

The Silent Strategy of Self-Representation in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*

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Introduction

The question of how one finds one's own voice in writing has long been a central issue in literary criticism of the novels of Charlotte Brontë. It has been particularly important since feminist critics started to read her novels as representing a woman's struggle to speak out, since they began to reconsider the passionate and repressive intensity of the heroines, once censured by many critics as that of egotism, full of 'hunger, rebellion and rage'. Even if Brontë did not intend to represent the suppressed voices of all Victorian women at the time of her writing, there is no doubt that she did try to convey in her work what belongs to her ideas and to her own voice.

We can see this in her statement on her own writing, 'Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it in, I have no business to publish' (Barker, 206). For her way of saying it, Brontë chose the form of autobiographical fiction, in which she could fully depict an inner life and thought as well as the history of a life. *Jane Eyre*, Brontë's first published book, was described by herself as 'a woman's autobiography' (Barker, 243), and her other novels, *The Professor* and *Villette*, can be read as autobiographical fictions. Through this style of autobiographical writing she believed she could achieve 'Truth and Nature', and, according to her letters, her works are aimed to 'attain, one day, the power of speaking the language of conviction in the accents of persuasion' (Barker, 202-3).

It seems, however, that Brontë's 'power of speaking the language of conviction' came to falter in her last novel. Her first published book *Jane Eyre* and her final book *Villette* are both written in the form of a woman's autobiography, but there is a striking difference between these novels in terms of the power of 'voice'. *Jane Eyre* is widely acknowledged to have a loud 'voice' that speaks for itself, but *Villette* is filled with 'silence'. This derives from the difference between the heroines' ways of narrating, that is, the convincing narrative by the confident narrator Jane and the withheld narrative by the unreliable narrator Lucy. Yet, this distinction of 'voice' stems not only from a difference in the characters of the heroines; it seems rather that it is caused by different narrative strategies in Brontë's autobiographical writing.

In comparison with *Jane Eyre*, we can see that Brontë made a change to her new autobiographical fiction *Villette*. First, *Villette* does not profess to be an autobiography, while *Jane Eyre* clearly does so, as its subtitle 'An Autobiography' indicates. Secondly, in publishing *Villette*, Brontë requested anonymity, refusing to make use of her pseudonym 'Currer Bell', although this stipulation was not fulfilled in the event of publication. Obviously, Brontë was worried about her image in the world of her readers.² Not only was she concerned with the success of her writing, but, I think, she was also concerned with misconceptions caused by her fictional autobiography. At the time of the publication of *Jane Eyre*, she was, in most cases, equated with the heroine Jane, as one of the reviews typically comments, 'Jane Eyre professes to

be an autobiography, and we think it likely that in some essential respects it is so. If the authoress has not been, like her heroine, an oppressed orphan, a starved and bullied charity-school girl, and a despised and slighted governess..., at all events we fear she is one to whom the world has not been kind.' (Barker, 193) Because of Jane's strong personal voice speaking her intense feelings and emotions, and furthermore, because of the quasi-autobiographical technique using first-person pronouns to narrate, the heroine is easily identified with a particular individual, that is, the author herself. However, what Brontë aimed at in her novels was to represent 'Truth and Nature', not to provide simply a portrait of herself. She did not want to fall into the 'danger of repeating himself' (Barker, 169). It might be possible, then, to see the 'silence' in *Villette* as Brontë's strategy to avoid such a reductive representation of selfhood.

Since these two novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, have some similarities in their fictional techniques, they have been often compared in criticism. Yet, Lucy's passivity and Brontë's anonymity has largely been seen as a strategy for the author as a female writer to gain 'power' to express herself. Even Lucy's reticence have been seen as a means to make Brontë's own 'voice' heard.³ I rather think to the contrary that, in shifting to *Villette* Brontë tries to make herself totally absent from the text, considering the fact of her particular need for anonymity, and that she tries to create a more complicated character in Lucy Snowe. What Brontë sought to represent is, I think, a subjectivity which is something more than a 'private' self. From *Jane Eyre* to *Villette*, Brontë's involvement with the text changes and, in the process of making herself absent from her novel, she comes to abandon her own authority within the text. Furthermore, I think that her strategy of absence or 'silence', in fact, can be even traced back to her first published novel *Jane Eyre*. In the following argument, I would like to show how the self of the protagonists is represented in Brontë's novels and how the author can be seen to be involved with her own texts. I should like to compare *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and especially focus on 'silence' in both of these novels.

1. From *Jane Eyre* to *Villette*: Silence and Textuality

Besides the similarity in their fictional technique by which the heroines tell about their history of life, both novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, have in common their narrative mode. These novels both treat the formative years in the heroines' life, from childhood to adolescence, and both heroines, Jane and Lucy, achieve a socially stable position at the end, along with the self-discipline and self-determination appropriate for adulthood. In other words, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* have a typical aspect of the novel as *Bildungsroman*. Jane, who was a rebellious and unsociable girl, finally achieves a domestic end by becoming Mrs Rochester, while Lucy, an orphan without any ties of family or close relatives, achieves a professional end by becoming a school-teacher in a foreign country. Both heroines think much about what their own self is to be at every phase of their life, as we can see in their self-questioning, such as in Jane's continual reflection, 'What shall I do — what shall I do?' (JE 47), or, Lucy's self-questioning words on her departure from London, 'Whence did I come? Whither should I go?' (V 107) Their lives are indeed journeys, searching for their way of being and their 'vocation', and this exploring process, both in their society and in their identity, constitutes the typical plot of a *Bildungsroman*.

