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An Agential-Realist Re/configuring of Helen Huntingdon as a Victorian Painter-Heroine

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Abstract

Through mattering discourse, this work attempts to re/configure Helen Huntingdon, the heroine of Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). A diffractive reading is provided through the aegis of Karen Barad's agential realism by relying on Victorian feminist imaginaries. Helen, the mother and Helen, the romantic partner, stands "together-apart" (Barad, 2014, p. 168) with matter (painting). There are no "absolute separations" now or (n)ever. All future renderings may (not) matter the same. This diffractive re/worlding focuses on the inseparability of Helen, the human, from the non-human thereby emerging a more than-human phenomenon.

Introduction

This study engages the notion of material culture by using post-humanist agential realism, a theoretico-methodological approach presented by Karen Barad (2003; 2007; 2010; 2014) (preferred pronouns: they, them, themself). An attempt is made to re/read the heroine of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* with respect to her painting career. The compound- painter-heroine- as used in the title, is borrowed from Dennis Denisoff (1999, p. 151) whose insights are duly engaged with in this paper in later sections. As my project uses Karen Barad, an early note on the use of forward slashes (/) and parentheses ( ) is desirable. In their provocative style, Barad exploits the punctuation marks to signal the potential of defining phenomena contingently afresh. No new iteration of reality is its final rendering. There remains an element of im/possibility, in/determinacy and im/permanence in each boundary-marking action (delineation of phenomena). The in/determinacy is not "uncertainty" (Bozalek, 2022, p. 2) and engages with ontology (how things are) rather than epistemology (ways of knowing). Each ontological re/turn is (de)stabilized with the change of an (epistemological) apparatus.

As a way of providing background to my project, I briefly refer to two past works (Lutz [2016] and Shand [2019; 2016] that have used the notion of materiality and endeavor to show both how my work builds on and is different from them. I am mindful that some agential realist terms in these two paragraphs may not be fully clear and, therefore, I keep them to the minimum and present explanation wherever possible; detailed terminology explaining is given in the section titled as Agential Realism as an Ethico-Onto-Epistemological Framework. The materiality (or material culture) in Brontë sisters' novels has been explored before, also. For example, the importance of objects is noted by Deborah Lutz (2016) who wishes for "objects to speak" (p. xxiv), to "step forth and speak, maybe even rise from the page" (p. xxvv). Lutz is interested in finding out (or imagining) what "the thing might have 'witnessed', how it colored its human settings". The material-discursive approach of my work, however, does not separate material (matter) from the discursive (words) and acknowledges a "mutual entailment" (Barad, 2003, p. 820). The meaning in Baradian material arrangements do not precede relations but come about as a result of specific agential cuts (actions) made by apparatuses (Victorian imaginaries for this project).

There is an element of materiality implied in Elizabeth Shand's (2019;2016) readings of *The Tenant of Wildfell House* (henceforth *TWH* as an abbreviation), also. She focuses on the novel for its narrative structure and directs our attention to three competing yet intertwining separate plots: Helen the artist, Helen the mother and, Helen the romantic partner (2016, p. 296). The present project, however, problematizes the separateness in the intertwining done by Shand, relying instead on Barad who give an alternative concept- entangling. Entangling is "not simply to be

intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (Barad 2007, p. ix). Barad (and I concur with them) hold the view that "individuals do not pre-exist their interactions" with matter but "emerge" relationally. Helen, the painter-heroine, is re/configured through her relationship with the matter (her ability to paint in the Victorian Age). This relationship is one of "cut together-apart" (Barad 2014, p. 168).

A Summary of TWH

The story is set in the 19th century Victorian England. The major portion of the story takes place in the countryside but London life with all its vices is also an important part of the plot. There are three main characters, a heiress Helen Huntingdon, her first husband, Arthur Huntingdon, a member of the landed gentry and a libertine given to drinking and over-spending, and, Gilbert Markham, a gentleman farmer who later marries Helen after Arthur Huntingdon's death). There are some supporting characters also like Rose Markham (Gilbert's sister), Eliza Millward (Gilbert's temporary love interest and daughter of Reverend Michael Millward), Mrs Markham (Gilbert's mother), Mrs. Maxwell (Helen's aunt), Lawrence Frederick (Helen's brother and the owner of Wildfell Hall), Milicent Hargrave (Helen's friend), Ralph Hattersley (Milicent's husband), Walter Hargrave (Milicent's brother who tries unsuccessfully to seduce Helen during her days of estrangement from her husband), Benson (male servant at Helen's married home), Rachel (Helen's maid and later confidante), Miss Myers (governess hired by Huntingdon against Helen's wishes), Lord Lowborough (Huntingdon's friend whom Huntingdon betrays by having an affair with his wife-Annabella Wilmot), Arthur Huntingdon, Jr. (Helen's son named after the father).

