The Position of Woman in the Works of the Brontes

Eleanor Lord McCue

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January 4, 1933

Approved

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Albert Morton Turner

January 4, 1933
THE POSITION OF WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF THE BRONTÉS

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (in English)

by

Eleanor Lord McCue

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Eleanor Lord McCue
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Chapter I.
The Sisters

The purpose of this study is to consider the position of woman in the works of the Brontës with particular attention to a comparison of the Brontë heroines with the usual heroines of Victorian fiction.

Before approaching their books, however, it will be necessary to learn something of these three sisters whose lives contained so much that set them apart from the typical English novelist of the nineteenth century.

In the first place, the Brontës were half Irish, for the Reverend Patrick Brontë, father of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, commenced his life in County Down, Ireland, as the oldest of the ten children of Hugh Brunty, peasant farmer. The story of Patrick's ambition, his determined and successful efforts to secure an education, and his changing of the honest Irish Brunty into the more elegant but rather anomalous Brontë may be told briefly, for constant repetition has made all the main facts of the Brontë history well-known.

Patrick Brontë was born in Drumballyroney, March 17, 1777.
He was a village school teacher, and later a private tutor. At length, in 1802, at the age of twenty-five, he appears as an under-graduate at St. John's College, Cambridge. In 1806, he was ordained. He held, successively, curacies at Wethersfield, in Essex, and at Dewsbury and Hartshead, in Yorkshire. It was while curate at Hartshead that Mr. Bronte was married to Maria Branwell, the daughter of a Methodist minister. Here were born, in 1813 and 1815, Maria and Elizabeth, destined not to outlive childhood, shadowy waifs of English literature, whose Bronte blood must have contained some measure of the Bronte genius.

At Thornton, Mr. Bronte's next curacy, were born the children who were to become famous. Charlotte was born on April 21, 1816; Branwell, on June 26, 1817; Emily Jane, on July 30, 1818; Anne, on January 17, 1820.

This Celtic inheritance, then, was the first and basic peculiarity, none the less telling for the fact that no trace of Irish consciousness or loyalty is to be found in any of the Bronte works. Charlotte, in fact, in the Reverend Peter Malone of Shirley, produced what is often regarded as an offensive and caricatured Irish portrait. Yet this same Charlotte, on her entrance to the Roe Head school at the age of fifteen, was described by Mary Taylor as speaking "with a strong Irish accent."

1. Mrs. Gaskell, Life of Charlotte Bronte, p. 87.
In about a month after the birth of the youngest child, Anne, the Brontës again moved. The new home was Haworth, a small and isolated Yorkshire village four miles from the better known Keighley, and ten miles from Bradford. Here Mr. Bronte had been made perpetual curate. Thus Haworth was the only home Charlotte, Emily, and Anne ever knew. Three highly impressionable little sisters with the double susceptibility of their childhood and of their Irish blood were soon to receive the stamp of the lonely Haworth parsonage and the lonely Haworth moors. This stamp was to be their second variation from the usual type of Victorian Englishwoman.

Mrs. Gaskell, in her Life of Charlotte Bronte, devotes the first two chapters to descriptions of Haworth and its inhabitants. As Mrs. Gaskell had visited Charlotte at Haworth, her description is presumably accurate. She describes the approach from Keighley:

Right before the traveller on this road rises Haworth village; he can see it for two miles before he arrives, for it is situated on the side of a pretty steep hill, with a background of dun and purple moors, rising and sweeping away yet higher than the church, which is built at the very summit of the long narrow street. All round the horizon there is the same line of sinuous wave-like hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar color and shape, crowned with wild, bleak moors—grand, from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of
mind in which the spectator may be.

The parsonage, the church, and the church yard lay above the few houses in the village. The parsonage looked out on the bleakness of the moors on one side and on the gloom of the church-yard on another. The graves were crowded close to the parsonage, as it was the only graveyard for miles around, and it has been estimated that more than 70,000 graves had been dug there, one layer covering another.

Sombre, indeed, was the atmosphere in which the sisters and their brother, Branwell, spent their childhood, and this sombreness was broken by no happy companionship with village playmates, by no normal home life. For Mrs. Brontë died in 1821, when Charlotte was only five, and the other children in whom we are especially interested, even younger. Mr. Brontë persuaded his wife's elder sister, Miss Elizabeth Branwell, to come to Haworth to help rear the children. To this task the estimable lady devoted the rest of her life, but the home picture is not the usual one. Mr. Brontë, self-contained, self-sufficient, spent most of his time in his study, not even, according to Mrs. Gaskell, eating his meals

2. Ibid, p.3.
with his family. Miss Branwell probably had little facility with children. Mrs. Gaskell says:

She missed the small round of cheerful, social visiting perpetually going on in a country town, she missed the friends she had known from her childhood, some of whom had been her parents' friends before they were hers; she disliked many of the customs of the place, and particularly, dreaded the cold damp arising from the flag floors in the passages and parlours of Haworth Parsonage...I have heard that Miss Branwell always went about the house in pattens, clicking up and down the stairs, from her dread of catching cold. For the same reason, in the later years of her life, she passed nearly all her time, and took most of her meals in her bedroom. The children respected her, and had that sort of affection for her which is generated by esteem; but I do not think they ever freely loved her.

With the Yorkshire villagers, true to the Yorkshire tradition of harsh independence, of unlettered pride, of strength and honesty under a difficult exterior, the little Brontës had almost no real contacts. But superficial as the contacts of this kind must have been, it is worthwhile remembering that they were early and continuous, the ordinary background of their lives.

Society and nature were rough. Isolation was the usual thing. The children were thrown upon themselves for companionship, upon the moors or the churchyard for unchildlike playgrounds. From these ingredients were mixed many of the un-

5. Ibid., p. 49.
usual Brontë traits, such as their passionate love of the moors, their shyness, their pride, their predestined sadness, and the ignorance of, rather than the disregard for, many of the current conventions. They were, according to a periodical of their times, "outlaws from the softer and more refined influences of modern life." 6

Miss Branwell taught her nieces sewing, cooking, and an exact care of the house. This instruction was quite proper. But the rest of their education was in the hands of their father, who taught them in a random way much that stimulated their precocious and keen minds. When Mr. Brontë's more formal lessons were concluded, he often told them stories he had heard as a youth in Ireland.

Now, as Romer Wilson reminds us, Mr. Brontë and also Tabby, the old servant, who in her turn told the children so many breath-taking stories, belonged to the previous century. Their ballads and Irish folktales were told unsqueamishly. There was no censorship of literature. There were no stork theories. 7

George Edwin MacLean, in his introduction to The Spell, a juvenile work by Charlotte which has very recently been published, says in this connection:

Of sex the Brontë children knew from childhood when Branwell, six years old, answered his father's

question to the assembled children "how best to distinguish the difference in the intellects of men and of women?" "By considering the differences between them as to their bodies." Quite innocently, therefore, the young Charlotte wrote making fun of the word hermaphrodite and knowing its significance.

In 1824, the four older girls were sent to Cowan Bridge, a school for clergymen's daughters, which was supported partly by charity. Whether or not poor sanitary conditions at this school caused the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth in 1825 is a moot question. Charlotte and Emily were withdrawn from the school in this same year, and for the next five years the family remained at Haworth. Their home life has already been described. During this period a new activity came to take first place in the children's lives. They began to write almost ceaselessly. Plays and stories in astonishing number were produced. At first the output was miscellaneous, but soon a definite plan was evolved. Charlotte and Branwell collaborated on a series of related romances known as the Angrian cycle, so named from the fanciful scene of the events; Emily and Anne, on a similar Gondal cycle. Along with this interest, went an intense concern over the political questions and the public men of the day. The daily papers, Blackwoods, in fact, anything upon which these children could lay their hands, claimed their attention and also provided grist for their literary mill.

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Charlotte left home again in 1831 to attend Roe Head School, where she remained for eighteen months. These months brought her the two most enduring friendships of her life, and it is through her subsequent letters to Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor that we learn much of the real Charlotte. In 1835, Charlotte returned to this school as teacher, taking Emily with her as a pupil.

At the end of three months Emily succumbed to the homesickness that was always to make her unhappy away from Haworth. Anne took her place in the school.

Next comes the governess period, in which Charlotte and Anne suffered in a manner that sometimes seems exaggerated until we refresh our minds on the position of a governess of the time. Her lot was admittedly a harsh one. She was, according to a writer of the day, neither an equal nor a servant.

