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A Poem, a Fervid Lyric, in an Unknown Tongue: Translation, Multilingualism, and Communication in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley

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“A POEM, A FERVID LYRIC, IN AN UNKNOWN TONGUE”: TRANSLATION,
MULTILINGUALISM, AND COMMUNICATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S

SHIRLEY

by

Amanda B. Erdmann

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT

“A POEM, A FERVID LYRIC, IN AN UNKNOWN TONGUE”: TRANSLATION, MULTILINGUALISM, AND COMMUNICATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S SHIRLEY

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In this essay, I will argue that looking at translation and multilingualism both as a mode of storytelling and as a theme of Brontë’s second published novel *Shirley* can help to uncover previously untapped moments of connection and understanding in the novel. Brontë’s exploration of translation and use of multilingualism reveals a sincere urge to connect in spite of tremendous difficulties—connect her characters to each other, connect her narrator to her readers. It is an ambitious, over-reaching goal, which Brontë did not ultimately attain. Yet, for Brontë, her (especially female) characters, and her narrator, translation in all its forms represents their earnest, if ultimately unfulfilled, desire to communicate—to be correctly comprehended and “well-rendered” as texts, whether they are translated by other characters within the novel or by an unseen reader without.

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I cannot express my gratitude enough to my husband, Alan. The reason this thesis has been written is entirely because of him—his love, support, and unfailing encouragement were the foundation I depended on. My son Sam reminded me of the importance of taking breaks to play and eat.

I also acknowledge my deceased grandparents, Reed and Margaret Holdaway, who treated everything I accomplished as if I were the best person ever to have done it. Finally, I want to thank my parents: my dad, who ran downstairs during dinner to look up poems by Robert Browning to read to me; and my mom, who taught me to always go to class.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
FOREWORD	1
TRANSLATION, MULTILINGUALISM, AND COMMUNICATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S <i>SHIRLEY</i>	12
WORKS CITED	51

FOREWORD

Charlotte Brontë uses multilingualism and translation in a unique way in her second published novel *Shirley*. In this essay, I will argue that looking at translation and multilingualism both as a mode of storytelling and as a theme of Brontë's story can help, if not entirely to unify what many consider a dis-unified novel, at least uncover previously untapped moments of connection and understanding in the novel, between the characters themselves, between narrator and reader. Her narrator and her female characters, rather than using foreign languages to create boundaries, instead recognize the pitfalls inherent in any use and attempt to overcome them through using foreign languages and foreign texts.

This foreword includes the bulk of the scholarship that I read in preparation for writing this thesis. While I do not specifically reference the majority of it in my project due to space restraints, these scholars and critics have informed my reading of *Shirley*, suggested my methodology, and provided the theory that has grounded my thesis.

Brontë Scholarship

Despite Charlotte Brontë's obvious interest in French language and culture, few scholars since Elaine Showalter have dealt overtly with the French in *Shirley*, focusing instead on her treatment of class and women's issues—and generally deciding that she did not go far enough into solving either of those problems entirely. Gilbert and Gubar, for example, declare that “Brontë becomes enmeshed in essentially the same male-dominated structures that imprison the characters in all her books” (373), and later scholars disparage the marriages of Louis and Shirley and Robert and Caroline as disastrous for their happiness. Other scholars, such as Tom Piatak, lament as well the

poor provisions made for the working classes in the novel. However, there is much disagreement among these scholars about which characters, if any, fight or attempt to escape the situation Brontë, or the system, has placed them in.

Surprisingly, in spite of the disagreement about which female characters are most liberated, these scholars all seem to concur on the characters' method of liberation; it is through myths and stories, they declare, that characters can transcend, even momentarily, their situations. These stories become a place where they can explore possibilities that are not realistic in fact. For example, Nancy Quick Langer discusses what she calls the "female imaginary" through which Shirley escapes male domination and argues that Caroline fails to escape because she cannot imagine herself outside of a patriarchal structure. Julia Gardner declares that Caroline refuses to consider matrimony as a viable future for herself and imagines being a governess instead, which liberates her. Tara Moore, in her article "Women and Myth Narratives," declares that the stories Caroline and Shirley tell to each other reveal their deep-seated emotions about women's roles: Shirley fears to become like the monster mermaid she speaks about, while Caroline conceives stories about escaping to Nunnwood and all-female solitude.

All of these scholars note that these imaginary spaces play a large role in Brontë's novel, since characters dream of solutions and explore them through stories. However, they typically still conclude that Brontë ultimately fails to fully support any solution, weakening her story. By contrast, other scholars, rather than assuming that Brontë intended to solve the "warped system of things" (*Jane Eyre* 559) in *Shirley*, focus instead on how Brontë uses the novel as a space for debate, not a place for concrete answers. When seen in this light, these imaginary spaces become yet another way in which Brontë

attempts to explore and question possibilities through stories, rather than a way in which her characters attempt and fail to escape their situations because of Brontë's supposed lack of vision.

The scholars who recognize the combative nature of Brontë's novels also note her ambivalence about all proposed solutions and her reluctance to fully commit to one solution or another. Pam Morris, for example, describes both the "longing and skepticism" in Brontë's representations of heroes and history (306). Sue Lonoff explains how her novels are full of dialogue, "a self conversing with itself, questioning and weighing, proposing resolutions, but rarely shutting doors in providing them" (389). Elizabeth Langland uses the same argument in her exploration of Brontë's narrative technique, arguing that that she represents "the patriarchal and feminist realities in tension, refusing assimilation, each interrogating the ultimate significance of the other" (26). It appears from all these scholars that proposing one solution is not sufficient when examining Brontë, that her aim throughout was to investigate possibilities, not concrete solutions.

Scholars also look at Brontë's refusal to espouse an ultimate solution through examining binaries she creates and upsets in her novels. In a chapter on *Villette* in her book *Alien Nation*, Cannon Schmidt discusses how Brontë presents binaries that would seem unable to coexist (English Protestant, Belgian Catholic), but then inserts a third term (colony) to complicate the binary, suggesting that the solution lies in uniting all three terms. Rather than a simple binary, this creates what John Barrell calls, "this/that/the other" (qtd. in Schmidt 92). Susie O'Brien takes a similar approach to Brontë's views in an article on sex and nationalism in *Shirley*, arguing that "By setting

up, in the context of a realist narrative, apparently intractable personal and political oppositions. Brontë implicitly criticizes both, positing the need for a third, liberating term. In *Shirley*, [. . .] this liberating term must come from outside the society defined by that intractable antagonism; it must, in other words, be foreign” (O'Brien 61). In the case of my argument, we could create a similar binary. Neither an English novel, nor a French poem, can adequately create understanding. Rather, characters must work together to understand each other’s language through translation and then create a new language formed from parts of both languages. Translation, then, is the third term that upsets the binary and includes both terms within itself.

Multilingualism Criticism

Multilingualism is a somewhat broad term referring to the use of any foreign language within a text, and has been used in various forms throughout English literature, from Chaucer to James Joyce, Shakespeare to Beckett. Kenneth Haynes, in a general overview of multilingualism in English literature in his book *English Literature and the Ancient Languages*, notes several different types of multilingualism such as composing in a foreign language (Milton wrote poems in Latin and Italian; More, Bacon, Hobbes and others also composed in Latin [18]). Other authors used foreign quotations or maxims in writing, as Montaigne does in his *Essaies*, or as Edward Gibbon in documenting his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In Gibbon’s work, these foreign quotations “are present mainly as part of the scholarly apparatus, and occasionally to provide an aura of the forbidden,” since by Gibbon’s own account “all licentious passages are left in the decent obscurity of a learned language” (qtd. in Haynes 24). In these various uses of foreign languages (largely in Latin or Greek), there is an implied

audience that may understand the foreign language presented, even in its “decent obscurity.” The authors are either writing for an international audience (in the case of the humanists), or writing for an audience that they know could understand the foreign languages they present.

Other uses of foreign languages in literature seem to confirm and create national-, class-, or gender-based boundaries. In some ways, this is merely satiric. Haynes notes the purposes of using Latin, for example, to mock the classes and professions that use them: “Molière uses Latin to go after doctors, Kyd the nobility, and Sterne to mock Catholic authority; Browning uses Latin to depict lawyers unsparingly” (27). Haynes also shows that in *Middlemarch* and *Aurora Leigh*, women are mocked for their lack of understanding the correct accenting of Greek. Later, however, Haynes describes how those who speak foreign languages in literature are often regarded with wariness: “Suspensions about the evils of those who mix foreign phrases into their conversation have been evident long before the novel came into being. Chaucer put foreign phrases into the mouth of the summoner in order to make his nasty inclinations evident. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Holofernes’ Latin pedantry is effectively stymied by Custard’s *reductio ad absurdum*” (35). Sir Walter Scott in *Waverley* and Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* and *A Tale of Two Cities* present French-speaking characters as external threats to a British (hence English-speaking, regardless of the dialect) way of life.