Yet, in point of fact, while both Jane and Lucy do attain their final 'vocation' in the end, their social positions turn out to be rather different. In *Jane Eyre*, there is a possibility left on the part of Jane that she can be accepted and integrated into the English social system, by becoming a member of the upper class that Mr Rochester belongs to. On the other hand, Lucy seems not to be incorporated into any social system, because she cannot be accepted even in the Catholic world where she has now made up her mind to live. Lucy decides to escape from Mme Beck's pensionnat and fails to marry M. Paul, who is the only Catholic person who understands her and tries to be reconciled with her. Lucy is thus totally alone in this foreign world, with no hope of return to English society, as is represented in the Bretton (the name associated with 'Britain') family's estrangement from Lucy.

If we can assume that one of the common grounds to qualify a story as that of the *Bildungsroman* lies in 'a belief that the self, however isolated or unruly, must be integrated into the community' (Dolin, xix), or, in its realisation 'to bring harmony "to the individual and to society"' (Moretti, 32), then *Villette*, unlike *Jane Eyre*, is a story which frustrates the typical pattern of the *Bildungsroman*.⁴ In *Villette*, the heroine's social position is never consolidated even if she comes to be a professional teacher in a small day school. Lucy's school is set in a 'faubourg', which is secluded from the centre of the city of Villette. She is to be off-centre, expelled from society, in the end of the novel. One of the reasons for this isolation is that Lucy is silent about her origins to anyone in the world (even to the readers), and her identity thus cannot be established in public. This ambiguous and unstable identity of the heroine can be seen in sharp contrast with Jane's established identity, with the discovery of her missing origins, the Rivers family, related to her on her paternal side, and with the inheritance of her uncle's fortune and thus an equal marriage with Mr. Rochester. If *Jane Eyre* can be seen as a successful *Bildungsroman* with its approbation of the social system on the whole, bringing 'harmony' between self-fulfillment and socialization, *Villette* can be seen as a deviation, not because it is a story which represents 'the self without society' (Tanner, 10) but because it represents a self which could be defined in its imaginary opposition to the existing society, as I would like to clarify later.

It is a well-known fact that Brontë, in writing *Villette*, tried to avoid revealing Lucy's secret past in her narrative and had no intention to allow her a successful marriage with M. Paul.⁵ I would like to argue in the following that Lucy's character of reticence and silence comes of necessity in order to represent this 'self' in *Villette*. Compared with Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy seems to be secretive and silent about herself in her own autobiography. What has been always pointed out concerning Lucy's reticence is, first of all, her silence about her origins, and moreover, silence about her private feelings. It is not only that she represses showing her affection to Graham or M. Paul, or, her antipathy to Mme Beck, but also that she tries to assume a coolness as an observer or narrator in her autobiographical narrative. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, who does not hesitate to express, both to the public and to her readers, her private feelings from the bottom of her 'heart' and 'soul', Lucy feels antipathy against being passionate and emotional. As a result, paradoxically, we may wonder why Lucy should start narrating her story in the first place. Can she really try to write about herself while keeping reticent as a narrator? Why does she have to write after all? I would like to look at how these silences of Lucy — the concealment of past events and of her private feelings and her reticence as a narrator — function for Brontë's strategy of self-representation in this autobiographical novel.

As I have mentioned above, Lucy's unknowable origins are in contrast with Jane's discovery of her origins, that is, her discovery of the relatives whom she can trust as a spiritual and financial mainstay. Lucy's past is never revealed in her autobiography; rather, she is afraid of the act of recollection itself which would search for her source of identity. She seems to have a disastrous memory of her childhood, perhaps the loss of her parents. (In recollecting her situation, she represents it metaphorically as a shipwreck caught by a storm: 'In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.' (V 94)) Yet she never mentions detailed events because the recollection itself calls up something unforgettable always lying in her mind: 'At this time, I well remember whatever could excite — certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy.' (V 175–6) She goes on saying, 'I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards.' (V 176) Lucy thus tries to get rid of the past, and it is for the purpose of finding a new 'existence' without clinging to her own memory. Living alone in a foreign world, Lucy, also for practical reasons, has to get along in a new society with a strong will to go on forward.

As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, we can indeed see, in Brontë's novels, an attempt 'to achieve an appropriate balance between nostalgic reaction and forward-looking enterprise' (76). Both Jane and Lucy are forward-looking, as in Lucy's statement, 'A strong, vague persuasion, that it was better to go forward than backward, and that I *could* go forward...predominated over other feelings.' (V 107) Enterprise is one of the characteristics of heroes and heroines in the *Bildungsroman*; yet, Jane and Lucy show a difference also in respect of their ambitions or future perspectives. Jane is surely an 'enterprising activist' (Eagleton, 22), whose spirit of rebellion and decisive action to escape coincides. She continually moves from one place to another, from Gateshead to Ferndean, and every time the movement is accompanied with a crucial moment of a desperate need for escape. At moments such as the time of her confinement in the red room or the disclosure of Mr Rochester's bigamy, she decides to search for another place and to take a new step into the future. The story of *Jane Eyre* is structured on a 'progression of houses' (13), as Tony Tanner pointed out, and Jane is at once ambitious and active without any concern for the unknown history of her origins.