The narrative of the story is told in the form of various letters, and, resultantly, the novel is also called an epistolary novel. Helen, the heroine of the novel, moves in the countryside neighborhood of Gilbert Markham and starts residing in a building called Wildfell House located in an isolated spot. She is accompanied by her little son, Arthur Jr. and a maid, Rachel. She portrays herself as a widow and wishes to remain reclusive in order to concentrate on her painting that she does for her living. However, she is pursued by her neighbors who are initially bent upon seeing her as frequently as they see each other. She does attend a party or two as well as an excursion before she is labelled as a persona non grata by the community as there are reports that she is not a chaste woman. She cannot account for her supposedly late husband; she cannot account for her relationship with Lawrence who later on turns out to be her brother. During the excursion to the sea-side and Gilbert's visits to her home, there is a clear connection between Helen and her art of painting. The two are inseparable to the point of being indivisible, and as pointed out above, Helen's own personality and future are shaped by painting.

The plot gets a twist when Gilbert, initially not believing the gossip, is thrown off his feet when he sees Helen and Lawrence together and cannot make justify Lawrence's presence at Helen's house late at night. It is all the more painful for him as just a few moments before, the two had shared a special connection where Helen had told Gilbert that she would tell him all about herself the next day. Their next meeting- an unplanned one- however, takes place after a few weeks as Gilbert feels betrayed and decides not to have anything to do with her. Helen not knowing the reason for Gilbert's sudden withdrawal is anxious to clear her name and gives him her diary when they meet in a chance encounter.

The diary starts from Helen's pre-marriage days when she turns to her painting to not just think about her beau in peace away from the din of the world (Arthur is disapproved by her aunt, Mrs Maxwell) but to recall his face and draw it, also. Before that, Helen writes that Arthur helps her escape a boring suitor by giving the excuse of showing her an oil painting by a renowned male artist. Later, it is again Helen's drawings (of Arthur) that become the reason for his being confident of her love for him despite Helen showing the sharpness of her temper. His decision to propose her rests on the sketches that she has drawn. Though Helen's married life is far from ideal, she finds solace in painting- a luxury that is not granted to Arthur. One of the reasons he runs off to his (eventual) doom to London life, is that he does not know how to occupy himself meaningfully unlike Helen.

When the time comes to run away from the torturous marriage, it is again Helen's artistic capabilities that she herself is banking upon, and also which alert Arthur to her possible escape. Brontë's equates Helen's art with gold sovereigns as Arthur seizes both when he suspects her of leaving him. Helen does leave him and tries to make a new life with the help of her brother and her painting. She is, however, thwarted in her plans by the malicious gossip directed towards her and she decides to leave Wildfell Hall. Before she could do that, she has to return home to Arthur

as he is on his death bed. He dies and Helen goes to live with her aunt. The turn of events leave Gilbert surprised and unsure about her affection towards him. His decision to go looking for her in her widowed residence proves lucky for him despite not seeming so at first. They eventually get married and he leaves his own home to come and live with her and her widowed aunt in a much bigger residence. His mother happily relieves him as he hands over his farm to his younger brother.

It is meaningful that it is art that first draws Arthur and Helen close, draws a wedge between them, and then draws Helen and Gilbert together. It becomes the reason behind most of her decisions wittingly or unwittingly.

Victorian Imaginaries and *TWH*

A number of Victorian scholars have admirably sketched the Victorian era by making the Queen as the center of their discussions debating whether she supported the budding feminism or not. In this section, I not only focus on the feminist role of the Queen, but what it means for Helen. As mentioned elsewhere, most accounts on Helen as a painter, wife and mother do not view her persona as a material-discursive arrangement that I endeavor to show in the later part of my study.