Multilingualism makes literature notoriously difficult to translate, and the way in which it is translated may reveal much about the translators and their allegiances to both source and target languages. Ton Hoenselaars notes the difficulty of translating works with multilingualism such as Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: “In French translation, the passages

in French blend with the target language, thus disappearing as audible markers of national difference” (xiv). He also quotes Derrida who despairs over translating *Finnegan’s Wake*: “Even if by some miracle one could translate all of the virtual impulses of the work [. . .] one thing remains that could never be translated: the fact that there are two tongues here, or at least more than one” (qtd. in Hoenselaars xv).

Matthew Reynolds describes a particularly telling example published in Brontë’s own day. Eugene Sue’s *Les Mysteres de Paris* was wildly popular in both Paris and England during the 1840s and was published in multiple translations. Even in the original French, however, there are translations for the *argot* slang of the inner-city Parisians. Reynolds explains the implications of an anonymous 1845 translation:

Sometimes the *argot* is imported unchanged onto the English pages while the Standard French translation is translated. [. . .] This aligns the English and French implied readers as being equally foreign to the language and environment represented. But more often the *argot* is rendered as London slang; this has the effect which always attaches to dialects (and not to standard languages) of relocation: its speakers belong in London not Paris. [. . .] And sometimes slang is given what looks like an explanation in standard French, as though readers were more at home in Paris than in London. [. . .] This style of translation follows a principle of skepticism about the consistency of national identity, and therefore about the solidity of national difference. In its pages, the inner city can suddenly look international, and English seem stranger than French. (72-73)

Multilingualism in the situations of *Henry V*, *Finnegan's Wake*, and *Les Mystères de Paris* becomes a linguistically and culturally vexed issue, where nearly any sort of boundary can be blurred, since the text itself is not bound to a single language. Brontë appears to be aware of some of these possibilities in her novel, particularly by setting *Shirley* at a time when national boundaries, whether English, French, or Belgian, are in a state of conflict, of redefinition.

Translation Scholarship

I am indebted to John Talbot's suggestion to use *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, which enabled me to historically and theoretically ground my argument and help me understand the translation conversation to which Brontë may have been attempting to add. In addition to these scholars, I have turned to more recent translation theorists for the foundation of my argument. Much work has been done recently with both post-colonial and post-national translation theory. Despite what transatlantic scholars such as Manning and Taylor say about how "translation theorists no longer speak of 'source' and 'target' languages, but rather of complex interactions between two or more idioms of equal status" (167), scholars such as Sathya Rao (whose article suggests that we should have a "non-colonial" translation) argue that "Translation and power are intimately linked" (73) and that translation historically has been used to promote a given political ideology. Lori Chamberlain notes this same idea and also observes that translations are described as faithful or unfaithful, just as women can be. One sixteenth-century translator describes his translation as a woman who must be subdued: "[I did] as the people of God were commanded to do with their captive women that were handsome and beautiful: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails [. . .]

I have Englished things not according to the vein of the Latin propriety, but of his own vulgar tongue” (qtd in Chamberlain 198). Translation in this sense is an act of colonization: domesticating a foreign (and female) text for the glory of the English language. Similarly, there are characters in *Shirley* who attempt to translate the language of others and interpret it for their own ideological purposes. Even the narrator has to occasionally domesticate the language of her French-speaking characters for the benefit of her English readership.

Bassnett and France dispute this idea of translator as an inherent imperialist, as they note that translating a text for ideological reasons was not confined to imperialist nations: “Both dominant societies and less powerful ones used translations for political purposes, selecting the texts most helpful for their purposes and adjusting them in translation. But whether the translators belonged to a dominant or a dominated culture, it was possible for the translation strategies employed to differ hardly at all” (49). In this way, translation complicates traditional notions of power between source and target languages, and can even overthrow typical power structures. Bassnett and France quote Tymoczko and Gentzler, who “describe the translator as having divided allegiances, as ‘a kind of double agent in the process of cultural negotiation’” (qtd. in Bassnett and France 50). Brontë’s narrator uses foreign texts that require translation as mediators in this process of “cultural negotiation” between her characters, and between her readers and herself. These divided allegiances for the narrator and characters require that both French and English languages be represented in the novel.

Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia explains that various languages and ideologies, more than just French and English, are represented in a text at the level of the utterance.

Caryl Emerson, the translator of Bakhtin, comments on how his work implies its own theory of translation—that more than just translating texts between separate languages, translation is required in every day interactions:

In fact, he [Bakhtin] viewed the boundaries between national languages as only one extreme on a continuum, at whose other end translation processes were required for one social group to understand another in the same city, for children to understand parents in the same family, for one day to understand the next. [. . .] To understand another person at any given moment, then, is to come to terms with meaning on the boundary between one's own and another's language: to translate. (Emerson 24)

I argue that Brontë's narrator and characters attempt to *cross* the boundary between their own and another's language. For the narrator, this involves inviting the reader to write the book at the same time as they translate it and read it; for the characters, this involves creating a new language on the border of each of their own, French or English.

In addition to individuals being able to communicate (surely the best result of translation), other post-national scholars have noted further positive possibilities for communication through translation. Emily Apter, for example, declares that translation “delivers a salubrious blow to narcissism, both national and individual” and often results in “political change”: “Cast as an act of love, [. . .] translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements” (6). For scholars such as Apter, the difficulties that result in attempting to “render self-

knowledge” in a foreign language are positive for the individuals that perform it, enabling them to overcome national and cultural boundaries when they overcome linguistic boundaries. Translation is a hopeful and ultimately positive force.

Other scholars, however, are less sanguine. Debra Castillo describes the loss of meaning that can occur even in texts considered most sacred because of the threat of lost meaning inherent in translation: “The word of God is mediated through a human word, translated into human languages, further mediated by the distance separating man from a direct relationship to the things of the word. Translated from one language to another, always with a slippage of meaning. Which, if any, language was the original word of God?” (4) This ultimate impossibility of coming to any reality through mediation is also noted by Walter Benjamin, who argues in his essay “The Task of the Translator” that “Translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (176). Although the characters and narrator in *Shirley* attempt to overcome the foreignness of languages through translation, they are ultimately unsuccessful. Benjamin quotes Mallarmé who reiterates why this is not possible: “the imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent; the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialize as truth” (178). Mallarmé’s statement here appears quite similar to Shirley’s school composition. Castillo, Benjamin, Mallarmé, all lament the instability of language that makes communicating, representing reality through language, ultimately impossible.

Shirley incorporates many of these different ideas. The characters do use translation to attempt to communicate even on a daily basis. The narrator makes her novel deliberately multilingual, requiring an audience which can translate, and which makes the novel, in and of itself, untranslatable into another foreign language. The characters and the narrator are only momentarily successful, reflecting once again Brontë's ambivalence about even the best possible solution. However, Brontë's refusal to assimilate and solve all of the problems that she presents, her refusal to write her novel and have her characters speak only one language, illustrate her desire to let as many voices be heard as possible in the hopes that some may communicate.

“A POEM, A FERVID LYRIC, IN AN UNKNOWN TONGUE”: TRANSLATION,
MULTILINGUALISM, AND COMMUNICATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S

SHIRLEY

Charlotte Brontë’s correspondence with her publisher W.S. Williams prior to the printing of her second published novel, *Shirley*, in 1849 reveals much about her composition and revision processes. Requested to change several aspects of her novel, she repeatedly refuses, proclaiming that once the novel has left her possession “it becomes next to impossible to alter or amend” (*Letters* 251). However, her letters over the next few weeks suggest that not only is she willing to modify certain aspects of her novel, she welcomes the opportunity to alter the (foreign) language her novel is written in. *Shirley* contains many instances of French language within the text, and before being revised contained even more. Several days after her refusal to revise, Brontë writes, “You observed that the French of *Shirley* might be cavilled at. There is a long paragraph written in the French language in that chapter entitled ‘Le cheval dompté.’ [. . .] I fear it will have a pretentious air. If you deem it advisable and will return the chapter, I will efface and substitute something else in English” (*Letters* 257). She also worries that the French words will be printed in italics, which, she fears, will make them appear “somehow obtrusively conspicuous” (*Letters* 255).

Despite Brontë’s ambivalence about the conspicuous multilingualism in her novel, Brontë’s narrator repeatedly calls attention to the frequent use of French in the novel, even occasionally daring her readers to dispute the words she uses and the language she writes them in. Not only that, but the characters within the novel (including the narrator) explore the possibilities and pitfalls of language, understanding, and

translation. The narrator declares she is translating the people of Yorkshire for her southern audience (apparently not enough for the reviewer of *Fraser's*, who disparaged her French, saying “The first volume will be unintelligible to most people, for it is half in French and half in broad Yorkshire” [*Fraser's Magazine* 153]). Just as often, these moments of translation or mistranslation occur between men and women. The narrator translates a composition one of the heroines, Shirley Keeldar, has written for her lover/French teacher Louis Moore (405); Caroline Helstone recommends to her cousin Robert Moore that he be “entirely English” (76) one evening by reading Shakespeare instead of French poets; Hiram Yorke, the French-speaking Yorkshire gentleman, attempts to read Shirley Keeldar, but finds her “untranslatable” (312). The novel has a preoccupation with texts (both French and English), with reading, and especially with translation.