Yet Jane's forward movement and future perspective is, in the end, concluded and rewarded by those 'heritages' of the past that she has wanted to escape. It is not only that she can finally establish herself by finding out her existing kindred and by succeeding to her legacy, but also that she can actually achieve it without any change in her way of being, while continually moving forward to escape from the present situation. Jane's spirit of rebellion and desire for her own self-definition in her childhood at Gateshead stays with her, even if her social behaviour improves and she appears to become more disciplined. In other words, her self-fulfillment is established by preserving her own 'soul', and what is finally revealed in *Jane Eyre* is that Jane's future relies on what is already in the past, and furthermore, on what is already given from an 'externality' of which she is out of control.⁶

On the other hand, in Lucy's case, both a nostalgic nature and forward-looking aspect exist simultaneously in her mind. Lucy says for herself that she longs for 'something to fetch [her] out of [her] present existence', but, at the same time, she thinks, 'This longing, and all of a similar

kind, it was necessary to knock on the head.' (V 176) She is not necessarily an ambitious person, and even if she tries to get rid of her past and move forward, she is, at the same time, frightened with the possibility of the repetition of her past events. This is particularly shown in her neurotic worries about a continual 'loss' of someone, Graham or M. Paul. Lucy is sensitive to a feeling of 'presentiment' (V 565), but, in fact, that presentiment does not tell about her future but only shows that she is obsessed with her own past. Her forward-looking motive always has to be repressed by a backward motive. In her mind, future perspective and past perspective coincide, and, even at the end of her narrative, she neither attains complete recall or recovery of her past, nor the complete security of her future. If, in the middle of the story, she is nevertheless able to go forward, this forward movement is actually different from that of Jane; it is neither driven by enterprising motivation nor by some 'external' force. It can be said that, while Jane fulfills her self-establishment by what is already in the past, such as genealogy, or heritage and her existing and unchanging identity, Lucy fails to establish her own identity because she cannot move to one end.

Throughout the story, Lucy is in a suspended position, suspended between forward and backward motivation. In the same way, she is constantly at a loss whether to push forward her emotion or withhold it. If Jane can be regarded as successful in expressing her private feelings both in speech and writing, and also in being disobedient against the situation which forces her to silence them, then Lucy appears to fail in that point in her autobiographical narrative. Yet, paradoxically, by being silent and also by becoming a 'sign' herself, Lucy becomes successful in being both reticent and 'expressive', submissive and 'rebellious', in the more controlled society of Mme Beck's pensionnat. Keeping silence about her own emotions is then not a matter of repression or submission imposed by her new society, but it is a way of getting along with that society while maintaining herself.

In recent criticisms, Lucy is often compared to a 'sign', a meaningful existence which mysteriously hides her significance. We are likely to assume secrecy in Lucy, since her autobiographical narrative is full of signs or hints which appear to disclose her true self. For example, the ghost of the nun has been seen as a crucial clue to Lucy's true image, that is, as Lucy's double, which functions 'as the system of signification which can...properly articulate the self' (Jacobus, 131). Yet, as Karen Lawrence explains, Lucy, in calling herself 'cypher' in public, is in fact 'an insignificant person, overlooked — that is to say, not one who becomes a sign or text to be read by someone else'. (808) She is not a representative image to be viewed or interpreted, not an image of beauty or a Victorian angel, for instance: she is just a 'nonentity'. Compared to Jane, who constructs her image and identity autonomously for the public (including the readers), Lucy is a sign which lacks of significance. We cannot know who she is, as one of the characters Ginevra, famously asks her, 'Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?' (V 392) This situation, according to Lawrence, also entails 'the risk of being misread' (809), and if we ever can recognize Lucy's nature and attain her real significance, it will involve 'a difficulty on the part of those who encounter her' (810).

If Lucy is a 'sign' which lacks its own significance, however, she is also a nonentity who can attract the surrounding people. Though Lucy is unobtrusive, withholding her passionate feelings and retaining coolness, surrounding people somehow become interested in her and try to work out her concealed feelings and her inner nature. M. Paul is the first man who tries to put her on stage to experience 'a keen relish for dramatic expression' (V 211). Graham suggests

writing a letter to Lucy, which makes her passionate enough to say, 'But if I feel, may I *never* express?' (V 307). Ginevra tries to make Lucy flustered by making up the ghost of the nun. These three people detect the passionate side of Lucy's character, as M. Paul rightly comments, 'You want so much checking, regulating, and keeping down' (V 452). Every character in *Villette* makes an attempt to observe and interpret Lucy, who is all the more attractive because of her unrevealed self, blankness as a sign. Although a desire for meanings and interpretation might lead to the 'misreading' of Lucy, she can, in this way, manage to live in a strange world while maintaining her relation to the others. In other words, Lucy cannot exist as 'somebody' without the other people's interests in her with a desire of filling her blankness as a sign. Being totally alone and a stranger, Lucy is almost destined to be expelled from the society; however, by means of becoming an unobtrusive sign which reveals nothing to show off, she can maintain her relationship with others and then with the society, neither being expelled nor completely incorporated by the new society.