Scholars like Patricia Zakreski (2002), Arianna Chernock (2019), Arildsen (2018) and Ulrich 2005) convincingly show that Queen Victoria despite her declarations about women and men having different roles in life, indirectly influenced the women's participation and rights at the broader level. Chernock (pp.1-3) reproduces the Queen's oft-repeated comment on women's rights: "mad, wicked folly" as "God made man and woman different" (Chernock, p. 2). Chernock, however, adds that she had said this in private. Outwardly, as far as Queen's words were concerned, she neither supported nor opposed women's rights especially during the suffrage movement. This also gave rise to the appearance of a "dilemma" (Ward, 2006, p. 279) that may (not) have existed between her private and public personae. However, aspects like "the subversive potential simply by sheer dint of a female monarch" (Chernock, p. 3), her "stealth feminism" (Ulrich, 2005, p.175) and a "tool" for women activists (Arildsen, 2018, p. 74) are noted with appreciation. Queen's sitting on the British throne validated women's efforts towards their own emancipation. Looking at the issue from another perspective, Ulrich (2005, p.147) argues that the Victorian era anti-suffragists (I use the term to denote traditionalists overall) and feminists had a lot in common. For example, both sides believed in "natural gender roles, religious matters, class divisions. Both believed in the power of mother love to strong enough to improve society". We see this in the character of Helen who, according to some critics, apparently gives up her painting career after her second marriage. "Helen is represented as a domestic woman regardless of her home life and seemingly 'unwifely' behavior" (Zakreski 2002, 91).

Some other Victorian scholars (for example, Wahrman, 1993; Boghian, 2014; Griffin et al, 2009; Boardman, 2000; Tosh, 1999) focus on how the age emphasized the gender roles: women in-charge of the household affairs and men looking outdoor affairs. This mostly implied undue and oppressive submissiveness on the part of women. Ignatius Nsaidzedze (2017) also writes about the amelioration that started taking place albeit slowly.

The selflessness that Arthur wanted in Helen despite his wrongdoings or that Milicent's husband (Ralph Hattersley) was looking for in a wife is echoed in Boghian (2014, p. 90). Boghian does not mention *TWH* explicitly but her views can be applied to understand the masterpiece. She writes that Victorian women were trained to be self-sacrificial, "submissive to husbands and fathers". The order is, of course, challenged in the person of Helen. Women were expected to "happily surrender their own opinions" when confronted by men (Griffin et al. 2009, p. 9) although as Boardman (2000, p. 154) points out women were in-charge of the house and men the outside. This authority granted to the women also meant that domesticity and the upkeep of the house and family was "integral to masculinity" (Tosh 1999, p. 4) and his position amongst his "peers". This is visible when Arthur tells Helen that he will not stand being insulted in case she left.

Darwin clearly had a role to play in the Victorians believing that men had superior minds (Nsaidzedze, 2017, p. 3). This translated into only male children being educated (Wahrman, 1993). Anne Bronte takes it up when she shows that Jane Wilson receives a boarding school education. It is interesting to see that one Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon became the first woman artist to have "artist" mentioned on her identity card. Ignatius Nsaidizedze (2017, p. 4) calls it "a thing unheard of". Nsaidizede further informs us that there was a gradual movement towards the

emancipation of women like mothers could get a child's custody in an act passed in 1839 provided that they could satisfy that they were of a good character. Moreover, this could only apply to children up to 7 years. Helen's (*TWH*, 357) insistence on Arthur signing a paper that he would not insist on taking their son away from her, is perhaps a hint at the same. Some other developments were that women were also allowed to own property, and also a woman could retain any money that she may have earned during her married life.

Agential Realism as an Ethico-Onto-Epistemological Framework

Agential realism, a relational ontology, relies on a materially and diffractively entangled re/configuring of ontology (how things are), epistemology (how they become known) and ethics (morality). By writing them together as Barad do, the ethico-onto-epistemology marks the "inseparability" (Barad, 2007, p. 409) for any rendering or iteration of reality. As a post-humanist approach, this means taking "response-ability and accountability for the entanglements 'we' help enact and what kinds of commitments 'we' are willing to take on, including commitments to 'ourselves' and who 'we' may become" (p. 382). The entanglements, the overlapping, the diffractions that help this project realize are to be chosen with care as they (can[not]) further the cause of justice. It may not turn out as planned and that is why Barad recommend writing certain terms with a slash like in/justice. With the help of language symbols, Barad signal the in/determinacy in re/worlding phenomena (basic ontological units of existence and Helen in this project). Barad further remind (2003, p. 829) us that "we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming".