She is a burden and restraint in society as all must be who are placed ostensibly at the same table, and yet are forbidden to help themselves or to be helped to the same viands. She is a bore to almost any gentleman, as a taboosed woman to whom he is interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex and yet who is perpetually crossing his path. She is a bore to most ladies too by the same rule.9

Proud, shy, and sensitive as the Brontës were, the position must have been nearly intolerable to them. Charlotte's situation was in 1839 with a Mrs. John Benson Sidgwick at Stonegrâce, near Skipton. She became exhausted at the end of

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three months and returned home, but in 1841 again set forth, this time to teach the children of Mrs. John White, of Upperward House, near Bradford. Anne's duties were with Mrs. Ingham at Blake Hall in 1839, and in 1841 at Thorp Green, near York, with the children of the Reverend Edmund Robinson. Emily did not share her sister's experiences as governess in private families, but within a year from the time she left Roe Head, she had obtained a position as teacher in a Miss Patchett's school at Law Head, Southorran, near Halifax. Here she managed to stay for six months before her homesickness again resulted in a nervous breakdown.

In February 1842, Charlotte and Emily took one of the most venturesome steps of their careers. The sisters wished to set up a school of their own, and in order to fit themselves for it, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to finish their education at the pensionnat kept by Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle. It is difficult to trace any particular significance of this Brussels experience on Emily's character. She was homesick, aloof, enigmatic. She made no friends. Charlotte refers to this period in her preface to Emily's poems:

Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer in this second ordeal. She did conquer, but the victory cost her dear. 10

Her ability, however, made a distinct impression upon M. Héger, who, long afterwards, recalled her as superior in mind and power to her sister.

For Charlotte, on the other hand, the Brussels episode was exceedingly important. She fell in love with M. Héger, the husband of Madame Héger. When the death of Miss Branwell recalled her nieces to England in November, 1842, Emily left Brussels forever, but Charlotte could not tear herself thus permanently from the man she loved so hopelessly. In January, 1843, she returned alone to the pensionnat as an English teacher. Of this return, she wrote to Ellen Nussey:

I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind.

Charlotte's unfortunate love for a foreign man in a foreign country has of necessity a direct bearing upon her outlook upon women, especially in regard to their relations with men. As such, it must be discussed at this point. For many years, the only clue to the affair was the above quoted paragraph, plus what could be suspected by a shrewd analysis of her books. Mrs. Gaskell gives us no inkling whatever. It was first hinted

at by T. Wemyss Reid in a monograph written in 1877. After that, the matter was taken up heatedly by Brontë lovers, and there was much discussion of the pros and cons.

But in 1913 the London Times laid bare the whole secret. After leaving Brussels for the last time Charlotte wrote M. Héger four letters which had been preserved. These letters had been torn into small pieces and pasted together. They had fallen into the hands of the son of M. Héger, who had finally been persuaded by Mr. Marion Spielman to give them to the British Museum. They were originally written in French, but they were translated by Mr. Spielman for publication.

A few extracts will show that they are heartbroken, heart-breaking extracts:

To forbid me to write to you, to refuse to answer me, would be to tear from me my only joy on earth, to deprive me of my last privilege—a privilege I never shall consent willingly to surrender.  

When day after day I look for a letter and day after day I am disappointed and thrown back into fearful depression, and the sweet joy of seeing your hand-writing, reading your admonitions, vanishes like a will o' the wisp, then I lose appetite, cannot sleep, become hollow cheeked....I love French for your sake with all my heart and soul.  

Once more goodbye, Monsieur— it hurts to say goodbye even in a letter. Oh, it is certain I shall see you again some day; it must be so, for as soon as I have earned enough money to go to Brussels I shall go there— and I shall see you again if only for a moment!

As far as we know, M. Héger soon ceased to answer these letters, and Charlotte was left to recover as best she could. It is easy to see how the whole affair happened. Charlotte had come for the first time in contact with a man of keen intellect and personal charm. Moreover, as a result of their teacher and pupil relationship, she knew him without her usual incurable barrier of shyness and reserve. And with all the pent up feverishness of her nature, she fell completely in love. There was no amour; because in the first place it is nearly certain that M. Héger, happily married, was not at all in love with Charlotte, although he most surely felt kindness and affection for her; and what is vastly more important, because Charlotte's stern conscience never would have let her deviate from her rigid moral code. As a result, she suffered terribly, as she records in Villette. This suffering inevitably left its mark on her.

In 1844, Charlotte returned to Haworth. The school never materialized. From 1845, when Anne finally left the Robinson family, the sisters were again at home. A hard later youth was settling down over an early youth, at its best, far from bright. The brother, Branwell, whose brilliant career had seemed so assured, had become little more than a degenerate and a drunkard. Until his death in 1848, his presence in the house poisoned any happiness his sisters might have found in being together once more in the home which they loved.
It was at this time that Charlotte, Emily, and Anne began their literary activities. "Began" is perhaps inaccurate, as the Angrian cycle had lasted late, and the Gondal cycle was still flourishing. But it was at this time that the literary activities suddenly became mature and serious.

In 1846 appeared their poems, published by Aylott and Jones of Paternoster Row, London as the Poems of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. The authors paid thirty guineas for the publications, and the book was not a success. Charlotte and Emily were not poets, and Emily's genius was not at once discovered.

Not discouraged by this failure, these resolute Brontës each set to work on a novel. Charlotte wrote The Professor; Emily, Wuthering Heights; Anne, Agnes Grey. Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey were finally accepted. The Professor failed to find a publisher. Just when Charlotte was the most discouraged, however, she received from the publishing firm of Smith, Elder and Company, a letter, rejecting her book, it is true, but offering constructive criticism, and expressing the desire that Currer Bell should submit his next novel to them. So speedily did this next novel, Jane Eyre, follow, that it was actually published in October, 1847, two months before Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, which did not come out until December of that same year.

Agreeable work, success, the beginnings of fame must have made their own kind of brief happiness. But it was soon over, for in December 1848, Emily died of consumption, at the
age of thirty, and in the following May, Anne, aged twenty-eight, died of the same disease. Charlotte was alone, having lost her brother and her two sisters in the space of eight months. Throughout her life, nearly everything she had wanted or loved, she had lost.

Shirley was published in October, 1849, and Charlotte's last novel, Villette in 1853. From the time of the remarkable success of Jane Eyre, Charlotte's world had been becoming gradually widened. Through her publishers, on her necessary visits to London, she met several of the literary figures of the day. People wanted to know the author of the book which had made such a stir. Charlotte had always admired Thackeray, and an interesting though slight friendship grew up between them. In 1850, she visited the English Lakes as the guest of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth. It was here that she met Mrs. Gaskell, Miss Martineau, Matthew Arnold, and other famous contemporaries. But to the end Charlotte was totally unable to conquer her shyness and painful self-consciousness.

Charlotte had refused, during her life, three offers of marriage, those of Henry Nussey (the brother of her friend, Ellen), of a curate named Bryce, and of James Taylor of the Smith, Elder publishing firm. But on June 29, 1854, she married her father's curate, the Reverend Arthur Bell Nicholls. He was a man of worth but not of brilliance. Charlotte's letters written after her marriage reflect a rather subdued happiness. But she lived less
than a year. She became pregnant, and her always delicate constitution gave way. She died March 31, 1855.

From these Brontës, with their Irish blood, their isolation, their identification with the moors, their free upbringing, their filled and refilled "cup of suffering", as Charlotte herself calls it, we cannot expect the usual Victorian yield.

It will be well to add to this account of the Brontës lives something to bring the sisters as individuals more vividly before us.

Mr. George M. Smith in A Publisher's Recollections of Famous Authors describes Charlotte as she impressed him when she first came up to London:

Her head seemed too large for her body. She had fine eyes, but her face was marred by the shape of her mouth and by the complexion. There was but little feminine charm about her; and of this fact she herself was uneasily and perpetually conscious. It may seem strange that the possession of genius did not lift her above the weakness of an excessive anxiety about her personal appearance. But I believe that she would have given all her genius and her fame to have been beautiful. Perhaps few women have existed more anxious to be pretty than she, or more angrily conscious of the circumstance that she was not pretty.  

A Bronte scholar relates that "with a coquetry rather surprising in one so austere she refused to wear glasses. More feminine than she appeared, she was doubtless aware that her eyes were her one attraction."