Thus, to be reticent and inoffensive with an air of a mystery, that is, at once to be 'somebody' with distinctive feelings and a 'nobody' lack of emotional intensity is, in fact, an effective strategy for Lucy to get along with teachers and students. Being suspended, both in time and in the way of embodying (or encoding) herself, is a way of life for her. Yet, she consequently cannot get any support by her society eventually. Mme Beck, who is schoolmistress and also Lucy's manager, stands for the authoritative power of this society. What Mme Beck tries to do is to codify and specify Lucy. She investigates Lucy's private possessions and defines her nature by these external materials. She regards Lucy as her 'rival, heart and soul' (V 544), who might take over her social position. Mme Beck can be compared with Mrs Reed in *Jane Eyre* in that she tries to define Lucy from her privileged position. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's first rebellion is against Mrs Reed's authoritative power to define her as a liar. Jane struggles to make herself acknowledged against its definition by speaking out. On the other hand, in *Villette*, Lucy has to keep silence against Mme Beck's power in order to maintain her relation with Mme Beck. By keeping silence, she can be safe and a certain freedom is given to her. The act of keeping silence for Lucy, however, is also that of abandoning established code for herself; this means that she has to throw away her own authority to signify herself. It is true that, by becoming a nonentity, Lucy can be both 'nobody' and 'somebody', but, on the other hand, her real self is thus easily undermined by others. It will be a necessary result that, in the end, Lucy has to leave Mme Beck's pensionnat for the sake of maintaining her 'pure' self. Then she finally has to stay as 'nobody' to the public, since she becomes totally alone with no one to justify her existence as 'somebody'.

At this point, we can begin to understand why Lucy has to write her own autobiography. Lucy, who cannot obtain social support to establish her identity and determine herself, has nothing else to do but write, in order to secure her capacity for self-determination and preserve her 'pure' self. Her identity is unstable and her existence is nothing, deserted in the end, because of her act of silence, but in her writing she can at least certify her existence by virtue of the prestige of the text.⁷ It is true that also in Lucy's narrative, silence prevails: she is silent about the sad and private experience of the past, about her personal feelings and her own nature. Readers will not come to find out who she is at the end of her narrative. However, she can at least secure an 'existence' by the act of writing, and, in a sense, retrieve her abandoned authority. By telling her story in her autobiography can she nominate herself, and thus we can see that the subjectivity

found in *Villette* is a self which can be made 'present' only by its textuality. This self can be seen as a 'written self'.⁸

What I would like to maintain in this essay is thus that, compared to *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* is more conspicuous by, or more conscious of, its textuality. It represents a self whose establishment is based on writing. If *Jane Eyre* is distinctive in our common acknowledgement of Jane's 'private' self (to remember 'hunger, rebellion and rage'), then *Villette* provides another subjectivity which is beyond personality or privacy. This written self, I think, does not necessarily belong to the character of Lucy anymore, since it is associated with the text itself; it can be also said that this textual-based self is what is between the 'private' and the 'public', since Lucy's interiority does not seem to be cancelled out in the fictional text of *Villette*. Lucy's silence in her narrative not only means her refusal to speak about the past or her rejection of expression in the process of the act of narration, but it is a 'silence' which is produced because of the narrative's reinforcement of its own textuality. 'Silence' in *Villette* is not just the reticence of Lucy but it is a by-product of its textuality.

It can be said that Brontë achieves her own effacement from her own text by thus fortifying its textual framework. In *Villette*, the subjectivity which is likely to be treated equivalently as what pertains to the private domain of the author herself, is no more to be found, because of the 'silence' of Lucy. It represents instead the subjectivity which is suspended between the 'private' and the 'public'. It is the 'self' which is made 'present' by writing itself. In contrast, in the other novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane's subjectivity seems to be established autonomously without the text. The novel appears to echo with Jane's private voice and speech, which have been naturally taken as the author's personal 'voice'. By shifting the narrative strategy from the expressive 'voice' to the 'silence', and thus becoming conscious of the textualization, Brontë can achieve her absence from her own text, with the realization of representing another self based on textuality.

In this way, 'silence' and textuality is closely related with each other. Yet, the textuality, which occupies the domain of the 'private' and the 'public', is not only for the purpose of expelling or rejecting one's personal 'voice'. I think that, also in *Jane Eyre*, the novel marked by its expressive 'voice', Brontë attempts to represent a self which is more than a 'private' self. As I will show in what follows, *Jane Eyre* is another text which is filled in another way with 'silence', and the self represented in this novel is another example which is beyond the heroine's privacy and personality. As I have shown, *Villette* is a novel where 'silence' is used for strategy to make the author absent from the text, but in reviewing her early novel we might also find again the 'silent' strategy. So, in the following argument, I would like to focus only on the text of *Jane Eyre* in order to explore and reconfirm Brontë's strategy of self-representation.