For Barad, reality is to be viewed through specific material-discursive apparatuses which are meaning-making devices for re/reading phenomena (Helen). Agential realism (Barad, 2003, p. 818) does not equate discourse with language. Rather it challenges the primacy given to words claiming instead that "primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted" (p. 819). It is these practices that are constitutive of phenomenon (or phenomena)- the reality as we encounter it. Moreover, meaning stands for "specific material (re)configurings of the world, and semantic indeterminacy, like ontological indeterminacy, is only locally resolvable" through agential cuts. In each iteration of reality or boundary marking of a phenomenon, apparatuses enact *material* (italics for emphasis) but temporary agential cuts which point to the im/permanence of what is determined. '[A]pparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (Barad, 2007, p. 148). If an apparatus changes, the reality changes. As it is the agential activity that de/stabilizes the in/determinacy of "words" and "things", Barad call for "the notions of materiality and discursivity" to be "reworked in a way that acknowledges their mutual entailment" (2003, p. 821). They also remind us that material- discursive practices or arrangements "have no finality in the ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity" (p. 821). This simply means that no iteration (like the present one) is the final and absolute rendering. Exclusions are not absolute neither the inclusions.

Any phenomenon that comes into being through agential cuts applied by apparatuses is to be re/read diffractively with "a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter and for whom" (Barad 2007, 90). Diffractive patterns highlight "the indefinite nature of boundaries" of a phenomenon as it shades into overlapping (and not separate) diffractions (2003, 803). These diffractions do not entail a sense of past. No new rendering can break with the past as the "past is never closed, never finished" (2010, p. 264). Barad argue that not only past cannot be brought back but it will be present in every re/configuring done: "The trace of all reconfigurings is written into the enfolded materialisations of what was/ is/ to-come" (p. 264). As I re/read Helen diffractively in the next section, the past renderings will (always) be present.

As pointed out above, in the current project, the apparatus is the Victorian imaginaries which enacts the phenomenon of Helen- a post human feminine body that emerges as a result of entanglement with matter- her painting ability- the more than human. A phenomenon in agential realism may stand for a human or a non-human (for example, a stick, a book, a spade, etc) (Murris & Bozalek, 2022, p. 59). In relational ontology, a phenomenon does not exist prior to its relational re/configuring as meaning is inherent in relations. Helen the phenomenon is co-constituted as a result of its relations with painting as enacted by cuts (or marks) made by the apparatus-Victorian mores.

A Diffractive Analysis of Helen Huntingdon

There are around twelve times that drawing (or painting) has been mentioned in the course of the narrative of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Although, I do not cover each incident individually, most are diffractively re/read for their post-human or more-than-human performativity drawing our attention to the inseparability of the human and the non-human.

Art matters when Helen meets Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham (the two men she falls in love with) for the first time. Going by the chronological order, the first mention is when (*TWH*, p. 69) Gilbert Markham and his sister Rose visit Helen and "the first object that met the eye was a painter's ease". The writer introduces readers to Helen through her art. An entangled version of the event alerts us to re/read the apparent erasure of Wildfell Hall's name from her painting as "entanglings entail differentiatings, differentiatings entail entanglings" (Barad 2014, p. 176). This apparent erasure of the building as well as her own identity as she is living under a presumed name (Mrs Graham) that ultimately leads to her defamation calling into question the acceptability of the profession that both Zakreski (2002, p. 75) and Losano (2003, p. 10) claim. It is reminiscent of professional women's plight of the Victorian age where women could not use their own names. Anne Brontë herself used Acton Bell in place of her own name without giving a clue as to whether it was a man or a woman.

In the same incident, Helen (*TWH*, pp. 70-1) does not divulge details about the painting of a (gentle)man even when Gilbert inquires about it. It is later on we come to know that it is of Arthur- her husband- and she has kept it to compare her son's features with those of his father that he never hopes to see again. Helen, the mother, is entangled with matter as the picture is hoped to decide how much resemblance son and father hold. It also points to situations where a non-resemblance can create issues to the paternity of a child. Bronte alerts to a future scenario when Gilbert wonders whether it is Lawrence Frederick who is the father of little Arthur as the village seems to suggest.

New patterns of a diffractive reading can be traced in a series of parallel events which re/mark Helen's courtship with Huntingdon. Talley (2009, p. 24) labels Helen as "unfeminine" as she is an oil painter in opposition to the societal demands and expectations. In the Victorian age, "oil painting was regarded as more appropriate for men" (Talley, p. 24). The same is mentioned by other scholars (for example, Dennis Denisoff, 1999; Patricia Zakreski, 2002). However, Helen is saved by an oil painting made by the Flemish portrait painter called Sir Anthony Vandyke (1599-164). She is able to get rid of the odious company of a certain Mr Wilmot (a potential suitor whom she does not like at all) when Arthur Huntingdon takes her to see it.