From its first publication, critics of *Shirley* have found fault with its lack of unity, its ambiguous and often unsatisfying treatment of women's and class issues, its (at times) overzealous, interfering narrator. G.H. Lewes' comments in the *Edinburgh Review* are typical and oft-quoted: “The authoress never seems distinctly to have made up her mind as to what she was to do [. . .]. [Charlotte Brontë] has much yet to learn,--and, especially, the discipline of her own tumultuous energies” (160). Later, he also critiques the frequent use of French in the novel:

We may also venture a word of quiet remonstrance against a most inappropriate obtrusion of French phrases. When Gérard Moore and his sister talk in French, which the authoress translates, it surely is not allowable to leave scraps of French in the translation. A French word or

two may be introduced now and then on account of some peculiar fitness, but Currer Bell's use of the language is little better than that of the fashionable novelists. (161)

Elaine Showalter follows Lewes in lamenting Brontë's lack of discipline, and argues that it shows particularly in her numerous uses of French (especially the obscure references to French poetry):

It seems likely that the terrible strain of grief which Charlotte Brontë underwent while she wrote the book—both Emily and Anne died during its composition—caused her customary discipline to falter. Including scraps of her favorite French poems and vocabulary, she indulged her longing for a happier past, for the life with two loving sisters, and for the schoolgirl triumphs with M. Héger. (231)

Elsewhere, Showalter notes the symbolic importance of French in Brontë's other works, so it seems odd that what is otherwise significant has been seen in *Shirley* as a sign of disunity and lack of discipline.

In contrast to these critics, James Buzard, in a chapter on *Shirley* in his book *Disorienting Fiction*, suggests (along with Morris, Lonoff, Langland, and others) that all this conflict, disorganization, and disunity is potentially positive: "it is difficult to come to any easy judgment" he muses, "on whether this disunity is not after all a productive phenomenon, the means rather than the obstacle to national redemption" (225). Buzard also engages with the languages (French, among others) and the oral nature of Brontë's novel to illuminate his views of Brontë's theory of national culture, "to hail a definitively pluralized people, a people whose differences of class, region, gender, and even (to a

degree) ethnicity, might be sustained and acknowledged as ways of being English” (234). Buzard and others argue that Brontë appears to explore possibilities, rather than advocate concrete solutions.

While these scholars have explored various solutions Brontë presents in the realm of culture (Buzard), romantic and realist genre conventions (Elizabeth Langland), and national heroes (Pam Morris), none have ever returned to complicate and build upon Showalter’s 1974 exploration of the French language in *Shirley* and investigate the possibilities the French language and its translation offers for the novel. In this essay, I will argue that looking at translation and multilingualism both as a mode of storytelling and as a theme of Brontë’s story can help, if not entirely to unify what many consider a dis-unified novel, at least uncover previously untapped moments of connection and understanding in the novel, between the characters themselves, between narrator and reader. For above all what Brontë’s exploration of translation and use of multilingualism reveals is a sincere urge (even at times perhaps overwhelming her customary discipline) to connect in spite of tremendous difficulties—connect her characters to each other despite gender and class differences, connect her narrator to her readers despite geographic and cultural differences. It is an ambitious, over-reaching goal, which Brontë did not ultimately attain, one she recognizes she cannot fully achieve because of the constant possibility of mistranslation and because language can often be used to achieve power over others. Yet, in the narrator’s most idealistic moments, communication is possible, if it is a shared endeavor, with no party (or language) gaining complete mastery. For Brontë, her (especially female) characters, and her narrator, translation in all its forms represents their earnest, if ultimately unfulfilled, desire to *communicate*—to be correctly

comprehended and “well-rendered” as texts, whether they are translated by other characters within the novel or by an unseen reader without.

Furthermore, Brontë’s attempts to communicate using a foreign language in her novel come in sharp contrast to many of her contemporaries’ uses of foreign language in their novels. Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, even Brontë’s literary idol William Thackeray use French-speaking characters to delineate differences between French and English people, between the upper class and lower class, between correct and incorrect national behavior (perhaps understandable in the hyper-national era during and after the Napoleonic wars, when France, Belgium and England colonized the world on a much larger scale than previously). However, rather than using foreign languages to create or even to describe differences between French and English, men and women, Charlotte Brontë uses French to (if ever so briefly) remove boundaries and eliminate differences that create misunderstanding between languages, between genders.

In this essay, I will first look at translation and multilingualism as Brontë’s contemporaries used it, to suggest how Brontë may have viewed the issues inherent with using and translating foreign languages in English literature. I will then focus on how Brontë’s narrator specifically translates for her readers and how this affects the relationship of the narrator to her readers. Next I will look more closely at the narrator’s use of multilingualism to see how the narrator attempts to mitigate differences between herself and her reader using a foreign language. Then I will delve into the story itself, exploring how characters misuse language and translation in order to achieve power over

others. Finally, I will examine the most successful moments of communication the novel offers and why they are not lasting.¹

Contemporary Views of French and Translation Debates

Brontë's publisher was correct, perhaps, in assuming that the French could be a stumbling-block for some readers—a cultural, if not necessarily a linguistic one. Britain's victory over France and Napoleon thirty years earlier had affirmed for its citizens the superiority of Britain and endorsed their imperative to spread its Englishness uniformly across the globe. Britain's drive to "English" the world is particularly apparent in language and translation. Kenneth Haynes notes that "Language loyalty has been most intense whenever it has been enjoined by the political forces of nationalism." He cites the example of French in nineteenth-century England, when at the beginning of the century, "Beckford wrote *Vathek* in French (which did not seem particularly odd to the public, especially when compared to the rest of his behavior) and 1895, when Wilde wrote

¹ I take some of the theoretical foundations of my argument from 20th -century translation theorists and critics, many of whom have noted the relationship between translation and nationalist power. Despite that, optimistic post-national translation scholars such as Emily Apter proclaim the power of translation to overcome national boundaries, as it "delivers a salubrious blow to narcissism, both national and individual" and is "a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements" (6). Walter Benjamin looks at translation from a much different, perhaps less sanguine angle when he asserts that "Translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (176). I have also based some of my conclusions on other translation critics, who write about the act of translating specific works, such as Caryl Emerson's article on translating Bakhtin, where she argues that for Bakhtin, "To understand another person at any given moment, then, is to come to terms with meaning on the boundary between one's own and another's language: to translate" (24). I mention these to give credit to those from whom I have liberally taken, but also to illustrate that I have chosen not to cling to one particular theory of translation at the expense of all others.

Salomé in French, which was thought to be a scandal” (Haynes 19). In addition to being a language too shocking to be composed in, literature from France was much less likely to be translated into English, since, as Terry Hale describes, “Foreign writing, especially French fiction, suffered from a specific disadvantage with regard to the world of the circulating libraries: it was perceived as morally dangerous” (Hale 40).

Multilingualism in literature, just as much as translations of complete works, could often be considered with suspicion. Indeed, Haynes notes that writers who included foreign conversations often did so to make the speakers appear untrustworthy, such as when “Chaucer put foreign phrases into the mouth of the summoner in order to make his nasty inclinations evident” (35). Haynes also describes how Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* includes various footnotes in Greek and Latin, which Gibbon makes more titillating by declaring in his Autobiography that “all licentious passages are left in the decent obscurity of a foreign language” (qtd. in Haynes 24).

At a time when the French language was both scintillating and scandalous, studied by gentlemen, and taught to English daughters by governesses such as Charlotte Brontë and her sisters, authors such as Charles Dickens (and, much earlier, Walter Scott) use French-speaking characters in their novels to set up what it means to be British. Lady Deadlock’s maid in *Bleak House*, the Defarges in *A Tale of Two Cities*, even Fergus Mac-Ivor in *Waverley* all pose threats to a British way of life. Whether through their language or through their morality, these characters are unacceptable examples of British behavior, in part because of their very French-ness.

It is not surprising in this context then, that translators of literature from other languages into English had a long history of bowdlerizing or “Englishing” morally dangerous or even less artistic elements to a form that would be acceptable to an English readership of English books. Bassnett and France discuss how Edward Fitzgerald’s 1859 translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Kaysam* “radically altered the Persian original, following the translator’s declaration that he perceived both the poem and its author to be lacking in sophistication and aesthetic value before his intervention” (Bassnett and France 48). FitzGerald’s implication is that a British translation can give Art to a rough foreign language. Even John Dryden, although in a different manner, places the comprehension and appreciation of his British audience above that of Virgil’s when he explains that he aims as a translator “to make Virgil speak such *English* as he wou’d himself have spoken, if he had been born in *England* and in this present Age” (qtd. in Reynolds 71). Both translators are somewhat ethnocentric in their respective approaches towards foreign literatures in English. The fact of their being English and speakers of foreign languages gives them authority over both the source language and the target audience. As translators, they may master the foreign text and remove all that is offensive; by doing so, they determine for the target audience what is healthy for them to consume in a “reproduction” of a foreign text.