Closely related to this consciousness of her own plainness, was her diffidence and her personal pessimism. There seems little doubt that Jane Eyre was the real Charlotte, as she exclaimed, "If others don't love me, I would rather die than live!" And yet she seems to have had the conviction that love was not for her. Rosamond Langbridge, in a modern study of Charlotte, says:

One deducts from Charlotte Brontë's biting words on love, not the extreme apathy of her own attitude towards it, but that she had brooded long and savagely on her own chances of inspiring it; and that at last with the damning Brontë honesty, the ruthless Brontë courage, and the withering Brontë scorn she had decided that her homely looks would repel lovers all her life. And from the hour of that early decision we can see Charlotte warning off the possible approach of happiness with the Gorgon's head of her own depreciation and mistrust.19

And further:

She was certain of her own repelling plainness; she was convinced that Life was Duty, never could be Beauty; she was positive that Joy and Love might be for others, but were not for her, and firm in these doctrines, she went forth in 1842 to meet the fate that she had grimly prophesied, "that intense passion seldom or never meets a requital" and to be left like the "fool" whom she derided "to love passionately and alone." 20

Charlotte had her very human weaknesses; she also had great strength. As the oldest of a very difficult family, she did not shrink from responsibilities. She was not cowed by her failures, her unhappiness, her circumstances. Hers were the plans

20. Ibid., p.89.
for the education of her sisters, for the establishment of the school, for the publication of their works. Although her one love affair was as hopeless as it was deep, and although she saw her brother and sisters die early and pitiful deaths, she had the will to go on determinedly toward her own literary goal.

E.F. Benson writes with penetration of Charlotte's courage at this time. He quotes the letter in which she says:

I felt that the house was all silent: the rooms were all empty. I remembered where the three were laid,—in what narrow dark dwellings — never more to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. The agony that was to be undergone, and was not to be avoided came on...The great trial is when evening closes, and night approaches. At that hour we used to assemble in the dining room: we used to talk. Now I sit by myself: necessarily I am silent. I cannot help thinking of their last days, remembering their sufferings and what they said and did, and how they looked in mortal affliction.

But Charlotte also wrote: "Crushed I am not yet, nor robbed of elasticity, nor of hope, nor quite of endeavor."

After quoting this letter, Benson lauds the "iron will" and the "magnificent fortitude" with which she forced herself to continue her writing.

It was, perhaps, her own self conquest that made her so stern a critic of the shortcomings of others. For many times it seems to us that Charlotte had a painful lack of tolerance. In her later years she knew why everything and everybody was wrong. She condemned a very normal pair of parents for a very normal

attitude toward their children:

Mr. Taylor makes a most devoted father and husband... But I rather grumbled (inwardly) over the indulgence of both parents toward their only child. The world revolves around the sun; certain babies, I plainly perceive are the more important center of all things. The papa and mamma could only take their meals, rest, and exercise at such times... as the despotic infant permitted...Tenderness to offspring is a virtue, yet I think I have seen mothers... who were most tender and thoughtful, yet in very love of their children would not permit them to become tyrants either over themselves or others. 22

In Shirley, with a most intolerant harshness, she condemned the three curates for very trivial faults.

She even condemned her paragon, Thackeray, for what any other woman would have taken as a charming compliment to herself. On one occasion, after he had finished a lecture, the distinguished author turned to the little Charlotte and naively asked her how she had liked it. Charlotte wrote:

(It was a ) question eminently characteristic, and reminding me, even in this his moment of triumph, of that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control, which were amongst his faults. He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought. 23

Charlotte's shyness came from no inner humility.

I think that we can consider Charlotte most fairly if we look for a moment at two very different analyses of her character. Let us take first Rosamond Langbridge's very modern and impersonal view:

It is only too easily summed up: Charlotte had nothing that she wanted in her life... And because Providence so inscrutably pressed everybody's claim but hers, she was further forced to a terrible unending patience with the things with which she had no patience... The result was that Charlotte Brontë, born witty, independent, gay, was gradually changed from a bright moth to a dull grub, the well-meaning woman; that type of person, who, concerning other folks' business never can "let well alone"- and concerning her own, never can let go. Far more than this type of woman will be the death of other people, will she cause her own decay. The whole secret of Charlotte Brontë's miseries, her sickness of mind, her sickness of body, the sickness of her Fats, is that she was suffering from suppressed Personality.

And yet after all Rosamond Langbridge never knew Charlotte Brontë, never came into actual contact with that personality of which she writes. Thackeray, her contemporary, knew the woman. To be sure, "Thackeray was writing a eulogy, at the time of her death, upon a friend who had dedicated a famous novel to him; yet there is undoubtedly as much accuracy in his estimation as in that of Miss Langbridge. Truth undoubtedly lies halfway between the two. Thackeray wrote:

Who that has read her books has not admired the artist's noble English, the burning love of truth, the bravery, the simplicity, the indignation at wrong, the eager sympathy, the pious love and reverence, the passionate honor, so to speak, of the woman?... I can remember the trembling little frame, the little hand, the great honest eyes. An impetuous honesty seemed to characterise the woman... She formed conclusions that might be wrong, and built up whole theories of character upon them. New to the London world, she entered it with an independent, indomitable spirit of her own, and judged of contemporaries... with extraordinary keenness of vision. She was angry with her favorites if their conduct or conversation fell

below her ideal. Often she seemed to me to be judging the London folk prematurely. I fancied an austere little Joan of Arc marching in upon us, and rebuking our easy lives, our easy morals. She gave me the impression of being a very pure, and lofty, and high minded person. A great and holy reverence of right and truth seemed to be with her always...

Anne, it seems to me, was a pale copy of her sister Charlotte. Most of the Brontë biographers have been too engrossed with her more striking sisters to give her much attention.

Will T. Hale, however, has made an interesting separate study of Anne and her works. He takes exception to certain things said carelessly of her by May Sinclair, who is primarily occupied with Charlotte and Emily. With Mr. Nicholls, who called her "the dear gentle Anne Brontë," and with Mrs. Gaskell, who spoke of "the docile pensive Anne," he has no quarrel. But he denies that Anne was "weak and ineffectual" as she was characterized by Miss Sinclair. He says:

She was gentle but not weak. Childlike and unsophisticated in many ways she was, but she had a power of will and a strength of character that always carried out the dictates of her sense of duty. For, as much as she hated the life of a governess, as unhappy as she always was away from home, this delicate girl of nineteen, upon whom consumption had already begun its fatal work, sensitive and shrinking in the presence of strangers, not only went forth into a world of which she had no experience, and insisted on going alone, but stuck to her job as governess, in spite of the drudgery and

humiliation, longer than either of her sisters. And, at last, when death was upon her, conscious to the last moment she looked death in the face as no weakling could have done. 26

Anne was indeed much like Charlotte. She had the same shrinking nature, the same iron will to overcome obstacles, the same longing for love and life that were never to be hers. To her writing, she, too, stubbornly bent her energies, none the less commendably because with less natural talent. She, like Charlotte, verbally condemned Branwell. Her Tenant of Wildfell Hall was written because she believed it her duty, as Charlotte wrote, to warn others against a life such as that of Branwell.

The choice of subject was an entire mistake. Nothing less congruous with the writer's nature could be conceived. The motives which dictated this choice were pure, but, I think, slightly morbid. She had in the course of her life been called on to contemplate, near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was a naturally sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail...as a warning to others. She hated her work but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften or conceal. This well-meant resolution brought on her misconstruction and some abuse, which she bore, as it was her custom, to bear what-ever was unpleasant, with mild, steady patience. She was a very sincere and practical Christian, but the tinge of religious melancholy communicated a sad shade to her brief, blameless life. 27

27. Charlotte Brontë, Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell, foreword to Agnes Grey.
Extracts from three of her homely little poems will show us Anne, I think, more truly than do her books. The first is from *The Bluebell*:

A fine and subtle spirit dwells
In every little flower,
Each one its own sweet feeling breathes
With more or less of power.

There is a silent eloquence
In every wild bluebell,
That fills my softened heart with bliss
That words could never tell.

The second is from *If This Be All*:

O God! if this indeed be all
That life can show to me;
If on my aching brow may fall
No freshening dew from Thee;

If with no brighter light than this
The lamp of hope may glow,
And I may only dream of bliss,
And wake to weary woe;

If friendship's solace must decay,
When other joys are gone,
And love must keep so far away,
While I go wandering on,
... If clouds must ever keep from sight
The glories of the Sun,
And I must suffer Winter's blight,
Ere Summer is begun:

If Life must be so full of care--
Then call me soon to Thee;
Oh give me strength enough to bear
My load of misery.

The last is from A Prayer.

My God,—oh, let me call Thee mine,
Weak, wretched sinner though I be,—
My trembling soul would fain be Thine;
My feeble faith still clings to Thee.

... I cannot say my faith is strong,
I dare not hope my love is great;
But strength and love to Thee belong;
Oh, do not leave me desolate!

I know I owe my all to Thee;
Oh, take the heart I cannot give!
Do Thou my strength—my Saviour be,
And make me to Thy glory live.
One hesitates, and feels a distinct sense of inadequacy in an attempt to paint any clear picture of Emily Bronte. She is at the same time too vivid and too baffling. All the adjectives seem to have been used, and yet the real Emily remains aloof, tantalizing, enigmatic. The facts that one can gather are few. She was tall; she was slender; she was more nearly beautiful than her sisters. She made no friends; she needed no friends. Her moors, her writing, her dogs, made up her world. With the exception of a very few intervals, she stayed at home, efficiently doing the house work while her sisters were away. She did not turn from Branwell in his repulsive need. She did not criticise him. She was completely fearless. Finally, she died as she had lived, desperately, grimly alone, with the last force of her will, forbidding pity or intrusion from the sisters who loved her.