2. 'Silence' in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre claims itself to be a genuine autobiography, as the title on the cover of the book clearly shows, 'Jane Eyre: An Autobiography'. It is formed as a narrative through which Jane's voice is to be directly heard. In the middle of its narrative, the narrator Jane describes her own style of writing as follows:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (JE 97)

Jane claims that her autobiography is not 'regular'. First, she is 'only bound to invoke memory', in a way that is different from an orthodox style of autobiography. Jane's comment seems to suggest that her life-history is to be described not in a conventional way as a 'history of events', but in a more deliberate and natural way in which the events are written down according to her private memories. Consequently, she does not care about leaving out 'the links of connection' in her narrative, interrupting the narrative with a period of silence, since it is not her intention to set out external events in detail. For example, during those eight years she skips in her narrative, her surroundings at school have greatly improved and changed because of Mr Brocklehurst's retirement, but she leaves that period in silence. It is because her life itself has been 'uniform' (98) during that time, and there is nothing in such a stable life that would be invoked by her own 'memory'. For Jane, 'memory' is truly private and subjective. At the same time, that 'memory' is communal enough to 'possess some degree of interest' even to her readers.

It can be maintained in a sense that the narrator Jane tries to write her autobiography as a kind of 'memoir', not as a 'history of events', because it is her most private experiences and her inner depth of feelings that are represented in focus.⁹ Jane does not intend to offer any verifiable and objective information about herself as a historical or social subject, but rather it is as if she were repeating an echo of her childhood outburst of her inner feelings. Jane's autobiography can thus be regarded as a private form of autobiography. Yet, on the other hand, it is not 'private' after all, since Jane's private feelings are, at the same time, offered to readers as a 'truth'. In the following, I would like to show that Jane's autobiography is not merely a narrative space where her personal feelings are put into words. It is rather a space where what is 'external' to Jane's narrative comes to be much concerned. I think that it is in this 'externality' that readers can paradoxically assume the direct representation of her personality and interiority in *Jane Eyre*.

a. 'language of Truth'

Jane, as a narrator and an autobiographer, is concerned with narrating what is to be taken as 'truth' for her. Although autobiographies in general are all concerned with truth-telling, based on 'the commonsense notion that autobiographies ought to be veracious' (Fleishman 8), Jane's truth-telling in her autobiography thus appears to be private and attitudinal. Jane has continually tried to speak the 'truth' since she first rebelled against Mrs Reed, asserting her reason to say; 'How dare I? Because it is the *truth*' (45), until she grew up but still made a defiant speech to St John Rivers; 'A fresh wrong did these words inflict: the worse, because they touched on the truth' (459). Indeed, Jane's whole life itself is a life of truth-telling, or, 'truth-speaking', by which she struggles to make herself understood and acknowledged as Jane Eyre.

Gateshead is the first place where Jane tries to cut herself free from 'submission' to Mrs Reed, who has defined her as an unsociable and deceptive child. For the first time in her life, she

tries to be acknowledged as herself by speaking out against Mrs Reed; '*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how?...I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence: — "I am not deceitful..." ' (45). Until then, Jane has submitted to being treated as a nonentity by keeping silence; she kept silent because, by being called a liar, she was, as it were, deprived of her competence of language itself. Yet, her only means of survival, that is, the means of her identification, is words; so she has to speak out, speak in her own way of speaking the 'truth'. As Janet H. Freeman maintains, 'Speaking is the equivalent of self-assertion, for Jane Eyre, the assertion of her most intimate, essential self, the self that even in secret takes the form of a "still, small voice" (ch.19)' (691), saying 'That Jane Eyre herself is one of those truth-tellers has been her destiny, her calling, from the beginning' (697).

It is natural then that her way of speaking 'truly' makes a series of echoes even in her own truth-telling narrative, by becoming her 'personal voice' in the narrative. Susan Snaider Lanser argues, from a feminist point of view, that Jane's 'female personal voice' and 'her own moral authority' are given from the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, by her refusal of silence in Gateshead in favor of her "new way of talking", whose manner is based on 'an essentially Romantic authority', that is, on 'the authority of her own perceptions, feelings, and experience'. That is to say, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane's 'personal voice' is not to be gained but to be sustained by 'the preservation of her right to speak' (183). Indeed, it might be possible to say, as Lanser does, that Jane's own voice or self-assertion keeps resounding even as her narrative 'voice', since Jane's autobiography as truth-telling is in itself a story of her 'truth-speaking'.

Is it really true to say, however, that Jane's speech is equivalent to her 'voice' in the text of *Jane Eyre*? In a shift from Jane's speaking to narrating, that is, from her speech to writing, how can we say that 'truth' is maintained? Moreover, even in her singular speech itself, to what extent can it be said that it expresses the 'truth' of herself? It is true that whenever Jane has a crucial moment of opposing others, Jane's truth-speaking comes to be the performance of her rebellion; but, in fact, her acts of speech always have to be accompanied by the action of escaping the place, as if her speech failed even then to be effective in her self-definition.