Not all translators believed in creating English (even exclusively British) literature out of a foreign language. Thomas Carlyle, for example, kept the foreignness of a work continually present in his translations. His translations of the German Jean Paul Friedrich Richter appeared in the first edition of *Fraser’s* magazine. Reynolds remarks that “*Fraser’s* editor was unusually adventurous [. . .] but still it is striking that such un-

English English should be allowed to appear in the vital first number of a new magazine. Foreignized English—translationese—was not only tolerated: it was thought more likely to sell” (Reynolds 71). Perhaps Carlyle believed that people would recognize the value of a foreign language translation more if they had to work for their understanding of it.²

Charlotte Brontë did not appreciate Carlyle’s Germanized English. In another letter to her publisher, she writes, “Now Carlyle is a great man, but I always wish he would write plain English; and to imitate his Germanisms is, I think, to imitate his faults” (*Letters* 74). Brontë would here appear to side more closely with Dryden than with Carlyle in her own translation theory, favoring clarity for the target audience over making the foreign language present in the target language.

Brontë further reveals her own opinions about translation while commenting on a French translation of *Jane Eyre*. After being asked by a French woman if she might translate, Brontë seems a bit skeptical, laughing,

I suppose she is competent to produce a decent translation, though one or two errors of orthography in her note rather afflict the eye; but I know that it is not unusual for what are considered well-educated French women to fail in the point of writing their mother tongue correctly. But whether competent or not, I presume she has a right to translate the book with or without my consent. (*Letters* 30)

² Robert Browning provides an even more striking example of this approach towards translation. Adrian Poole notes that in his translations of Aeschylus, Browning believed a translator must be “literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language” (qtd. in Poole 179). Poole argues that he “defies the allure of fluency [for the target audience] to explore the disjunctions between speech and writing” (180).

Later, after seeing the translation, she approves of it, saying, “The specimens of the translation given are on the whole, good; now and then the meaning of the original has been misapprehended; but generally it is well rendered” (*Letters* 140).

Brontë thus engages in one of the essential questions of translation: whether it is better to be correct in interpreting the author’s meaning (i.e. to be literal in translation), or “well rendered” in translation at the expense of the original. Throughout *Shirley*, Brontë’s narrator vacillates between these two options, between Dryden’s and Carlyle’s modes of translation, sometimes preferring one, sometimes favoring another. Occasionally she uses a foreign word because it increases the clarity of her sentence. At other times, she uses it in order to make her thoughts more “well-rendered,” or more beautiful. She often appears obliged to translate her foreign characters for her target audience, taming their language for the English as Dryden would tame Virgil. Despite her criticisms of Carlyle for his Germanisms, Brontë imitates him insofar as she also makes the foreignness of language present in her multilingual writing. Whether or not the language is actually translated in her writing, she emphasizes the necessity of a foreign language—not necessarily for its foreignness alone, but for its ability to better communicate meaning.

And although she has several characters who, like Becky Sharpe in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, have suspiciously French-speaking origins, her French-speaking heroes pose no real threat to a British way of life, but are rather, in some way, necessary to it. Similar to the narrator’s need for French in order to tell her story, the heroines of the novel seem to require the French-speaking Moores for their ability to communicate, to speak language (whether English or French) in a way that no Englishmen in the novel are capable of—both clearly and beautifully.

Narrative Translations

Brontë was not unfamiliar with the experience of formal translation. While in Belgium to learn French, her teacher, M. Héger, required her to translate English compositions into French, in addition to writing compositions entirely in French. One of her letters home complains about her experiences:

[M. Héger] is very angry with me just at present, because I have written a translation which he chose to stigmatize as 'peu correct.' He did not tell me so, but wrote the word on the margin of my book, and asked, in brief stern phrase, how it happened that my compositions were always better than my translations? adding that the thing seemed to him inexplicable. The fact is, some weeks ago, in a high-flown humour, he forbade me to use either dictionary or grammar in translating the most difficult English compositions into French. This makes the task rather arduous, and compels me every now and then to introduce an English word, which nearly plucks the eyes out of his head when he sees it. (qtd. in Gaskell 168-169)

Although Brontë continued to improve in her French and English compositions, in the writing of *Shirley*, she reverted to her former multilingual habits as a student learning French, combining her English composition with French words and translations. *Shirley* is full of moments when the narrator deliberately uses French words and explains that there is no English word that will suit her quite so well. Writing in English, it appears, can be just as "arduous" as translating into French, as it appears that multilingualism is necessary for the ideas in Brontë's narrator's head to be made clear in any text.

Furthermore, the narrator herself³ seems to feel that there are multiple times throughout the text when her readers may not understand her, whether or not by their ignorance. Carol Bock, in her article “Storytelling and the Multiple Audiences of *Shirley*” asserts that many critics have been insulted by the narrator’s treatment of what Bock calls “the fictive audience” (231), even calling the narrator at times “contemptuously hostile” (236). Bock argues that this is in part due to frustration with the act of storytelling on the narrator’s part, since “The mutual endeavor of sending and receiving fiction has turned out to be a difficult, problematic, and ultimately disappointing experience” (236). Bock notes the contrast between times when the narrator appears to condemn or mock her audience for their ignorance and the occasions when the narrator appears to reach out to her audience, inviting them into her “privileged viewpoint” (233) of characters, even if she struggles with her audience’s misunderstanding of her characters or her characters’ languages.

This shifting between critique and reconciliation in the making of fiction and in the negotiation of narrator/reader relationships (both of which issues appear unique to

³ There is much, almost unnoticed, disagreement about the gender of the narrator. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the narrator is pseudo-male. Margaret Smith appears to take it as a matter of course that the narrator is a man. Others conflate Brontë with her narrator and say the narrator is a woman. Still others ignore the question altogether. I agree that the narrator’s gender is ambiguous, probably deliberately so. However, I choose to assert with Buzard and others that the narrator is female for several reasons. First, it was only after reading this novel that the majority of Brontë’s reviewers decided that Currer Bell was a woman (although Brontë’s unpublished “Preface to the *Quarterly Review*” and a deleted sentence toward the end of *Shirley* describe Currer Bell as a middle-aged bachelor living in Millcote, near Rochester’s house in *Jane Eyre*). Secondly, the moments when the narrator uses “I” tend to be when declaring her intimate knowledge of particular women—their thoughts and their futures (or as the reviewer of *Fraser’s* puts it “She knows women by their brains and hearts, men by their foreheads and chests” [154]). Finally, several of the more bombastic comments about women and the hopelessness of their lives would be outrageous if declared by a male narrator.

Brontë's novel in this part of the nineteenth century, in contrast to Victorian earnestness and didacticism) can be seen even more clearly by looking specifically at how the narrator employs translation in her narrative. Her use of French shows the narrator's struggles with communication and her fears of being mistranslated. Her self-proclaimed knowledge and use of languages that may be foreign to her readers gives her authority over her audience when reproducing or interpreting her characters' texts and languages, but the narrator seems to desire to be reconciled with her readers, to share the process of interpretation and translation—the meaning-making of her story. As she attempts to be understood as a narrator and as a text, she questions the value of the text she is creating, just as she questions her readers. And although the narrator may despair at last of having been interpreted correctly, her mood towards her reader is often much more softening, filled more with a desire to communicate, engage with, and invite her readers into her story, than a desire to spite them.

Throughout the novel, Brontë's narrator's use of translation centers on French words and phrases, but when she first asserts her authority to translate foreign languages for her audience, she does so in her audience's own language, if not their native dialect. After the hero, the mill-owner Robert Moore, has discovered the machines he expects to come to his cloth factory have been destroyed by frame-breakers, he finds they have left a note, addressed to "The Divil of Hollow's Miln." Brontë's narrator remarks, "We will not copy the rest of the orthography, which was very peculiar, but translate it into legible English" (29). The narrator has inserted, reproduced in a sense, a different text into the larger text of her novel. The functions of these texts-within-the-text that occur throughout *Shirley* vary, but in this case, since presumably only a foreigner to Yorkshire would find

the orthography peculiar, the narrator relegates the English from the south to foreignness within their own nation. They require a translator in order to understand their own countrymen. The narrator is one who can interpret the men of Yorkshire to southern English readers through her translations, putting her in a position of authority. Her translations assuredly favor her target audience, even at the expense of the source language, since she refuses to share the orthography. It is too “peculiar” for an audience that requires “legible English” in order to understand. This first instance of translation calls the readers’ attention to their own linguistic frailties, forcing them to depend upon an author/translator to reveal language written even in English, albeit in a peculiar fashion.