We read the strangely powerful Wuthering Heights, and we wish to know her. We read her poems, and we get the only answer we shall ever find. The following poem is without title.

I'm happiest now when most away
I can tear my soul from its mold of clay,
On a windy night when the moon
is bright
And my eye can wander through worlds
of light--
When I am not, and none beside
Nor earth, nor sea, nor cloudless sky,
But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity.

The second is from _The Caged Bird_:

And like myself lone, wholly lone,
It sees the days long sunshine glow;
And like myself it makes its moan
In unexhausted woe.

Give we the hills our equal prayer,
Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea,
I ask for nothing further here
But my own heart and liberty.

One would like to go on and on with Emily's poems,
but one more will have to suffice. It is the famous _No Coward Soul is Mine_, and I shall give it entire:

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.
O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever present Deity!
Life — that in me has rest,
As I — undying life — have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idle froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and
rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.
There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Thou - Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be
destroyed.

Much has been written about Emily Bronte. In view of
her many love poems, an effort has even been
made to prove that she was in love with the curate, William Weightman.
Mr. Benson, criticizing this view, points out that if this had
been true, and if Weightman had been in love with her, as was
further surmised, there would have been no reason in the world
why the two could not have declared their love, and been
married.28 Furthermore, when we remember all that Charlotte
wrote of the amorous, though charming and good little Weight-
man, it seems absurd to linger for a moment over the idea that
Emily could have stooped to be seriously interested in him.

There was obviously something of the mystic in Emily.
Her heroes were dark. They reappear strangely in her poems.
Consequently Romer Wilson has rather fantastically amalgamated
these facts in a book which pictures Emily as continually iden-
tifying herself with the Dark Hero, as existing from day to day
as Heathcliff, the hero of her Wuthering Heights, as being, at

least, so it seemed, quite mad. 29

Charlotte did not understand her sister, but after all
she must have come as near to understanding her as any one else.
She wrote:

I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger
than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone...
while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no
pity. 30

Matthew Arnold wrote of her:

Whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence, grief,
Daring, since Byron died.

29. Romer Wilson, The Life and Private History of Emily Jane
    Bronte.
Chapter 2.

The Victorian Woman

As we are looking at the Brontës against the Victorian background, it would be well, at this point, to recall some of the usual Victorian ideas in regard to woman.

In reading over recent comments upon the Victorian Age, one notes that modern writers almost without exception seem to take Victorians very lightly. Books upon the era are patronizing; references to it, usually humorous.

But in the comment of that time we find that no people took themselves and their ideas more seriously—I may say, more heavily—than these Victorians. Somervell, in his recent book, *English Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, speaks about this serious-mindedness, and further mentions the complacency which permeated the era. He reminds us that the economic situation of England at the time was responsible for this attitude. It was an age of absolutely unprecedented development. Population was growing; wealth was abounding; education was becoming widespread.
It was inevitable that those who lived in such an age should be at once bewildered and exhilarated... The Victorian Englishman felt that he was a member of the greatest nation in the world at the most important epoch of human history, and that he must rise to the occasion. He rose, and to the detached spectator he could not but be a trifle amusing. He felt that his conspicuous men were really great and their achievements enormously important.  

Furthermore, the Victorian was sure that the home was the key to the greatness of the nation. The middle class home and the middle class large family formed a sort of cult, presided over by Queen Victoria, who had set the example by herself bearing nine children. To produce an ever-increasing number of Englishmen became a moral, as well as an economic, good. Consequently the home was held sacred. Mr. Esmé Wingfield-Stratford in *Those Earnest Victorians* speaks of England at this time as "a paradise of middle-class domesticity" in which the only purpose of marriage was to multiply. Here, to virtuous marriage alone could be awarded the happy ending. "Illicit indulgence of passion was sin, and its wages death."  

A marriage, once made, was practically irrevocable. According to the literature of the time, "a wife could only leave her husband with a blackguard of deepest dye who would abandon her shortly, as in *East Lynne* and *Bleak House).* And there is no reason to believe that the attitude of the average

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Victorian was different from that of the writers of fiction. Wingfield-Stratford, going at some length into this subject, reminds us that "for a woman to divorce her husband was next door to impossible. For her to leave him was social ruin." 3

It is interesting to see just what was the position of woman in an age so dominated by the idea of the importance, sacredness, and inviolability of the home. Alan Bott, in his very amusing This Was England, says:

Woman was presented as half goddess and half brio-a-brac...Her part was the tender spouse if married, or if unmarried, the ministering angel, whether to orphans, poorer people, or Hottentots. 4

She was distinctly inferior to man and divinely created for the domestic life. She must obey. But, on the other hand, this was somewhat compensated for by the conception of her purity and goddess-like qualities. Graves, writing on Aspects of Victorian England, in the social history which he compiled largely from a study of early volumes of Punch, spoke of the woman of the time as feminine and kindly, but colourless, and quite lacking in a sense of humour. 5

While woman was theoretically inferior to man, her influence actually was admitted to be very great. She softened man's crudenesses; she inspired him to his best. The Eighteenth

4. Alan Bott, This Was England, p.55.
Century had been marked by a good deal of freedom as to morals, and a good deal of license as to literature. The Victorian woman set herself against anything of this kind. Homes, according to Wingfield-Stratford, were made "sanctuaries of refinement to combat the drunkenness and crude bawdry of the world outside home." The same idea is expressed by Bott when he says; "To be arbiter of the home and ruler of the bed-chamber was a right won by years of subtle assertion...Beyond that, they had reformed their males out of raffish habits learned under George IV, and had made the smoking-before-ladies taboo a symbol of family refinement."  

Since woman was destined for domestic life, and obedience, and goddess-hood, she was reared accordingly. The following view is that of a modern writer, May Sinclair, and though it may seem a little extreme, it is a very revealing analysis of the Victorian woman:

The traditions of her upbringing were such that the real, vital things, the things that mattered, were never mentioned in her presence. Religion was the solitary exception; and religion had the reality and vitality taken out of it by its dissociation with the rest of life. A woman in these horrible conditions was only half alive. She had no energies, no passions, no enthusiasms. Convention drained her of her life blood. What was left to her had no outlet; pent up in her, it bred weak, anaemic substitutes for its natural issue, sentimentalism for passion, and sensibility for the nerves of vision.

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7. Alan Bott, This Was England, p.55.  
There was an interesting little book published in 1843 with the edifying title *Wives of England, Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influences, and Social Obligations*, by Sarah Stickney Ellis. In Chapter Four, entitled *Behavior to Husbands*, we read that "a woman may learn to turn the conversation so her husband may shine." She herself, on the other hand, should not talk much in a dogmatic way:

Indeed, that mode of conversation which I have been accustomed to describe as talking on a large scale is, except on very important occasions, most inimical to the natural softness and attractiveness of woman. It is not, in fact, her forte; but belongs to a region of display in which she cannot or ought not to shine.

A little farther on in the same chapter, Mrs. Ellis adds that, if a wife has wealth or station, "she must tremble with fear of giving pain to her husband, but also she may give him pleasure."

With this feeling, subdued by Christian meekness, and cherished only in her heart of hearts, it might almost be forgiven to any woman secretly to exult in being favorably distinguished; for to render illustrious a beloved name, and to shed a glory around an honoured brow, is at once the most natural, and noblest ambition of which the female mind is capable.

These models of Christian meekness were swathed in flounces in the forties, and crinolines by the fifties. *Punch* remarked contemporaneously that people were "now dressed not in the height but in the full breadth of fashion." The women used

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few cosmetics but were equipped with a superfluity of veils, bonnets, and sun shades to protect their complexions. In early Victorian times the hair was dressed in bands and braids kept in place by the use of hair nets, but on full dress occasions it was worn in ringlets. In the fifties women wore gold and silver dust sprinkled in their hair.  

These elaborately clothed ladies usually devoted an appropriate time to one or more of the refined accomplishments thought proper for them. They played with music, poker-work, needlework, fretwork, or water-colours. They also put much time into "good works."

Mr. Wingfield-Stratford enumerates the simple sports in which ladies sometimes indulged, as croquet, archery, cricket, and skating. The delicate health, to say nothing of the delicate sensibilities of the Victorian woman, could stand nothing more vigorous. Little girls were even taught that it was unrefined to have too red cheeks.  