Jane, as a matter of fact, is not always loud in her speech; she is usually reticent, trying not to obtrude herself, as can be seen in her attitude of never having a conversation with the guests at Thornfield. She does this not only because she is totally neglected by upper class people but also because she does not feel like speaking with them on account of the difference between her speech and theirs. Jane sticks to her own way of speaking 'truly' and comments on Miss Ingram's manner of speech;

She[Miss Ingram] was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. (210)

Jane cannot have a conversation with people like Miss Ingram who speaks in 'sounding phrases from books' or 'a high tone of sentiment'. Jane's 'originality' in speaking is expressed in her words to Mr Rochester in the following:

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? — You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you, — and full as much heart!...I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit.... (284)

Jane's words cannot be, to borrow Brontë's own term, the mere 'jargon of Conventionality', such as that of Miss Ingram; they are 'the language of Truth', which derives from her own 'spirit' or 'soul'.¹⁰

Yet what exactly is this 'language of Truth'? What we can find from Jane's characteristic behaviour is that her action is a sequence of rejections and dispossessions, since every time she is in opposition to someone, she has to flee from the people who surround her. The same thing can be said as to Jane's language: that is, her words are also a succession of negations. As a child, when she is asked by Mr Lloyd why she is so unhappy, her first and 'true response' is, 'For one thing, I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters' (31). As a result of not knowing how to 'analyse' (31) her depth of feelings, the child Jane can only enumerate what she does not have. Furthermore, Jane's first mutinous words against Mrs Reed are also a succession of negations and contradictions: 'I am not deceitful', followed by 'I declare I do not love you...I am glad you are no relation of mine', and ending with 'I am not your dear; I cannot lie down: send me to school soon, Mrs Reed, for I hate to live here' (45–6). Jane can only specify *what she will do* (to get out of the house): she cannot specify *what she is* against Mrs Reed's definition through these sequential negations. Moreover, Jane cannot even define her opponent: she tries to represent him by a sequence of similes, 'You are like a murderer — you are like a slave-driver — you are like the Roman emperors!' (17), whereas John easily defines her: 'you are a dependant' (17). Even after Jane grows up, she still denies others' representations of herself, saying to Mr Rochester after their engagement, 'I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer' (291). Still, she cannot clarify what she is to be, only speaking in tautology, 'I will be myself' (292).

Jane's 'language of Truth' is, in a word, a figuration. When she calls herself 'Jane Eyre' every time, she does not just give her name but tries to express her full meaning. When she piles up negatives, or even similes, she seeks for an expression of the whole meaning she tries to represent. As Jane grows up, her 'original' way of speaking the truth comes to be more refined, in a sense, but less marked, because it turns into words of irony. These words are reflected in her conversation with St John Rivers on his marriage proposal, which is one of her crucial moments. Jane cannot accept his offer because she cannot 'marry' him with his 'love' on *his* ground of meaning and reference by the words quoted. St John uses the words 'marriage' and 'love' naturally as a parson, who has a mission to serve God and considers love and marriage as an extension of labour and service to God; but Jane well understands what his words 'truly' mean to herself. Jane, being asked the reason for her refusal finally, answers with the following:

'Once more, why this refusal?' he asked.

'Formerly,' I answered, 'because you did not love me; now, I reply, because you almost hate me. If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now.'

His lips and cheeks turned white — quite white.

'I should kill you — I am killing you? Your words are such as ought not to be used: violent,

unfeminine, and untrue.' (459)

In these words, Jane tries to point out that St John's 'love' is essentially equal to 'hate', his 'marriage' is equivalent to 'killing'. Certainly, she does not here use the words 'hate' and 'kill' literally, since St John does not intend to kill her physically or hate her as his real opponent; Jane uses the words in a figurative meaning. Still, it can be seen that she tries to bring out 'the literal' meaning of his words of 'love' and 'marriage', that is, the real significance and primal equivalence of these words addressed to her, by way of her own figurative language, 'hate' and 'kill'.¹¹ In our usual pragmatic use of words, 'love' and 'hate' are typical antonyms; but Jane tries to clarify the notion of the 'love' of St John by introducing the opposite word 'hate'. In this proposal scene, Jane cannot be compliant with St John's usage of the conventional meaning of the words because it is untrue for her; so she speaks up with her own language that always seeks for truth — a truth which is subjective enough to be objective — and that has also the risk of being taken as sarcasm. Hearing her words, St John reproves her to her face, since he thinks Jane's words are 'violent, unfeminine and untrue'. Even on this occasion, Jane cannot express fully her subjective 'truth', and this is surely because of the nature of her figurative language itself, which cannot specify one and the only truth.

In this way, Jane's 'language of Truth' can be considered as figurative, and consequently her truth-telling narrative fails to express herself as well as her 'truth-speaking'. It can then be said that, in Jane's personal form of autobiography, her self-representation cannot be completed. *Jane Eyre* has been seen as a 'subjective' mode of novel, but it is not because Jane's acts of speech or her truth-telling narrative provide her immediate 'voice'. Rather, Jane's 'self' assumes its own immediacy and independence, and her 'truth' is not actually revealed in her 'autobiography'. The 'self' and 'truth' represented in *Jane Eyre*, which is called 'spirit' or 'soul' in her own words, is thus something transcendental: 'transcendental' not only in that it exemplifies a Romantic ideal of self-identity but also in that it lies beyond the framework of Jane's private mode of autobiography.

b. 'externality': silence and voice in *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's 'truth-speaking' at the crucial time is always accompanied with her action of escape. Wherever she goes, she cannot bear to be under the 'submission' of others who try to take her over by confinement or by marriage, or, who try to define her according to their own needs, at one time by naming her 'dependent' or 'hypocrite' and at another time by naming her 'Jane Rochester' or 'a missionary's wife'. To avoid being defined and thus being herself 'changed', she has to define herself in her own way of speaking. However, as I have tried to demonstrate above, her speech does not have its own capacity of self-definition, since her figurative words of negation, tautology and irony cannot define anything positive but leave what she wants to express in blank. It can be said that her action of escape is not only to seek for another place of the renewal of her life but also for the sake of her own self-preservation without speech before she is defined by others.