However, in her next translation, the narrator is slightly less confident and more questioning about the translations she makes and the reasons why she is required to make them. Further, in this instance, it is not just the readers who must be negotiated with, but also the genre in which she is writing, the “English book,” which requires that only one language be contained within its pages. After Robert Moore comes home following the skirmish with his dissatisfied mill-workers, he begins to work in the garden:

At length, [. . .] a window opened, and a female voice called to him, -

‘Eh bien! Tu ne déjeunes pas ce matin?’

The answer, and the rest of the conversation, was in French, but as this is an English book, I shall translate it into English. (47)

The narrator appears constrained to translate rather than eager to transfer her characters’ conversation from its original language into a foreign one. She cannot keep the conversation, however trivial, in its original language because she is writing an “English

book.” The demands of the audience of an English book apparently require that only one language be presented.⁴ But by so explicitly stating that she writes an English book, the narrator supposes the possibility of a different type of text, one where, perhaps, the narrator would not have to translate for her readers because they would be able to understand the conversation regardless of the language she wrote it in.

This statement should be qualified somewhat, as Brontë’s intended readership (which Richard Altick in *The English Common Reader* declares was “relatively small, intellectually and socially superior” [7] and was not, at least in Altick’s estimation, the masses) probably spoke French and could understand, at least to a certain extent, French language. Brontë’s own education, as the daughter of a clergyman (albeit a well-read clergyman), involved much training in French, and several studies of female education in England at the time agree that French tuition for women was privileged even above instruction in household management (Burstyn 64). However, in this instance, the narrator is unwilling to let French, even if it is about household management, remain in untranslated French. The narrator again controls the access that any reader, whether educated in French or not, would have to her characters by translating their French into English for her English readers of her English book.

However, by suggesting the linguistic inferiority of an English book (and possibly by extension, English readers of English books), the narrator negotiates a much more

⁴ There may also be nationalist reasons why the narrator so explicitly translates this. As noted earlier, French was considered morally dangerous, and setting the book during the Napoleonic wars might certainly increase the suspicion with which these characters are regarded; even though, from their first introduction into the text, they are described as being “not French,” the stigma of speaking French probably remains to a certain extent, since they are certainly, “not English,” either. The narrator may also be keen to avoid any hint of this being a “French novel” with all the sensationalism that the label implies.

uneasy position of authority for herself. On the one hand, she again reminds her reader of her own knowledge of foreign languages and their inability to understand her characters. On the other, however, she recognizes her readers' needs and that the genre in which she is writing has certain conventions, one of them being a standard language—even if that language does not necessarily contribute to authentic communication of her story and her characters. There seems to be a longing for a different type of book or a different type of reader that can cross linguistic boundaries without a narrator so overtly translating for them.

Indeed, in an earlier scene in the novel, she gives that desired type of reader privileged information. The narrator does not translate a long passage of French that reveals information about Robert Moore not explicitly stated elsewhere in the novel, rewarding those who can comprehend other languages without translation. Robert Moore has a long conversation in French, but it is not with a fellow countryman, but a Yorkshire man, Hiram Yorke. The narrator does not comment on her lack of translation, but moves smoothly from an English conversation to a French conversation, and only slightly remarks on its peculiarity at the end:

“Ay, there it is [says Yorke]. The lad is a mak' of an alien among us. His father would never have talked i' that way. – Go back to Antwerp, where you were born and bred, *mauvaise tête!*”

“*Mauvais tête vous-même, je ne fais que mon devoir; quant à vos lourdauds de paysans, je m'en moque!*”

[. . .]

And here Mr. Yorke held his peace; and while he sits leaning back in his three-cornered carved oak chair, I will snatch my opportunity to sketch the portrait of this French-speaking Yorkshire gentleman (33-34). In addition to suggesting, perhaps, that her characters become, at least in this way, a bit more like the European-educated Hiram Yorke, the narrator's lack of translation allows readers who can understand Robert Moore's native language to become even better acquainted with his character and his motives. James Buzard points this out admirably by translating the passage himself: "Readers who can temporarily leave English for French will discover here the source of Moore's pitiless drive: loyalty to an English father betrayed by the so-called friends he called upon for help" (239). Those who can understand Robert Moore's language themselves receive insight into the harshness and isolation of Moore's character, which the narrator never reveals in English at any time in the novel. The narrator refuses to interpret Moore for her readers, in spite of English readers who may no longer be able to understand her English book.

Exact or Well-Rendered Multilingualism

In addition to these translated or untranslated conversations or texts where the narrator questions her readers and her genre, the narrator also inserts French words when describing people and places, again reproducing a type of foreign text. However, rather than critiquing those who cannot understand as she does in these earlier texts and conversations, the narrator invites her reader into a discussion of her word choice. She no longer simply caters to their need for an English book, keeping the authority of the narrative to herself; she allows her readers to determine for themselves if the words she uses are sufficient to describe the scenes before them. By doing so, the narrator allows

them a measure of control in the narrative. The audience crosses the boundary between reading and writing an English book. This deliberate multilingualism and the narrative commentaries surrounding it allow the narrator's audience both to understand the foreign language and perhaps question the efficacy of their own language by itself.

Furthermore, these examples of multilingualism are reversals of Brontë's earlier French translations of English texts as a student in Belgium. Now compelled to write in English instead of French, the narrator reverts to French words when she cannot find a word in English which adequately expresses her meaning or when she finds a word that is more beautiful in French than in English. What is striking about her use of French, is that in contrast to other novelists of her day who insert French phrases that had passed into English popular culture without explanation ("au fait," "tête-à-tête," etc.), Brontë's narrator alerts her readers to what she has done and invites a response from them. Brontë's narrator transverses the boundaries between English and French through her parentheses and footnotes, inviting the reader to join her in creating meaning through multilingualism. Through this process, she and her readers create a new language, a combination of the two languages that enriches the meaning of both languages and the text, communicating more clearly and more beautifully than either language could do on its own.

The narrator is occasionally defensive about her use of a French word, as when she explains, "[Caroline] let the punctilious whim pass, sure that her [Hortense's] natural bonté (I use this French word because it expresses just what I mean – neither goodness nor good-nature, but something between the two) would presently get the upper hand" (262). Here, French is the best way for the narrator to correctly express just what she

means to say. She suggests alternate possibilities of words she could have chosen to use, but “neither goodness nor good-nature” is exactly what she means. The narrator has enacted for her readers (particularly for the readers who might suggest that she could just have easily used an English word instead of a French word) her process of word choice, before finally rejecting the language of her novel for a foreign word that more fully illustrates and comprehends her meaning. By doing so, she allows her readers to better understand the character she is describing—but she requires multiple languages to do so.

A later example shows the narrator softened, more conciliatory, as she invites her readers to participate in a conversation about language: “The world wore a North Pole covering; all its lights and tints looked like the ‘reflets’ of white, or violet, or pale green gems.” In a footnote,⁵ the narrator invites, “Find me an English word as good, reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word. ‘Reflections’ won’t do” (1849, 207). The narrator enables her readers to experience the foreignness of their own language through its inability to express exactly what she means, and invites them to participate in her writing process by seeking out words which could better articulate her meaning. The narrator encourages the reader to go out and “find” her another word to use, showing her desire to negotiate the traditional relationship of authority between a writer and a reader.

⁵ This footnote is mysteriously missing from my 2007 Oxford UP edition. It is in both the 1849 and 1857 editions. Most editors based their editions on the first or second (1853) edition, and this footnote appears in both of them. The footnote also appears in the 1979 Oxford Clarendon edition and the 2006 Penguin classics edition. I am almost inclined to think that it is a mistake—as reluctant as I am to think that Oxford UP could make a mistake—because they have detailed footnotes about the two other footnotes that were taken out for the 1857 edition, but there is absolutely nothing about this one. An e-mail query to the Victoria list-serv uncovered no new information about the missing footnote. Consequently, I have chosen to cite this particular footnote from the first edition of the novel.

The reader, the writer, and their new pluralized language of French-English all work together to be understood.

The narrator shows a different aspect of the French words included in the text during a reunion scene between Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore after he has been shot: their possibility of making the text more “well-rendered,” as a result of a different language. The narrator describes how “[Caroline] took [Robert’s] thin fingers between her two little hands; she bent her head ‘et les effleura de ses lèvres’ (I put that in French because the word *effleurer* is an exquisite word).” (435). Here, the narrator changes from her previous uses of French words, which she claims better represent the situation she is describing. She mentions nothing about what it expresses but instead focuses on the beauty of the word itself. Rather than choosing words for their precise meaning, she chooses them to make her tale more “exquisitely” rendered than it would be without the French word.

In some cases, as with *effleurer*, it may be that there is a word in English which expresses the narrator’s meaning just as well, but the French words have an aesthetic quality in this instance which an English description of the same scene would be entirely without. In this example, the narrator’s tone is even less confrontational than in the other passages; she hopes that she has persuaded the reader of the correctness of her multilingualism and can now fully enjoy with the narrator the beauties and depth of meaning that another language can add to a text in English.