In another courtship scene, the im/possibility of Helen's future in/separable from the material painting is reinforced when back in the country-side, Huntingdon is invited by her uncle as a guest and he comes across a foil of his own picture (*TWH*, p. 152). He is thus almost assured of Helen's affection for him. Helen's outburst at his audacity is directed towards the picture rather than him that she calls 'that hateful picture' (*TWH*, p. 153) giving matter (material) agency. She, however, takes refuge in painting, nonetheless (*TWH*, p. 154). A little later, the ominous conversation (*TWH*, p. 155) between the two where each wants the other to be "tender and faithful" and Arthur Huntingdon seizing a miniature painting of his which she snatches back and throws in the fire, is something that happens again later in the narrative when it is Arthur who throws her painting material in to the fire to stop her from running away. While this altercation leaves her "miserable" (*TWH*, p. 155), the next one revives her faith in her destiny (*TWH*, p. 312) and she is eventually able to escape when Arthur goes to London for the season. Barad explains Helen's becoming in the following words "the self is itself a multiplicity, a superposition of beings, becomings, here and there's, now and then's" (2014, p. 176).

In the same scene (TWH, 311), the unforeclosability of Helen's co-constitution with matter is described by Arthur by snarling that she wants to "disgrace" by "running away and turning artist", and it would make his son into "a low, beggarly painter". This affords a becoming of Helen that is dis/continuous outside the relations despite Dennis Denisoff's (1999, p. 151) assertion that she uses "her palette knife" to run away from "an abusive marriage".

The material-discursivity of the phenomenon of Helen with her art is emphasized during relatively normal times, also. As Brenda Whipps (2023, n.p) points out, Victorian women took up drawing as a hobby (including Anne Bronte herself). Barad's (2007) notion of reponse-ability (the ethical in her approach) invites Arthur in her be/coming. As Barad argue, response-ability is "not about the right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and

enabling the response of the Other" (Barad, in Kleinman 2012, p. 81). This is illustrated when Helen (*TWH*, p. 195) realizes that she has got her "drawing" whereas "poor Arthur was sadly at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time". She repeats (p. 206) the same when she feels that she can pass her time better as compared to Arthur and wishes that he "would take up with some literary study, or learn to draw or to play music". She entangles her drawing with the rest of her responsibilities like "domestic affairs, and the welfare and comfort of Arthur's poor tenants and laborers" (*TWH*, p. 222). The observation by John Sutherland (1989, p. 622) who calls Helen an "abnormally dutiful wife" only reinforces the dis/continuity of the enfolding of Helen as a phenomenon.

Another instance of response-ability that Helen enacts is when she wants to repay back the money she borrows from her brother and to pay the rent (*TWH*, p. 331). Helen with her ability to earn from her painting can afford to not take favors from anyone. Entangled with this is Patricia Zakreski's (2002, p. 89) observation that she makes keeping the constraints of the Victorian age in view: "But even here her artistic production is mediated through a male protector -her paintings are delivered to the dealer and sold through her brother".

The agential cut marking Helen as a diffractive phenomenon has a differentiating entanglement with Milicent Hargrave (her meek friend. While 'Helen shatters the Victorian icon of the submissive wife" (Smith, 1992, p. xvi-ii), Milicent is the ideal Victorian wife, and it is much later that her husband comes to know that she was critical of him before her friends. Marianne Thormählen (2019, p. 8) points out that "all that such submissiveness is seen to do is to encourage male oppression". Hattersley (*TWH*, p. 322) is quick to make amends when Helen informs him of his failings towards his wife as narrated by Milicent herself.

Helen's entanglement with Milicent has another angle also. Helen "cannot afford to paint" for her "own amusement" (*TWH*, p. 70), but Milicent can, thereby their relationship remains open to im/possibilities of another (and another) re/configuration. This is especially noticeable when talking to Gilbert (while still at *The Tenant*) she (*TWH*, p. 98) says that she cannot fully admire the nature as she is always trying to imitate it. Gilbert consoles her by saying that she does "succeed in delighting others" with her artistic efforts. She, however, sets a futuristic tone for professional life when she acknowledges (*TWH*, p. 99) that she should not "complain" as "few people gain their livelihood with so much pleasure in their toil" as she. So equating art only with financial empowerment may (not) be entirely (un)true.

