battle between slavery and servitude. They, however, are given the opportunity for freedom and autonomy and are given a voice that extends well beyond what Charlotte Brontë affords her servant characters.

The contrasting visibility and invisibility of the servant figures of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* is evident in the extent to which they convey their opinions and complaints about their masters or mistresses. Nelly Dean, for example, has voice and agency, the power to criticise her master, the power to take over the narrative itself. Similarly, Joseph is never afraid to scold or convey his opinion of his master's behaviour directly to them in the presence of other servants and masters. The irascible and faithful Joseph depicts the servant who is unafraid of the consequences of his opinion and voice. This differs from Bessie and Miss Abbot in *Jane Eyre,* who dare not reveal their opinion or feelings directly to Mrs Reed because of their fear of dismissal. In contrast, the servants of *Wuthering Heights* shape our views and knowledge of the masters. The formation of Catherine Earnshaw's character and behaviour is entirely

reliant on Nelly Dean, and much of the readers' knowledge of Heathcliff, Hindley, Edgar, and Hareton is similarly shaped by her account.

My thesis highlights the previously invisible characters of the novels. Although I write of Grace, Jane, and Nelly, my focus is also on the many other servants such as Leah, Sam or Robert who do not get as much time on the page. I ask why Sophie, the French speaking nurse, is reserved about revealing her past. I acknowledge Sarah, the silent servant at Gateshead, who Brontë names but offers no voice. I question where Zillah goes to when she leaves Wuthering Heights. I have searched scholarly articles, books, and websites, but these servants remain invisible and lacking in critical commentary. By engaging with these invisible servants, I propel them to the forefront, giving them the voice, they deserve.

In both the historical record and in scholarship about the literary representation of servants there is more work to be done. The incidents of sexual abuse suffered by male and female servants, the babies removed from their mothers at birth and the incidences of infanticide, and the ensuing consequences and punishments, and how this impacted on their future lives are all aspects of the historical record in need of a more focused and thorough analysis. Likewise, a similar excavation is needed of servant figures in other nineteenth century narratives. A starting point would be Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* with its combination of silent servants and the loyal servant Rachel who chastises and comforts her mistress. In profiling servants who are both silent and who speak loudly and unabashedly I have hopefully paved the way for future analyses. Above all, I have shown the servants of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* to be both complex and ordinary, as are all human beings.

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