It should be noticed that the very moment when Jane tries to leave the place, she hears 'external' voices which appeal to her, and, furthermore, she becomes silent herself, as if she were throwing away her competence to speak the 'truth'. This is most conspicuously represented in

the scene where Jane hears the voice of Mr Rochester, 'Jane! Jane! Jane!' (467) when she has almost accepted the proposal of St John Rivers. Jane has continued her refusal but she cannot persuade him, even herself, because her figurative speech cannot say what she actually wants to express. St John's sermon appeals to her as an energetic speech which attempts to take her over, and also as the language of God. There is a conflict between St John's speaking the language of God and Jane's speaking the 'language of Truth'. Yet, while St John's deliverance of God's oracles and his language is what is to be amplified and multiplied enough to influence or convert the others by his mission, Jane's speech, through the figurative phrases of antonym and synonym, has almost already come to the apex of 'silence'. Jane here stops speaking indeed, almost reconciling with him about 'changing' herself; but then she hears some 'external' voice as if it were answering her prayer and substitutes in her mind what it is like to be in truth. In a sense, the voice replaces Jane's 'silent' speech; it represents her 'true' self, which she keeps sustaining but fails to represent by her speech. In other words, this 'external' voice supplements her own voice, representing what fails to be Jane's and what is turned into 'silence'.

Jane hears a similar 'external' voice whenever she reaches the moment of a crisis, that is, whenever she has any pressure to 'change' herself. When Jane cannot convince Mr Rochester and herself that she will not marry him because of her silence, she comes to see a vision of 'a white human form' which addresses her, 'My daughter, flee temptation!' (358); even before she leaves Lowood, 'a kind fairy' gives advice on 'how to get a new place' (100-1) in her sleep; in Gateshead, instead of a voice, she thinks she has 'a herald of... vision' (24) of dead Uncle Reed in the red-room where she has a feeling of resistance for the first time. All these voices and visions replace her 'silence'; they are what could have been Jane's own voice expressing her way of being against any voice of others, such as Mr Rochester and Mrs Reed, who tries to make her 'change'. (In Lowood, she does not have an opposing voice of any others, but it can be said that she tries to confirm her own way of being after her most reliable friends have gone.) In this sense, these voices can be seen as more 'authentic' and also more 'authoritative' than Jane's own voice, since they represent what cannot be *the* voice of Jane in her speech and they have an ascendancy over any other opposing voice or speech. Still, it is because of these 'external' voices in favour of Jane that she can retain herself not only in terms of her own existence but also in terms of her voice in her own narrative. In fact, it is these 'external' voices that uphold and authenticate Jane's truth-telling voice.

Then, what is this 'externality'? It is obvious that it is beyond the limits of Jane's own narrative, because in her own narrative, it can only be explained as a dream or a delusion or 'the supernatural' (497), as what is beyond the reality or beyond her understanding to explain as a narrator. However, does this 'externality' pertain to the outer frame of Jane's narrative? That is, is the 'externality' caused by any necessity on the part of the author Brontë? For example, are the voices in favour of Jane equivalent to the author's 'voice' as an insertion? In fact, these 'external' voices cannot be called 'voices', nor 'speech', since they supplement what cannot be the *words* of Jane.

All of these 'external voices' or 'externality', however, are actually represented as a kind of instruction to prompt Jane to onward actions. They are represented as advice, as imperatives and addresses, which are external agencies to make her move without reasoning. Terry Eagleton explains about these instructions that they come from the novel's need 'to stress the "scarcely voluntary" nature' (61) in Jane. It is true that Jane appears to move forward with no decision by

herself, but I would argue that this is not because of Jane's passivity, as Eagleton suggests. It is because she cannot give any motivation or reason why she has to leave each place through her figurative words of negation and tautology. In fact, the 'externality' not only replaces Jane's 'silence' of speech but also has the function of cancelling out the reason and motivation of Jane's removal and escape.

The 'voices' that always appear when Jane reaches a crucial moment enable Jane to go forward without her speech of self-definition, that is, without representing herself. In her autobiography, Jane cannot tell her 'true' self, but the 'externality' replaces Jane's 'absence' or 'silence' in the way that it supplements Jane's 'silence' as if her 'true' self were there. What has been clarified here is that there is a gap between the narrative of Jane and the text of *Jane Eyre*. On this point, I consider that the way we see *Jane Eyre* as a private form of autobiography, or, the author's own autobiographical novel, is concerned with this 'externality', not with Jane's personal and direct self-representation in her narrative. It is true that Jane herself cannot represent her 'true' self in her own autobiography, but if there is no outer frame to make Jane progress with no discrepancy, there will be no 'Jane Eyre', either. Furthermore, the 'externality' of Jane's narrative, I think, is caused by a necessity on the part of the author, particularly by a necessity entailed by the author's own relation to the text. To put it in another way, it is caused by a necessity of a text of *Jane Eyre*. The novel needs, as it were, the double frame of Jane's fictional autobiography and its textualized framework. The 'self' is made 'present' by its textualization. It can also be said that Jane's 'self' that appears to exist 'here' in the novel is produced through the way the author makes herself disappear in her relation with the text. Jane is of course not equivalent to Brontë herself; on the contrary, in the same way as Jane herself is 'absent' in her narrative, Brontë herself is absent from this text. Yet, as I have tried to show, since there are 'signs' of externality which at once suggest the author's involvement with the text and make it possible to substantialize the way of being of Jane, we can say that the 'self' represented in *Jane Eyre* is another 'self' produced by the text through the absence of both Jane and Brontë.