All this excessive refinement tended to become artificiality and prudery. In Barchester Towers, the lovely heroine, Eleanor Bold, slaps the face of the very obnoxious Mr. Slope, who has insisted on thrusting that unpleasant face near to hers, and asking her to marry him. But Eleanor worries over, and regrets for weeks, her serious impropriety.  

In Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth*, we have a beautiful and innocent girl, who, through a series of circumstances over which she has no control, finally goes to Scotland with a wealthy and worthless young man. So delicately is all this put, that it takes one sometime to decide whether or not she was actually seduced.

It was not considered in the best taste to write even of ordinary physical love-making. Love scenes were treated in a reticent though sentimental way. After a hero had made a formal proposal of marriage, he sometimes was allowed to encircle her slender waist with his arm. A fair head occasionally rested gently against a masculine breast. Passion, judging by the novels, was unknown.

Even the vocabularies in Victorian times were pruned, so that, in polite society "inexpressibles" was the name for breeches and "interesting condition" for pregnancy.\(^{13}\)

The married woman was shackled by many of the Victorian ideals, but the unmarried woman seems to have been the special problem of the age. If a woman had reached the age of twenty-four or five and was unmarried, she was considered not only middle aged but a failure. Few roads were open to her. Usually she spent her life in someone else's home, dependent upon a father or brother for her living, often unwanted, often bitter,

\(^{13}\) Romer Wilson, *Life and Private History of Emily Jane Brontë*, p.84.
usually unhappy. As an alternative she might be a sempstress; she might be a governess.

The life of the latter was particularly hard. As, in this thesis, we are particularly interested in governesses, it will not be amiss to add something here to the comments made in the first chapter. Mr. Graves says:

The treatment of governesses was one of the blots on the Victorian age. They lived in what might be called No Woman's Land. Their status was semi-menial; their salaries were often much lower than those of cooks; they seldom emerged from the school-room; they had little encouragement to be efficient; if they were young and pretty they were frowned upon as potential adventuresses; if they were elderly and ill favored they were negligible and neglected. The very term "governess" carried with it a certain hint of social disparagement; and they were for the most part the easy victims of snobbery. 14

Of course, there were a few literary women, who had, however, to pick their paths very carefully. A woman might manage, if she had sufficient talent, to carve out for herself a literary career under certain conditions. She must not seek for publicity; she must put her domestic duties first; she must avoid at all costs the stigma of being called "strong-minded." Mrs. Gaskell said:

A woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. 15

Robert Southey wrote in answer to Charlotte Brontë's inquiry as to whether she should take up literature for a career:

The daydreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to produce a distempered state of mind...Literature cannot be the business for a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation.16

And in Wives of England, we find how Mrs. Ellis regarded the talented woman:

Intellectual gifts are the bane rather than the blessing of a woman...yet if there be any case in which a woman might be forgiven for entertaining an honest pride in the superiority of her own talent, it would be when she regarded it only as a means of doing higher homage to her husband, and bringing greater ability to bear upon the advancement of his intellectual and moral good. Indeed, what is the possession of talent to a woman when considered in her own character, separately and alone? -The possession of a dangerous heritage -a jewel which cannot with propriety be worn -a mine of wealth which has no legitimate channel for the expenditure of its vast resources.17

The danger so feared by Mrs. Ellis, should woman's talent flow in ordinary channels, is probably that the woman would become "strong minded." One does not wonder at the dread of this after reading some of the contemporary jibes at "strong minded women." In 1860 Punch stated that it would be just as well to have all educated women deported if they were in any danger of becoming strongminded, and painted the following

17. Sarah Stickney Ellis, op.cit.
humorous picture:

We would advise The Great Eastern being chartered immediately for this purpose, and we do not mind giving a large subscription...providing the vessel sails at a very early period. However we pity the poor colony that receives this intellectual cargo! The only chance of its escaping this blue stocking visitation is, that the strong minded women may quarrel amongst themselves on the voyage out, of which there is the most natural probability; so that when the heavily freighted ship touches the shore, there may not be one of them alive, and nothing but their false back hair or magazine tales left behind them. By all means let such an interesting experiment be carried out and to the greatest possible number.18

To be quite fair, one should not forget that throughout this period there did run a faint thread of revolt against the complete domination of women by men. J.R.M. Butler, writing on the sixties, reminds us that Florence Nightingale could face danger and not swoon. Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies, and the two Garrett sisters worked as pioneers, with eventual success, to admit women to university education, the medical profession, and parliamentary suffrage. Josephine Butler faced intense social disapproval for her crusade for the redress of wrongs done women by unjust discrimination in moral questions.19

But these and a few other beginnings and exceptions scarcely changed the general tenor of Victorianism. And it is against this general Victorian background that we must look at the singular figures of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë.

Chapter 3.
The Rebellious Charlotte

Jane Eyre, published in October, 1847, attracted immediate attention. The first comment was favorable, with the Times, the Edinburgh Review, Blackwoods, Fraser's Magazine, the Examiner, the Athenaeum, the Literary Gazette, and the Daily News leading the way with excellent reviews.

Then, suddenly, the trend of criticism changed. The Victorians decided that Currer Bell's novel was shockingly improper. A series of hostile reviews was started by a merciless article by Lady Rigby in the Quarterly Review of December, 1848. Typical of much of the unfavorable comment which ensued is the following sentence from an article in the North British Review:

All that we shall say on the subject is, that if it is the production of a woman, she must be a woman pretty nearly unsexed; and Jane Eyre strikes us as a personage much more likely to have sprung ready armed from the head of a man, and that head a pretty hard one, than to have experienced in any shape, the softening influence of female creation.

1. North British Review, August, 1849.
The Living Age, while admitting the power of the author, considered the book "stamped with coarseness of language and laxity of tone" and "in horrid taste." Even George M. Smith, the publisher of the novel, in a reminiscient article, written for the Critic many years after Charlotte Brontë's death, admitted that the book was considered immoral by many people. He relates an anecdote told him by his mother of Lady Herschel's surprise at finding Jane Eyre in Mrs. Smith's drawing room.

"Do you," asked this horrified Victorian, "leave such a book as this about at the risk of your daughter's reading it?"

In addition, the novel was considered un-Christian and rebellious, and in the Victorian mind to be rebellious was nearly as wicked as to be un-Christian.

According to one disapproving critic, even when Jane does right, it is from the dictates of her heathen mind, which is a law to itself. Jane has the sins of pride and ungratefulfulness. She is not humble. She murmurs"in ungodly discontent" against the comforts of the rich and the privations of the poor. The book is full of the tone and thought that has

"overthrown authority, and violated every code human and
divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home."

These reviews happen to deal particularly with Jane
Eyre, but Charlotte's later works occasioned many similar ex-
pressions of disapproval. Let us try to see in what ways the
heroines of Charlotte Brontë were unVictorian and consequently
shocking.

To begin with, these heroines did not even measure up
to the standard heroine in the outward aspects of feminine
beauty and feminine dress. Upon these two points Charlotte had
curiously strong ideas. She disliked extremely the usual Vic-
torian heroine.

In a letter to Mr. W.S. Williams she wrote, concerning
the School for Fathers:

I say nothing about the female characters, not
one word; only that Lydia seems to me like a pretty
little actress, prettily dressed, gracefully appearing
and disappearing, and reappearing in a genteel comedy,
asuming the proper sentiments of her part with all
due tact and naïveté, and—that is all.5

She told her sisters that she considered it morally
wrong to make a heroine beautiful, as a matter of course.

"I will show you," said Charlotte, "a heroine as
plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting
as any of yours."6

6. Ibid., p.286.
So she created Jane Eyre, who "sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth," and who felt it a misfortune that she "was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked." 7

Fully as plain was Lucy Snowe, who after catching sight of herself in a full-length mirror said:

Thus for the first, and perhaps the only time in my life, I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful; it might have been worse. 8

Only in Shirley did Charlotte relent and give to her heroines any share of beauty, and it must be remembered that these two heroines have always been considered portraits, respectively, of her idolized sister, Emily, and her dearest friend, Ellen Nussey.

Even in Charlotte's first novel, The Professor, Frances Henri escapes plainness only in the last few pages and under the transforming influence of love.

And in Emma, 9 Charlotte's last unfinished fragment, although very little is told of the heroine, it seems clear that she is to be small, poor, and unattractive.

These plain heroines had a persistent and unusual dislike for anything but the most severe dress. So averse were they

to anything remotely resembling feminine finery that a gaily colored gown became to them not merely a matter of taste, but almost a matter of morals.

Jane Eyre possessed one dress of silver gray for gala occasions. Habitually, however, she wore black. She was quite horrified at Rochester's suggestion that, after she was married, she might wear the Rochester family jewels. And even in choosing a trousseau, this girl of eighteen refused pink and blue finery for "a sober black satin and a pearl gray silk."