At the end of the novel, the narrator enters the tale as a character and thus actually becomes a part of the text she has labored so to create, describing the scenes and the people she has worked to correctly translate for the unseen reader who is outside the text.

This underscores the desire the narrator has of being understood and interpreted correctly, even at the expense of the traditional authority which comes from authoring. She wants to be read correctly just as her book is read, to have communicated her message and not to be misapprehended. The narrator emphasizes by this act that meaning-making in this story can and should be a shared endeavor. But a book entirely in English, without any other language to communicate in, does not accurately translate the ideas in her head. The narrator requires multiple languages (even the creation of a new, pluralized language) in order to make the reproducible text more concrete, and as well-rendered as possible. This new language requires an audience who can, at least in part, translate the foreign texts she uses. The narrator's use of multilingualism seeks to break down traditional power relationships between author and reader, as they work together to make a text that is both beautiful and functional in transmitting its message.

Power and Mistranslation

Although the narrator attempts to overcome traditional reader/writer boundaries through her use of translation and language, the misuse of language to maintain or create social (particularly gender) boundaries, frequently occurs within in the novel. Characters often try to "read" each other's behavior as they would a text and translate their language and actions to determine their motives. And whereas the narrator negotiates a relationship of power between herself and her readers based on her ability to translate her story, some of the characters within the story seek to gain power over each other by translating and reproducing the behavior of others with their own interpretation. These misuses of translation reveal the difficulties that occur, particularly between men and women, when translation is abused.

When Caroline recites poetry for Robert (a scene I shall return to), she remarks, “When I meet with *real* poetry, I cannot rest till I have learned it by heart, and so made it partly mine” (81). The desire to master texts, to read, understand, and learn them “by heart” spreads beyond mere texts to include characters and people. The characters within the novel attempt to read and interpret one another’s behavior as they would a text, and some (generally men) use their interpretation to master a person (typically women) as they would a foreign text—translating a source text to please a target audience (themselves), and often misapprehending the text’s meaning entirely.⁶

Joe Scott, Robert Moore’s well meaning but chauvinist foreman, interprets all women’s behavior through a translation of scripture, and believes that no woman could comprehend man’s language. He believes that women can be read, interpreted, and controlled as easily as the written word. When Shirley and Caroline try to discuss politics with Joe, he refuses to believe they could understand the conversation topic they chose, saying, “It is rayther difficult to explain where you are sure not to be understood” and “I cannot argue, where I cannot be comprehended” (276-277). In addition to viewing men’s and women’s languages as separate and distinct, with no possibility of a hybrid multilingual language where men and women could meet on common ground, Joe bases his convictions on his interpretation of scriptural authority. He quotes the First Epistle of Timothy, which declares that women must “learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence” (277). All

⁶ Much later, Bram Stoker’s *Count Dracula* expresses a similar relationship between knowledge of a foreign language and mastery by others when he tells Jonathan Harker why he has chosen to learn and speak perfect English: “I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, to say, ‘Ha, ha! A stranger!’ I have been so long master that I would be master still – or at least that none other should be master of me” (Stoker 20).

language, according to Joe, is the province of men only, so that for women to use it would be to “usurp authority” which rightly belongs to men.

Here Joe uses an English translation of the Bible as a key to understand and interpret women. He translates their language and prescribes their behavior using this key, and then denies them the opportunity to translate his language. The Bible, this translated and retranslated text, controls Joe’s interpretation of women, and he uses this interpretation to, in turn, control their behavior as he would control a text that he had mastered and so made “partly his.” He forms all his conclusions about them based on the authority of this text and tries to force them to act in accordance with his translation of them. Furthermore, Joe denies Shirley and Caroline the ability to interpret the scriptures on their own and perhaps regain a measure of control for themselves, since, according to Joe, women are “to take their husbands’ opinion, both in politics and religion” (278).

Caroline attempts to convince Joe of the difficulty in translating texts, let alone women. She argues that Paul

wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn, to make it say, ‘Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection;’— ‘it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace,’ and so on. (278)

Caroline notes how difficult it is for people to understand written text, and thus the impossibility of claiming validity for any single-language translation. There are more languages than just words on a page, there are situations which shift meanings, and many of them are difficult, nigh impossible to translate. To control behavior on the basis of a translation that may have been “misapprehended altogether” is merely an excuse to oppress. Not even the holy Word of scripture from a source language should be imposed upon a target audience, either as an interpretation of or a prescription for behavior.

But Joe holds on to his translations, both of the Bible and of Caroline and Shirley, presenting his interpretation of some of their behavior and laughing at what he sees as their inability to understand men’s language. He reproduces their behavior in retelling it, but interprets and changes it according to his own purposes. He scoffs in retelling how Caroline came to get Robert to help her with a sum, saying: “She couldn’t do it; Mr. Moore had to show her how; and when he did show her, she couldn’t understand him” (278). Shirley, too, he condemns, and translates her behavior while talking to Robert Moore as ignorance: “She hears no more o’ Mr. Moore’s talk nor if he spake Hebrew” (279). Joe refuses any interpretation, any translation of these events that is contrary to his own, assuming he has correctly apprehended the meaning of their behavior and thus mastered and controlled them. And because he also refuses to listen, Shirley and Caroline remain mis-read texts. Neither can communicate or understand the other’s language.

Hiram Yorke, later in the text, also believes he can achieve power over Shirley by interpreting her language after they get into a disagreement over the battle at Hollow’s Mill. Shirley had defended Robert Moore’s actions to the radical Yorke, and the narrator explains that though he would “not have borne this language very patiently” from a man

or even from some women, he endures Shirley's rebukes with patience because of her beauty and most especially because "if he wished to avenge himself for her severity, he knew the means lay in his power: a word, he believed, would suffice to tame and silence her, to cover her frank forehead with the rosy shadow of shame, and veil the glow of her eye under down-drooped lid and lash" (310). Yorke's power over Shirley, he imagines, lies in his ability to translate Shirley's behavior and body language for himself, uncovering what he believes is her secret, perhaps shameful love for Robert Moore and then to silence her by reproducing his interpretation of her own motives back to her as if she were a text he had mastered; only "a word" would be required to do so. His knowledge and correct translation of her body language would give him power over her. Yorke mistakenly imagines that Shirley is a text to be read as easily as a book, and when read aloud, effortlessly mastered.

When he taunts her about her supposed attachment to Robert Moore, Shirley's self-control baffles him and overcomes his self-proclaimed capability to translate her and her language:

She checked herself—words seemed crowding to her tongue, she would not give them utterance; but her look spoke much at the moment: what, Yorke tried to read, but could not. The language was there, visible, but untranslatable – a poem, a fervid lyric, in an unknown tongue. It was not a plain story, however, no simple gush of feeling, no ordinary love confession – that was obvious; it was something other, deeper, more intricate than he guessed at: he felt his revenge had not struck home; he

felt that Shirley triumphed—she held him at fault, baffled, puzzled: she enjoyed the moment—not he. (312)

Shirley achieves victory in their skirmish by precisely the same means that he imagines she would show defeat: her silence. She disciplines her body language to keep her secret. Yorke then recognizes his inability to “read” her silent language which “spoke much.” Yorke can see that Shirley speaks another language and that it is “untranslatable.” He again believes that Shirley is a text, but a much more complicated text than he had believed—not so easily translated. Shirley triumphs because she is unreadable; she keeps her language of true communication secret. Yorke can only admire the “poem,” the “fervid lyric,” the “unknown tongue” without any clue as to how to master or even interpret it.

In these instances, the boundaries between men and women are insuperable, and as Kenneth Haynes notes, the foreign language has preserved “social distinctions” between men and women, a phenomenon that occurs even in works by female authors such as George Eliot in *Middlemarch* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh*, where the women are mocked for their ignorance of how to correctly accent Greek (17). However, in contrast to Eliot and Barrett Browning, Brontë makes it clear that it is not women who find men’s languages incomprehensible (the Latin and Greek of *Middlemarch* and *Aurora Leigh*), but it is men who cannot understand the more complex language that women use.

Communication through Foreign Texts

At the same time as she represents the communication failures that may occur when men and women fail to understand one another’s language or attempt to use a false

translation in order to master another person as they would a text, Brontë's narrator also posits moments of successful communication, where men and women can correctly interpret and understand each other's languages. Even as the narrator requires foreign languages in her text, the characters also require foreign texts to eliminate the barriers to communication, to create a unique, hybrid, pluralized language in which they can understand each other and authentically communicate. Again, this seems markedly different from other situations in nineteenth-century novels (although Hoenselaars notes John Marston's 1599 play, *Antonio and Mellida*, in which English lovers declare themselves in foreign Italian) in which lovers are content to either speak to each other while together, or send letters while apart, or send a message through another person. Communication is carried on through one medium, one genre, at a time; whereas in *Shirley*, in the course of one conversation, the characters move from speaking, to reading compositions, to reciting poetry, back to speaking again.