Notes

¹ Matthew Arnold writes to Mrs Foster, 'Because the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact put into her book.' See Eleanor McNeese, ed., *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments*. Vol.3. (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1996) 601.

² Behind the contemporary reception of Brontë's novels as her autobiographical sources, Dolin points out the development of modern celebrity in the nineteenth century and the public heightened curiosity towards 'the "hidden truth" about the "real person" behind the public figure'. (xxiv) He says, 'Charlotte Brontë is not the hyper-public media woman of late capitalism — no Princess Diana — but she is that woman in the making. Her overwhelming desire for seclusion and retreat, which has been construed as "ostentatious withdrawal", demonstrates a truism of the tabloid age: there is no publicity like privacy.' (xxx) Dolin puts forward an idea that Brontë investigates in the withheld narrative of *Villette* 'the relationship between the private life and public identity of the writer' (xvi). I agree with him in that *Villette* is a novel which is conscious of the problem between 'privacy' and 'publicity'. What I would like to explore in this essay, however, is not the biographical details of Brontë, or, particular identity of the writer, but rather the relationship between 'privacy' and

'publicity' within the fictional writing itself.

³ For example, Rabinowitz says that Lucy can gain ascendance over the passive situation by not speaking intentionally and thus by denying readers knowledge of her, remaining as 'the sole owner of the incident' (70); 'Control over language is, thus, underlined by the deceptive use of language; this mis-use is a way for the powerless to take power'. (75) Rabinowitz suggests that Lucy's 'deceptions' and 'silence' are challenged to 'the dictated conventions of the realistic form' (69) so as to develop Lucy's, and even the author's, own mode of discourse.

⁴ In fact, Moretti, in his analysis of the *Bildungsroman*, classifies its two types: one is the 'classical *Bildungsroman*', which marks its ending with the eventual annulment of an individual freedom and its harmony with the society, and the other is one which appears after the period of classical *Bildungsroman*, and which is characteristic of its rejection of social solution and its indetermination about the notion of personal identity. To follow Moretti's classification, *Villette*, I think, is rather close to the latter type of the *Bildungsroman*.

⁵ Brontë writes in her letter to W.S. Williams, 'You say that she [Lucy] may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessary become morbid.' (Gaskell, 480) She also writes to George Smith, 'If Lucy marries anybody — it must be the Professor....But I am not leniently disposed towards Miss Frost [=Snowe] — from the beginning I never intended to appoint her lines in pleasant places.' (Barker, 354)

⁶ On this 'externality', I will argue in the latter part (section 2. b) of this essay.

⁷ Kreilkamp suggests that Brontë, in writing *Villette*, tried to generate the 'prestige' of the text in order to participate in the public print sphere as a female writer. According to him, in the Victorian culture where 'prestige, power and reward — professional advancement — follow most effectively *not* from assertions of personal identity...but from mastery of the flow of print and information', readership could only be anticipated as the 'eventual reward for valuable texts'. (344) It follows that in the Victorian era 'textuality' came to be more valued also for the cultural reasons.

⁸ I referred the word 'written self' to Fleishman's book on autobiography. Fleishman says that '[the autobiographer's] role is to bear the script, in which the play of self is written out,' explaining that, in writing an autobiography, the autobiographer 'extends himself beyond his unwritten self' by 'the formation of personal myth out of a train of metaphors' and by 'open[ing] himself to a play of language that takes him beyond his original intentions'. (35)

⁹ I use the term 'memoir' in association with the word 'memory' which Jane refers to in her narration, not in its reference to a particular genre of an autobiographical record. 'Memoir' as a genre of autobiography is generally regarded as not so much a subjective form of autobiography as a record of events or incidents in relation to personal matters. Jerome Beaty says that memoirs 'more often deal with outward, even historical events' (14) than the other autobiographical records. Beaty goes on to say in his argument of genre of *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography that in the late 1840s, *Jane Eyre* was accepted as a unique 'autobiography' because of its introspective and subjective form. In those days, 'autobiographies' were often presented in a form of 'memoir' as a genre, and furthermore, novels were defined as 'a history of events, in which incident predominates and the passions are exhibited by action' (16). *Jane Eyre*, when it was published, was criticised in its irregular writing as both an autobiography and a novel.

¹⁰ I quoted these words from Brontë's letter to W.S. Williams in 1848; she tells him her own principles of writing: 'Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it in, I have no business to publish...unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent'. (Barker, 206).

¹¹ Margaret Homans defines the 'literal' as 'the absent referent in our predominant myth of language' (4), by which she follows Lacanian idea, 'transcendental-signified'. From her feminist points of view, she argues that, in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë evades 'literalisation', which is a woman

writer's practice according to her, and that it is because she has to be silenced through 'literalisation'. I agree with her in that Brontë survives the silence of 'literalisation' by means of figurative writing, but I think that a certain type of figuration of Brontë also helps to 'literalise' such silence.

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