Lucy Snowe, though she was finally forced to give in, became all but tragic over the idea of wearing a simple pink dress to the opera. She said:

I thought no human force should avail to put me into it. A pink dress! I knew it not. It knew me not. I had not proved it.

At another time, Lucy refused to wear a white muslin dress like the other teachers at a school festival:

The courage was not in me to put on a transparent white dress: something thin I must wear--the weather and rooms being too hot to give substantial fabrics suff erance, so I had sought through a dozen shops till I hit upon a crape-like material of purple gray--the color, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom.

Charlotte Brontë, then, denied her heroines beauty and

11. Ibid., vol.2, p.32.
finery. Conversely, she drove home her point against beauty by making many of her weak and unpleasant characters at least pretty. In *Villette* she described Mrs. Howe as "a very pretty but a giddy careless woman who had neglected her child and disappointed and disheartened her husband." 14

Mrs. Ingram in *Jane Eyre* was "very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments, but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature." 15

In the same book we read of Georgiana Reed:

She had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged. Her beauty, her pink cheeks, and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault. 16

Particularly sweeping are Lucy Snow's comments upon the women she saw at the opera in Brussels:

Some fine forms there were here and there, models of a peculiar style of beauty; a style, I think never seen in England: a solid, firm-set sculptural style... Women of this order need no ornament, and they seldom wear any; the smooth hair, closely banded, supplies a sufficient contrast to the smoother cheek and brow... With one of these beauties I once had the honor and rapture to be perfectly acquainted; the inert force of the deep, settled love she bore herself was wonderful; it could only be surpassed by her proud impotency to care for any other living thing. Of blood, her cool veins conducted no flow; placid lymph filled and almost obstructed her arteries. 17

16. Ibid., vol.1, p.15.
Truly, Charlotte Bronte had no love for handsomely dressed, beautiful women. But if her heroines were lacking in these attributes demanded by novel-readers of the time, they did possess other qualities which were not so arbitrarily demanded by readers. They not only possessed brains, but used them. They used them, too, upon subjects not usually considered woman's sphere.

In Shirley, pretty little Caroline insists on reading Coriolanus to her cousin, Robert Moore. She then points out to him how he is like Coriolanus, and draws a lesson from the parallel.

You must not be proud to your working people; you must not neglect chances of soothing them, and you must not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request, as austerely as if it were a command.18

In this novel, it is, however, Shirley Keeldar herself, who, in her position of orphaned heiress, has the greatest scope of unfeminine interests of all Charlotte Bronte's heroines. She is talking to one of her tenants, Joe Scott, who has an ignorant but Victorian view of the limitations of the female mind.

"Do you know I see a newspaper every day, and two of a Sunday?"
"I should think you'll read the marriages, probably, Miss, and the murders, and the accidents and such like?"

"I read the leading articles, Joe, and the foreign intelligence, and I look over the market prices: in short, I read just what gentlemen read."

Joe looked as though he thought this talk was like the chattering of a pig. He replied to it by a disdainful silence.

"Joe," continued Miss Keeldar, "I never yet could ascertain properly, whether you are a Whig or a Tory."

"It is rather difficult to explain where you are sure not to be understood," was Joe's haughty response; "But, as to being a Tory, I'd as soon be an old woman... and if I be of any party... I'm of that which is most favorable to peace, and, by consequence, to the mercantile interests of this here land."

"So am I, Joe," replied Shirley, who had rather a pleasure in teasing the overloooker, by persisting in talking on subjects with which he opined she - as a woman - had no right to meddle: "partly, at least, I have rather a leaning to the agricultural interest, too; as good reason is, seeing that I don't desire England to be under the feet of France, and that if a share of my income comes from Hollow's-mill, a larger share comes from the landed estate around it. It would not do to take any measures injurious to the farmers, Joe, I think?"

"The dews at this hour is unwholesome for females," observed Joe.19

In this passage we have the author consciously differing from the conventions of the time and drawing defiant attention to her deviation by placing the usual Victorian sentiments in the mouth of the dullard, Joe.

Less hostile is the scene in Villette in which the young Paulina de Bassompierre discusses "many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life on which... she had both read and reflected" with a group of highly intelligent, middle-aged

Frenchmen, who are her father's dinner guests.

Again, the thirteen-year-old school girl, Helen Burns, in ordinary conversation with her schoolmate, Jane Eyre, speaks thus intellectually of Charles the First:

I was wondering how a man who wished to do right could act so unjustly and unwisely as Charles the First sometimes did; and I thought what a pity it was that, with his integrity and conscientiousness, he could see no farther than the prerogatives of the crown. If he had but been able to look to a distance, and see how what they call the spirit of the age was tending!

Along with this intellectual strain in Charlotte's ideal women went a spirit of independence, and a freedom of action considered unwomanly by many Victorians. In fact some of these views seem extreme even today. For example, Frances Henri, who is about to be married, insists on teaching after her marriage. She says:

Think of marrying you to be kept by you, monsieur! I could not do it; and how dull my days would be; you would be away teaching in close noisy school-rooms from morning till evening, and I should be lingering at home, unemployed and solitary; I should soon get depressed and sullen, and you would soon tire of me.

Exactly the same idea is expressed by Jane Eyre when she expects to marry the wealthy Mr. Rochester:

I shall continue to act as Adèle's governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I'll furnish my wardrobe out of that money.

Seventeen-year-old Caroline Helstone has perhaps a more obvious excuse for wishing to earn her living, as she is an orphan living with her uncle, for whom she keeps house, aided by an adequate number of servants. She is asked whether she is content with her lot:

"I used to be, formerly. Children, you know, have little reflection, or rather their reflections run on ideal themes. There are moments now when I am not quite satisfied."

"Why?"

"I am making no money—earning nothing."

"You come to the point, Lina; you, too, then wish to make money?"

"I do; I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one. I see such an easy, pleasant way of learning a business, and making my way in life."

"Go on; let us hear what way?"

"I could be apprenticed to your trade— the cloth-trade. I could learn it of you...I would do the counting house work, keep the books, and write the letters..."

Now to go to London to "seek a fortune" was all very well for Dick Whittington, but most people were not so sure of its propriety for Lucy Snowe, who, absolutely alone, with very little money, and with an indefinite purpose of going on to Brussels, went to the great English city. After spending the night at an inn seemingly picked at random, Lucy goes out in the morning to walk about London.

Prodigious was the amount of life I lived that morning. Finding myself before St. Paul's, I went in; I mounted to the dome; I saw thence London with its river, and its bridges, and its churches; I saw antique Westminster, and the green Temple Gardens, with sun upon them, and a glad, blue sky, of early spring, above...

Descending, I wandered whither chance might lead in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment: and I got-I know not how-I got into the heart of city life. I saw and felt London at last; I got into the Strand; I went up Cornhill; I mixed with the life passing along; I dared the perils of crossings. To do this and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps, an irrational, but a real pleasure.

This adventure brings to mind an episode in Jane Eyre, which is not, however, exactly parallel. Jane, too, starts away from the Rochester home, alone and practically penniless. But poor Jane is driven to her act not by any love for adventure, but by motives completely noble, completely nineteenth century. Her wedding has been stopped at the altar. She has learned of the existence of Rochester's maniac wife, and loving him as she does, she will not remain under the same roof with him even long enough to plan her future. Nevertheless, the very idea that she could possibly take her fate in her own hands, and start out into the world so utterly unprotected, would not have occurred to the ordinary Victorian woman.

In addition to the basic spirit of independence which the above incidents typify, Charlotte Brontë's women again and again show little independent traits, sometimes quite super-

ficial, but nevertheless interesting.

Hortense Moore, sister of the half-English, half-Belgian mill owner, refuses to conform at all to the English mode of dress. She persists in "wearing petticoat, camisole and curlpapers" in the morning because that is the fashion of her country.

She did not choose to adopt English fashions because she was obliged to live in England; she adhered to the old Belgian modes, quite satisfied that there was a merit in so doing.26

Very amusing is the episode in which Shirley Keildar drives the young clergyman, Donne, from her tea party because he has made disparaging remarks about his parishioners:

Up she rose; nobody could control her now, for she was exasperated; straight she walked to her garden gates, wide open she flung them.
"Walk through," she said austerely, "and pretty quickly, and set foot on this pavement no more."
Donne was astounded...
"Rid me of you instantly - instantly!" reiterated Shirley, as he lingered.
"Madam - a clergyman! "Turn out a clergyman?"
"Ooff! Were you an archbishop: you have proved yourself no gentleman and must go. Quick!"27

Jane Eyre frankly tells St. John Rivers what she has observed about his attitude toward Rosamond Oliver:

"You tremble and become flushed whenever Miss Oliver enters the schoolroom."
Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a man.28

27. Ibid., vol.1, pp.413-414.
Naturally heroines of this calibre were prone neither to fainting nor to clinging. They had a physical fearlessness which stood them in good stead.