Just as Caroline and Shirley are represented as texts, the heroes, the half-Belgian Moores are also described in terms of their textuality. Caroline's and Shirley's guardians express their disapproval of their nieces' friendships with the Moores by condemning not their actual relationships, nor the men themselves, but the French texts and the French language with which the men are associated. They attempt to control their nieces' behavior by controlling the languages they speak. When the Reverend Helstone forbids Caroline's relationship with Robert Moore, he does so by commanding her to stop taking French lessons:

The language, he observed, was a bad and frivolous one at the best, and most of the works it boasted were bad and frivolous, highly injurious in

their tendency to weak female minds. He wondered (he remarked parenthetically) what noodle first made it the fashion to teach women French: nothing was more improper for them; it was like feeding a rickety child on chalk and water-gruel. (144)

Helstone describes the French language in terms of its nutritional value; Shirley's uncle, Mr. Sympson, also discusses foreigners as malnourished foreign texts when he declares: "You read French. Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles" (460). It is obvious that Mr. Sympson is discussing Louis, but he refers to Louis only through the texts and novels that he gives Shirley to read—and these texts and the language they are written in have the capacity to poison the mind. Similar to ethnocentric translators, Helstone and Sympson have determined that only English fare is healthy for their nieces, and so they must restrict their diet, forbidding them to consume morally dangerous French food and texts. In part, this could be a result of the Napoleonic wars: the French language, regardless of the nationality of the authors who compose in it or the characters who speak it, would be seen as not only frivolous, but bad, unpatriotic, even dangerous to England. Only good, solid British fare would be healthy for the "rickety child," woman.

Shirley and Caroline's uncles are perhaps right to discuss the influence of the half-Belgian brothers in terms of their textuality. Caroline and Robert and Louis and Shirley communicate most effectively when they repeat French (and in the case of Caroline and Robert, English) texts to one another in order to transmit their messages. Once they have sent these messages using foreign texts, they then create a new language together with which they can communicate more freely, more authentically than by

reproducing the words of others. These scenes serve as fitting bookends to a novel obsessed with the languages we communicate in—showing how foreign texts may increase understanding by creating a unique, pluralized language, even as they represent the transient, fleeting nature of this type of communication.

Buzard uses the example of Robert and Caroline to show how Robert is “Englished” by reading aloud Shakespeare and Caroline is “Frenched” by reciting a French poem (239-240). Buzard notes the impact of using French specifically at the time represented in the novel; that for Brontë, the importance of having the broader worldview and pluralized culture that French brings is so important that she uses French despite the fact that

at the time of her story, [these nationalities] could hardly be more committed to mutual exclusivity. At the moment when Napoleon’s Continental System is choking Britain off, when English and French people are under intense pressure to “declare themselves” the adherents of one identity only, Brontë’s lovers declare themselves in each other’s native tongue, each recovering in that other language some lost, indispensable component of the self. (240)⁷

Brontë’s potentially scandalous use of the French language is tempered by the ambiguity of her French-speaking characters’ national identity. Robert makes it very clear to his foreman, Joe Scott, that he refuses any allegiance to France or to England. Robert and Louis Moore are half-Belgian, half-English, with a French-speaking mother hailing from Anvers or Antwerp, a part of Belgium that traditionally speaks Dutch. At the

⁷ Cf. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* for a similar, linguistic boundary-crossing proposal scene.

time of *Shirley*'s setting, the area that would be known as Belgium was technically a part of France, since France had taken over the country during the Revolution, and thus was not even an existing country. These characters, by their very nature, cannot be “the adherents of one identity only,” since they have no particular national identity to begin with. Their liminality seems to imply that they cannot communicate effectively with either nationality—at least, they cannot communicate effectively using only one language.

Not only do the narrator's characters attain a lost component of their cultural selves, creating a deeper, more pluralized member of a community by using a new language, as Buzard argues, but they also create a pluralized language, which enables them to have the possibility of true communication (overcoming their linguistic, cultural, and gender differences) that is denied the other relationships in the novel, and even largely denied the narrator. The lovers begin this new process of communication hesitantly, by sending messages to be translated in the guise of discussing foreign texts. Caroline shares with Robert her disapproval of his behavior to his workers through the text of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. It is shortly after this that she recites the text of a French poem and he remarks “Oh! I understand thee” (82). Caroline and Robert begin this creation of a new language by crossing directly over to a foreign language, sending messages to be replicated orally and then translated by the other person. The ability to understand a physical, reproducible text in a foreign language shows their ability to understand the metaphorical text that the other person may present.

As they reproduce, translate, and then discuss these texts, the narrator describes how congenial their conversation is and why it is that way—because it is not

reproducible: “It may be remarked, in passing, that the general character of her conversation that evening, whether serious or sprightly, grave or gay, was as something untaught, unstudied, intuitive, fitful; when once gone, no more to be reproduced as it had been, than the glancing ray of the meteor, than the tints of the dew-gem” (78). Unlike the texts they have used to communicate, unlike the texts of behavior that are mistranslated by the other characters in the novel, and unlike the narrator’s text itself, the new language of communication between Caroline and Robert in this moment cannot be replicated—and that is what makes it real.⁸

An even more interesting linguistic interaction comes during the French lesson between Louis and Shirley—the relationship that many scholars consider the more problematic, as Shirley grows continually more silent as the novel draws towards its close. However, an examination of the scene in the schoolroom (which scholars often mark as the beginning of Louis’s domination of Shirley) shows that, at least at this point in the novel, Shirley and Louis may almost be able to speak the same language—with the right combination of the well-rendered-ness of French language and the authenticity of English subjects.

Nancy Quick Langer argues in her article “Capsizing the ‘patriarch bull’ in *Shirley*,” that “[Louis’s] ability to recite one of [Shirley’s compositions] from memory indicates his obsession with claiming ownership of her work, but also suggests that his

⁸ The two footnotes that were taken out for the second edition of *Shirley* are both, surprisingly, related to this idea of authenticity and reproducibility in the French language. The footnote which was here in the first edition suggests an additional French poem that is “worthy of being written in English,—an inartificial, genuine, impressive strain. To how many other samples of French verse can the same be applied with truth?” (1849, 131-132). The narrator’s belief that French is not enough to communicate perhaps comes from this suggestion that French texts are artificial, although beautiful.

oral rendering transforms her words according to his criticism of them” (289). However, it is not just Louis who possibly “transforms” Shirley’s words, but Brontë’s narrator, who explains, “He gave [the recital] in French but we must translate, on pain of being unintelligible to some readers” (405). The narrator then offers an interpretation in English of a composition originally written in French, changing the meaning or the rendering of both its original author as well as its declaimer. Shirley’s fictitious written text is taken from one medium to another: written down by Shirley, then recited by Louis, then translated by the narrator and then written down again for the benefit of the reader. Meaning is potentially lost in each translation as it gains a new author. While it may be true that Louis claims a part ownership in the composition by reciting it from memory (making it “partly” his, as Caroline would say), Shirley claims at least an equal portion, as does the narrator and even the reader. Brontë’s letters reveal, as discussed above, that without consideration for the reader, the composition would still have been in French, and possibly been “cavilled at.” Reader, narrator, male and female characters: all take a measure of control and ownership in the production of meaning in Shirley’s school composition. All of them can claim partial authority over the text, since all are in part authors.

Whatever the interpretation or the ownership of the ideas within the composition, they underscore the inability of language—spoken or written—to transfer meaning effectively. Shirley’s essay describes Eva, roaming the earth alone, searching for answers, for companionship through communication, but

All she questioned responded by oracles. She heard – she was impressed; but she could not understand. [. . .]

“Guidance—help—comfort—come!” was her cry.

There was no voice, nor any that answered. [. . .]

At last one overstretched chord of her agony slacked: she thought
 Something above relented; she felt as if Something far round drew nigher;
 she heard as if Silence spoke. There was no language, no word, only a
 tone. (407)

While many scholars have noted Shirley’s composition, “Le Premier Femme Savante,” as a presentation of a mythic Eve or Brontë’s homage to her sister Emily’s religion of nature, this composition is remarkable not only for its complicated, disputed transmission history, but for its depiction of true communication and interpretation. For the author(s), it appears that whenever language interferes, true communication is not possible. Not even the biblical Word can offer any translatable message to Eva, and there is no human language that she can interpret. All the answers Eva receives are oracles, a word frequently employed in *Shirley* when mentioning statements difficult or impossible to understand. The use of the word oracle gives—especially here—these incomprehensible messages greater symbolic meaning. People in *Shirley* cannot even understand what would generally be considered the most important of messages, because of the pitfalls of all language. Only a vague Something and an even vaguer Silence can offer any sort of truth to the heroine of the composition. But when it does, Eva exclaims, “All I would have, at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from my childhood, are interpreted” (408). The perfect union of Genius and Humanity, as the composition calls it, comes when they can correctly understand one

another, and that is all the mythic woman requires—perhaps all that any of the composition’s authors require.