When Anne Bronte makes sure that other than Helen and Milicent, no other woman is portrayed as an artist, she is attributing a value to art and puts it in opposition to another supposedly womanly quality (or vice) to gossip. Anne Bronte herself was fond of sketching (Brenda Whipps, 2023, n.p) as mentioned a few paragraphs above also. The more-than-human self sufficiency given to Helen as an artist is evident in something that Gilbert's brother points out. Fergus (*TWH*, p. 81) keeping the Victorian mores in mind, re/configures Helen's relationship with art as well as other women when he confesses "for some of us have nothing better to do than to talk about our neighbors' concerns" as they have "exhausted sources of amusements". Fergus (p. 80) also declares that his sister (Rose) would go "mad" living in a place where she would not be able to see or talk to people referring to Wildfell Hall's rather isolated location. As mentioned above, Arthur lacked this self-sufficiency, too.

While Helen's re/worlding in Arthur's world is in/significant, her co-constitution in her dealings with Gilbert Markham is desirable, too, as it is him that she gets remarried to and eventually leaves drawing as Patricia Zakreski (2002) provocatively points out. Before I engage with Zakreski, some provocative diffractions emerge with respect to her relationship with Gilbert. Art provides both Helen and Gilbert to enjoy each other's company without indulging in anything romantic (suiting Helen more than Gilbert). Gilbert's silent monologue "[I] thought I would make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me" (TWH, p. 85) if read diffractively with Patricia Zakreski's (2002, p. 88) notion of "masculine critic" (that she uses for Arthur when he disembowels Helen's portfolio before their marriage) is a dis/continuity in the becoming of Helen. Admittedly, he is talking about sketching Helen and not the nature, but Helen being "so obviously morally and artistically superior to Gilbert" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 135) is something that Gilbert is not ready to fully concede at this stage.

There are two ways in which I prefer to re/read this. Firstly, this dis/continuity is strengthened by Helen herself when she alludes to her solitary life and its "many evils" (*TWH*, p. 86) but in the sense of missing "another's judgement" to improve her art. This is an in/admission of her being incapable as a woman and as an artist. While artists thrive on others' approbation, the Victorians also believed Darwin (as mentioned above) when he assumed that

women's minds were inferior to men (Nsaidzedze, 2017, p. 3). This is something that we see a little later (*TWH*, p. 89) when Gilbert is told by Helen to give suggestions for "further improvement" which "shall be—duly considered, at least". The effect of Gilbert's praise was that her "artist's pride was gratified".

The second way in which the above incident (Gilbert thinking to himself as a superior artist albeit when drawing Helen), is to refer to Patricia Zakreski's comment that Helen leaves painting after her marriage to Gilbert. She does not leave it after her first marriage (to Arthur). She worked at her canvass from daylight till dusk, with very little intermission saving when pure necessity" (*TWH*, p. 300). Could it be that unlike Arthur, Gilbert spent al his time with Helen leaving her no time to pursue her hobby? Or that Helen has fallen prey to the Victorian mores as pointed out by the likes of Wahrman (1993), Boghian (2014), Boardman (2000), etc. above, that women looked after the household affairs whereas men outdoors? The Victorian scholar, Patricia Zakreski, however, has a different point of view. She (2002, p. 88) seems to understand Anne Brontë suggesting that marriage "is most detrimental to creativity and female production". Zakreski's observation carries weight as Bronte never having married herself would know it all too well. The "alternate view of domesticity" that Helen offers, challenges "insubstantial and modish conventions of ideal femininity" (Patricia, 2002, p. 91). There is a sense of disappointment in Zakreski's account when she concedes that Helen is "represented as a domestic woman regardless of her home life and seemingly 'unwifely' behavior", after all. The assumption that Helen leaves painting is open to the im/possibility of re/configuring as an "ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity" (2003, p. 821).

Conclusion

In this section, I go back to the two references that I mention in the first section of this essay: Deborah Lutz (2019) and Elizabeth Shand (2106). My entangled and more-than-human rendering of Helen seems to do justice to Deborah Lutz's struggle that objects (non-human) may "speak", or they "rise from the page". In my account, Helen stands as "together-apart" (Barad, 2014, p. 168) with matter (painting). There are no "absolute separations" now or (n)ever. All future renderings may (not) matter the same.

By engaging with Elizabeth Shand's (2016, p. 296) tripartite division of Helen's personality (Helen the artist, Helen the mother and, Helen the romantic partner), I draw a diffracted rendering rather than an intertwined one. This diffractive re/worlding focuses on the inseparability of Helen, the human, from the non-human thereby emerging a more than-human phenomenon.

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