Lucy Snowe and Dr. Graham Bretton are present at a theatre in which a fire breaks out, causing a panic. A young girl is knocked down, and Dr. John offers his assistance.

"If you have no lady with you, be it so," was the answer...
"I have a lady," said Graham; "but she will be neither hindrance nor incumbrance." 29

Shirley, in similar wise, proves her bravery many times. On the night of an attack upon a neighboring mill, she is left with a brace of loaded pistols and a knife to defend Caroline and the two women servants. She is not afraid; in fact, we gather that she would rather welcome an opportunity of using the weapons. Finally, unable to remain away from the scene of action, she persuades the gentle Caroline to go with her in the dead of night to the mill, where they witness the riot. 30

Shirley, on another occasion, separates with her own hand three large fighting dogs. 31 Concerning herself she says:

I am fearless, physically. I am never nervous about danger. I was not startled from self-possession when Mr. Wynne's great red bull rose with a bellow before my face as I was crossing the cowslip lea alone. 32

32. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 380.
Readers who disapproved of heroines so strong minded, and unbecomingly unfeminine, expected and found little good in them in the way of the refined niceties of speech and demeanor. They were not surprised when Frances Henri was so incredibly coarse as to discuss hell and use the very word in polite conversation with two gentlemen. Frances was talking rather strongmindedly of Paradise at the time:

"I don't clearly know what Paradise is; and what angels are; yet taking it to be the most glorious region I can conceive, and angels' the most elevated existences-if one of them -if Abdiel the Faithful himself"-(she was thinking of Milton) "were suddenly stripped of the faculty of association, I think he would soon rush forth from 'the ever-during gates', leave heaven, and seek what he had lost in hell. Yes, in the very hell from which he turned 'with retorted scorn.'"

Frances' tone in saying this was as marked as her language, and it was when the word "hell" twanged off from her lips, with a somewhat startling emphasis, that Hunsden deigned to bestow one slight glance of admiration. He liked something strong, whether in man or woman; he liked whatever dared to clear conventional limits. He had never before heard a lady say "hell" with that uncompromising sort of accent, and the sound of it pleased him from a lady's lips. 33

To use questionable language, however, was hardly worse than to listen to it. Guilty, indeed, in this respect, was Jane Eyre, to whom Rochester habitually addressed remarks such as:

"By God! I long to exert a fraction of Samson's strength and break the entanglement like tow!" 34

But her guilt did not end here, for to Jane, Rochester talked so very freely of his ex-mistresses and amours, that in 1849 a shocked critic wrote:

He pours into her ears disgraceful tales of his past life, connected with the birth of little Adèle, which any man with common respect for a woman, and that a mere girl of eighteen, would have spared her; but which eighteen in this case listens to as though it were nothing new, and certainly nothing distasteful. 35

Then there were minor misdemeanors in the behavior of Charlotte's women. For example Shirley went around whistling until reprimanded for it by Mrs. Pryor. 36 Lucy Snowe did not object when M. Paul "lit his cigar" and "puffed it" while he was talking with her. 37

The plain, soberly dressed, little heroine of Charlotte Brontë, then, possessed qualities that startlingly belied the quiet demureness of her outward appearance. Her intellectual interests included political questions, history, art, and literature. She was independent in action and in thought. She was all but obsessed with the idea of earning her own living. She faced any physical danger with bravery. She calmly ignored many of the sacred Victorian conventions.

With these traits in mind, one might naturally picture a heroine completely self-sufficient. One might expect that love could play but a small part in her life. But in both cases, one would be wholly wrong. In fact, so all important is the theme of love in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, that it is necessary in a study of her women characters to devote a complete chapter to the subject.
Chapter 4.

Love in the Works of Charlotte

There can be no doubt that the dominant motif in all of Charlotte Bronte's novels is love. In 1878, the *Westminster Review* in a long article upon Charlotte, said that she missed greatness because she was able to see only one thing in life, sexual love.

Her world is a love toil. Her heroes are lovers; her heroines are women wanting love, loving or lacking love, and that, too with the fierdeness and energy of a lonely, friendless, unlovely nature, which has found a rough, harsh, shunned human being with whom it can impulsively sympathize, and whom it can ardently adore. If that...is the test of true art, we admit Charlotte Bronte's supremacy.

Even Charlotte's friend, Miss Harriett Martineau, found this same fault with the novels. Charlotte had written to her, asking for a frank criticism of *Villette*. Miss Martineau replied:

As to the other side of the question, which you desire to know, I have but one thing to say, but it is not a small one. I do not like the love, either the

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kind or the degree of it; and its prevalence in the book, and effect on the action of it, help to explain the passages in the reviews which you consulted me about, and seem to afford some foundation for the criticisms they offered.

To this Charlotte replied in the following vehement justification:

I know what love is as I understand it; and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then there is nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish on this earth, as I comprehend rectitude, nobleness, fidelity, truth, and disinterestedness.

Love in Charlotte Brontë's novels is not the sentimental, lightly sketched interlude that one finds, for example, in Dickens or Trollope. Lucy Snowe does not love in the demure and unfleshlike manner of the charming Eleanor Bold. On the contrary, love with Jane Eyre, Shirley, Caroline, and Lucy Snowe is headlong, passionate, and overwhelming. More painful than pleasant, it brings in its train most of the suffering for which these heroines are famous.

Practically all of the adverse criticism hurled at Jane Eyre, Charlotte's first published novel, was occasioned by the heroine's love affair with Rochester. Let us see what elements it contains. An orphaned girl of eighteen, friendless, ardent, starved for human love and affection, in her position of governess is thrown in contact with a man of the world,

poised, assured, and of a dynamic though not wholly pleasant personality. He makes her his confidante. He flatters her. He deliberately seeks to arouse her jealousy by inviting to his home, under her very eyes, a beautiful and wealthy young woman whom he gives Jane every reason to suppose he is to make his wife. After all these manoeuvres he further tortures the little governess, now desperately in love with him, by making to her no open declaration. Finally, shaken beyond the limit of her endurance, she confesses her love. Rochester then proposes marriage. There follow a few happy weeks in which Jane prepares a scanty trousseau, and allows Rochester to make ardent but not immoderate love to her. Then comes the dramatic and tragic scene at the altar in which the wedding is prevented and the fact that Rochester has a living maniacal wife is disclosed. Jane resists all Rochester's pleadings to stay with him without marriage, locks herself away from him, and at night runs away with absolutely no provision for the future. When after a great deal of suffering, she regains her health, finds herself among friends, and even, by a bit of Brontës sleight of hand, inherits a fortune, she refuses an offer of marriage, remaining true to her one love. In the end, she finds Rochester, broken, and blind, and, since his wife is now dead, marries him.

One may well ask of what sins, in the eyes of contemporaries, Jane was guilty.
In the first place, she was of an exceptionally passionate temperament in an age when passion in women was taboo. She did not love in the mild manner considered refined by Victorian novelists. An author should not allow a lady to have emotions such as those expressed by Jane, when she said:

"My eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face. I could not keep their lids under control; they would rise, and the irids would fix on him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking—a precious, yet poignant pleasure; pure gold with a steely point of agony; a pleasure like what the thirst a perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless." 

Or later on, when she has promised to marry Rochester:

"My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not in those days see God for his creature, of whom I had made an idol." 

Quite in keeping with Jane's capacity for intense emotion are her sensations during her struggle with Rochester when he is begging her to live with him regardless of his insane wife.

"I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning!"

Shocking, indeed, were these unseemly exhibitions of passion, but Jane's most unpardonable sin seems to have been in

confessing her love to Rochester. May Sinclair says of the impression made on contemporaries by this confession:

Jane offended. She sinned against the unwritten code that a woman may lie till she is purple in the face, but she must not, as a piece of gratuitous information, tell a man she loves him; nor, that is to say, in so many words. She may declare her passion unmistakably in other ways. She may exhibit every ignominious and sickly sign of it; her eyes may glow like hot coals; she may tremble; she may flush and turn pale; she may do almost anything, provided she does not speak the actual words. In mid-Victorian times an enormous license was allowed her. She might... fall ill, horridly and visibly and have to be taken away to spas... Everybody knew what that meant... but nobody minded. It was part of the mid-Victorian convention.

Jane Eyre did none of these things. Instead of languishing and fainting where Rochester could see her, she held her head higher than usual and practiced the spirited arts of retort and repartee. And nobody gave her credit for it. Then Rochester puts the little thing... to torture, and with the last excruciating turn of the screw, she confesses. That was the enormity that was never forgiven her... She had done it. There was magic in the orchard at Thornfield; there was youth in her blood; and 'Jane, do you hear the nightingale singing in that wood?' Still she had done it.