Louis and the narrator both take and reproduce texts, but in this scene, as with Robert and Caroline at the beginning of the novel, the reproduction and repetition of texts is a step towards true communication. Shirley and Louis shift from reciting the texts of others (including Shirley’s composition) to the very beginnings of a real conversation, using Louis’s native language, and Shirley’s English authenticity.

Louis begins by asking Shirley to recite some French poetry which she no longer remembers, so she asks him to recite the poem for her: “When he [Louis] ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them: she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression” (412). Neither Shirley nor Louis speaks a new language here; all Louis can do is orate already composed texts, and all Shirley can do is reproduce exactly his oration. There is no originality, no production of anything new. Furthermore, Shirley is dependent on Louis (who in turn is dependent on the French poets) for how to speak—she has no words of her own to use. Yet, the narrator explains that she enjoys reproducing his language: “she found lively excitement in the pleasure of making his language her own; she asked for further indulgence” (413). Again, however, the memorization and recitation of texts implies some mastery over them—Shirley has made Louis’s language partly her own, as has Caroline earlier in the novel.

Together, Louis and Shirley recite French poetry, back and forth, first one poem, then another, “all the old school-pieces were revived, and with them, Shirley’s old school-days” (413). They begin to communicate through exchanging a combination of

written and oral texts—the poems themselves, and their reproduction/recitation of them. The messages they send recall the days when Shirley was less proud and scornful of Louis, when they could understand one another.

Yet both recognize after a certain point that merely replicating the French language of others is not enough: “Perhaps a simultaneous feeling seized them now, that their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown as a Yule log to the devouring flame” (413). Louis laments the incapacity of French to be more “dramatic, nervous, natural,”⁹ and then Louis and Shirley abandon mere texts and begin speak to one another in French, using their own words, producing their own new language. On either side, there is a repudiation of native language and an embracing of a foreign: Shirley rejects her native language and embraces French, and Louis rejects French subjects and embraces English ones. Their mutual understanding of each other’s languages enables them to cross the barriers, linguistic and otherwise, that prevent them from communicating. They meet on the common ground of a new language only they can understand.

Failures of Communication

These moments of true communication, between Robert and Caroline and Louis and Shirley, are very fleeting. The evening of mutual understanding between Robert and Caroline departs just as swiftly as does the unstudied nature of their conversation; as soon as Caroline leaves him, Robert thinks of his embarrassed financial situation, his cloth he

⁹ The other footnote omitted from the 1853 edition comes here, and, just as the previous omitted footnote, suggests more possibilities of French poems for Louis to recite, since they have more feeling than the poems Louis and Shirley declaim and they might have “partly have satisfied the longing of his strong lungs and large heart” (1849, 106).

cannot sell because of the wars with France, and determines, “There’s weakness—there’s downright ruin in all this.” To save his livelihood and money, he no longer speaks the same language as Caroline and greets her the following day without the “nameless charm of last night” (89). Not even at the end of the novel do they return to this combination of languages.

Outside the world of Shirley’s school composition, in fact, as soon as the recitation concludes, misinterpretation prevails: “‘I never could correct that composition,’ observed Shirley, as Moore concluded. ‘Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, whose signification I strove vainly to fathom’” (409). Louis’s textual comments on the composition are written in a language Shirley cannot translate or understand. And later in this scene, almost immediately after Louis and Shirley begin their authentic conversation in their new language, the narrator describes how “the group were happy enough, but ‘Pleasures are like poppies spread / You seize the flower—its bloom is shed’” (413). In the next sentence, a carriage arrives and Shirley is called away. The French lesson is over, and Louis and Shirley again have difficulties communicating.

In part, Robert makes a clear diagnosis as to why this happens—there is “weakness” in allowing your language to be understood by another person. Far better to shut down communication than be exposed by it, far better to create boundaries than to open yourself to be mastered by removing them. Robert and Louis fall back into the pattern set by the other men in the novel: controlling other texts by controlling their language. Both brothers discuss their romantic conquests (particularly Louis) in terms of the power they have gained, the mastery they have achieved, over these women who were previously foreign texts—but now that they understand their language, they ultimately

triumph. The conversations by these two couples at the end of their courtships are filled with conflict, *reparti*, and very few French texts or phrases, let alone narrative descriptions of congenial languages and irreproducible conversations. The couples abandon the language they only momentarily discovered; instead, Caroline submits to and Shirley sulks about their loss of communication.

The narrator herself expresses her ambivalence about multilingualism and its possibilities for communication when she enters the story as a character in the last chapter of the novel. The narrator describes how Robert Moore's factory now appears "ambitious as the tower of Babel" (541). This final image is one of multilingualism, but of a failed sort—none of the languages can understand each other; all have been confounded. Furthermore, the narrator refers to a text that has itself been translated and reproduced so many times that its meaning may have been lost.

And in the last lines of the novel the narrator doubts again that she will be understood as she finishes her story sardonically: "I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!" (542). The reader may find a moral, suggests the narrator, but it will not be because he has understood the narrator, translated her text correctly. There is the slight possibility for communication in these last words of the narrator, but the final feeling is one of disappointment that she and her judicious reader do not speak the same language—or if they do, it is momentary and cannot be sustained for more than a word—because the word is unstable, continually vulnerable to mastery or appropriation by another person, text, or language.

Brontë's narrator and her female characters conclude, in their separate ways (whether by mocking, submitting, or sulking), that their attempts to communicate through translation have failed because the medium itself—language, text—is faulty, unable to communicate meaning, even in its multilingual forms, without a disturbing loss of power. Even when these women are willing to cede some amount of control by allowing readers or other characters access to their own language, they receive little or no reciprocal gestures giving them power from men in the novel, or from readers without.

Conclusion

The 1859 French translation of *Shirley* (which mistakenly includes both *Shirley* and *Agnes Gray* as compositions of Currer Bell) removes the multilingualism of the novel, since the alternate possibility for language choices has been removed.¹⁰ Any time there is a translation that the narrator normally would have remarked upon as necessary for an English readership, the translators leave out the remarks of the narrator and keep the passage in French. Any time the narrator uses a French word and then comments upon her use of the word, the translators leave out the commentary entirely. This makes for a very different novel. No more is there any ambivalence about the language or the genre in which the narrator is writing, no more does the language of *Shirley*'s school composition become mediated by a narrator required to translate for her English

¹⁰ Hoenselaars notes the difficulty of translating works with multilingualism in works such as Shakespeare's *Henry V*, "In French translation, the passages in French blend with the target language, thus disappearing as audible markers of national difference" (xiv). and quotes Derrida who despairs over translating *Finnegan's Wake*: "Even if by some miracle one could translate all of the virtual impulses of the work [. . .] one thing remains that could never be translated: the fact that there are two tongues here, or at least more than one" (qtd. in Hoenselaars xv). It is difficult, these scholars describe, to create a sense of the plurality of languages (and even national identities), using only one language.

readership. The book has become what the narrator appears to question and even condemn—a book written entirely in one language, not open to the possibilities for communication that another language brings. The narrator in the French translation is now unwilling to cede any authority by experimenting with a new language, and the readers have no opportunity to respond to her language choices as English readers may do with the English narrator's use of French in an English novel.

Recognizing the diversity with which Charlotte Brontë uses the French language and French texts in her English novel gives greater depth to the social, cultural, and linguistic solutions she explores in *Shirley*, particularly in contrast to those of her contemporaries who use it to maintain traditional conceptions of nationality, class, and gender. As other scholars have noted, there is never a concrete, clear-cut solution to problems. Brontë appears to be wary of any extreme, and hence explores them with ambivalence. What Brontë represents in *Shirley* is a picture of not only the possibilities that communication through multilingualism brings, but also a supposition about why these new languages are impossible to sustain. If there were such a language that could cross the boundaries between French and English, between reader and writer, between men and women, all of their languages would be equal, with none gaining mastery or control over another. These groups could understand one another's language, interpret their behavior correctly. Communication would prevail. The idealism in *Shirley* momentarily soars with hope in the possibilities for solving what Brontë terms elsewhere "the warped system of things" (*Jane Eyre* 559), between men and women, between classes, between nations. But, it is repeatedly brought back down to earth by the inherent pitfalls of languages, texts, and the people that use them. Brontë argues in *Shirley* that

translation and multilingualism as a physical act and as a metaphor for understanding is an appealing but unrealistic solution to the natural disparities and divisions that arise among people and between genders. Ultimately, Brontë appears to be in agreement with Shirley's school composition that no one language, word, or text can authentically communicate: only a Tone, only Silence can speak. Perhaps, then, it is not the fault of Brontë that her novel appears disjointed and undisciplined. It might be taken instead as a structural representation of the failure of language, the failure of reproducible text to authentically, accurately communicate translatable knowledge.

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