And she was the first heroine who had. Adultery, with which we are fairly familiar, would have seemed a lesser sin. There may be extenuating circumstances for the adulteress... There were no extenuating circumstances for little Jane. 7

Although Miss Sinclair's last paragraph is bitter in tone, it is indeed justified when one remembers the many Victorians who subscribed to the Quarterly Review opinion that Charlotte Brontë, had, in writing this novel proved herself "one who had forfeited the respect of her sex."

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As has already been pointed out, there was a minimum of physical love making in the Victorian novel. Such love-making was to be read between the lines if one wished, but certainly not boldly in the lines themselves. Here again Jane Eyre offended.

For Jane hides "her dazzled eyes against Mr. Rochester's shoulder," and Jane admits that "he kissed me repeatedly" and Jane does not realize that she should not speak of sitting on Mr. Rochester's knee. And most unusual of all, she enjoys love making which does not even have the excuse of being romantic. On one occasion, for example, she has been particularly capricious with Mr. Rochester, and in consequence, as she tells the reader:

"For caresses, too, I now got grimaces; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm; for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak on the ear. It was all right; at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favors to anything more tender."

That Jane was a shocking heroine for the times was admitted even by that leading Brontë scholar and admirer, Mr. Clement K. Shorter in his Charlotte Brontë:

9. Ibid.
After the current novels of the day, Jane Eyre was a model of outspokenness, a veritable volcano. No wonder Miss Rigby said hard things about it, things which caused critics who wrote a generation later to be indignant. But really the little Jane was upsetting the conventional standards of her day by sitting on Rochester's knees.  

But Jane Eyre is by no means the only impassioned or frankly ardent woman in the novels of Charlotte Brontë. If Jane received more than her share of censure at the hands of the critics, it is because she made her public appearance first and, in a measure, paved the way for the others. Although she did appear first in print, Jane Eyre, was not, as a matter of fact the first impassioned woman created by Charlotte Brontë. We can find her predecessors in the author's early romance, The Spell, which has only recently been published.

In this work by the nineteen-year-old Charlotte, we find woven into a highly romantic tale passionate expressions of love very prophetic of her more mature work. The words of the Duchess of Zamorna are very much like those of the later Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe:

As for love, every drop I possess of that passion is poured out on one grand object. Zamorna has it all, and I could not if I would deduct one atom from his right. I wish, oh how I wish, that he could be sensible of this; that he knew how much, how deeply, and how fervently I love him...I had dreamt about him years before...when I at last saw him, when I heard him speak, when I even felt the thrilling touch of his hand, no tongue can express the emotions that almost paralyzed me with their power.

The following scene, which takes place when Zamorna is supposed to be dying is, of course, extravagant, but it contains nevertheless, a strength and an abandonment of passion the quality of which reminds us not so much of Charlotte's own later works as of Emily's *Wuthering Heights*.

The Duchess...gazed a long time at him and then, with a moan of mingled love and agony bent down and clasping her arms round his neck kissed his lips and cheek with passionate tenderness. He instantly awoke. "By the Genii, 'My Lady's lips burned like fire...Flower, would there not be heroism in fading with thy guardian...my scorching bride and her royal lover will consume to ashes in the same earth. Or what do you say to a suttee?...I shall be *ash* on the timber, then you, Mary, will ascend, take my head on your knee, greet my cold and bloodless lips with a few of those burning kisses, no need to apply the torches, we shall of ourselves kindle into a burst of flame so vivid that, when the inhabitants of Vindopolis look out from their c.comments, the glow of the setting not rising sun will be seen on the Oriental sky-line. Hah, Queen of Angria, how would you like that?"

"I would die any death with you, Adrian," was the fond and devoted reply. 14

Frances Henri, in the *Professor*, was really a predecessor of Jane Eyre, and while to the modern reader, she seems a model of decorum, she committed many of the same offenses which were so unmaidenly in Jane. In fact, Frances' conduct was such that her lover, William Crimsworth, was able to write: "I drew her a little nearer to my heart. I took a first kiss from her lips." 15

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A little later he recounts that "after some hesitation, natural to a novice in the art of kissing, she brought her lips into very shy contact with my forehead; I took the small gift as a loan, and repaid it promptly and with generous interest." 16

This would not be so shocking were it not for the almost unbelievable fact that on page three hundred and thirteen we learn that William places Frances upon his knee, and on page three hundred and twenty we learn that she is still there!

Frances, however, was only extremely indelicate. Even the Victorians did not accuse her of passion.

But gentle Caroline Helstone, who came after Jane Eyre, did not escape so easily, for, when speaking of love to Shirley Keeldar, did she not say: "It is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength in its flame"? 17

The idea of placing human above divine love, expressed by Jane Eyre, in reference to Rochester, is repeated in Villette in the words of Miss Marchmont, the old maid, as she speaks of her dead lover:

"You see I still think of Frank more than of God; and unless it be counted that in thus loving the creature so much, so long, and so exclusively, I have not at least blasphemed the Creator, small is my chance of Salvation." 18

But it is in Lucy Snowe of Villette that we have love accentuated to a frenzy almost verging on madness. M. Paul Emmanuel, the "master" with whom Lucy is in love, has been absent from the school in which they both teach. She learns that he has given up his teaching position and is to go to Basseterre in Guadeloupe to conduct a friend's business interests. She does not know whether or not she will see him again before he leaves. She tells us:

I had little slumber about this time, but whenever I did slumber, it followed infallibly that I was quickly roused with a start, while the words "Basseterre", "Guadaloupe", seemed pronounced over my pillow, or ran athwart the darkness round and before me, in zigzag characters of red or violet light.

Finally the day came when M. Paul was expected to make one farewell appearance before the school, and Lucy goes on:

Morning wasted. Afternoon came, and I thought all was over. My heart trembled in its place. My blood was troubled in its current. I was quite sick and hardly knew how to keep at my post or do my work.

Still she did not see him, and again at night she waited.

I began to take some courage, some comfort; it seemed to me that I felt a pulse of his heart beating yet true to the whole throb of mine.

I waited my champion. Apollyan came trailing his Hell behind him. I think if Eternity held torment, its form would not be fiery wrack, or its nature despair. I think that on a certain day... an angel
entered Hades—stood, shone, smiled, delivered a prophecy of conditional pardon, kindled a doubtful hope of bliss to come...spoke thus—then towering, became a star, and vanished into his own heaven. His legacy was suspense—a worse doom than despair. 19

It seems clear to the reader that no woman would go to these emotional extremes over a man unless she loved him with physical passion. Yet an interesting point is that Lucy disclaims this very kind of love:

The love born of beauty was not mine; I had nothing in common with it; I could not dare to meddle with it; but another love...stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection's pure and durable alloy, submitted by intellect to intellect's own test... this love that laughed at Passion his fast furies and his hot and hurried extinction, in this Love I had a vested interest. 20

When we read this, and glance back over such phrases as "I had little slumber about this time," and "Apollyon came trailing his Hell behind him", we wonder at the author's inconsistency.

We find, however, that this is an inconsistency not limited to Villette. Elsewhere Charlotte Brontë seems to have rather conflicting ideas upon passionate love. For instance, the lack of it in Jane Austen's works caused Charlotte to write in a letter to Mr. W.S. Williams:

The passions are perfectly unknown to her. She rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition. Too frequent converse with them would ruffle

the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores.  

It is not hard to understand how the originator of a Jane Eyre and a Lucy Snowe could hold this opinion of Jane Austen. It is, however, slightly more difficult to understand a part of one of her letters to Ellen Nussey:

As to intense passion, I am convinced that it is no desirable feeling. In the first place it seldom or never meets requital; and in the second place, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary; it would last the honeymoon.22

In the same vein, Charlotte has Shirley Keeldar say:

I don't think we should trust to what they call passion at all, Caroline. I believe it is a mere fire of dry sticks, blazing up and vanishing.23

These conflicting opinions lead one to the conclusion that Charlotte herself was not conscious that she had created a series of passionate heroines. To her they must have seemed less cold blooded, it is true, than those of Jane Austen, but also less warm blooded than they again and again prove themselves. It is probable too, that Charlotte Brontë was after all, Victorian enough to prefer at least the word "love" to

22. Rosamond Langbridge, Charlotte Brontë, p.86.
the word "passion."

However that may be, passion plays an unusually large part, according to Victorian standards, in her novels. It contains no prurience, no cheapness, no sensuality. It is clean, honest, vital; but it exists. Its presence in her woman characters, is, indeed, according to W.D. Howells, Charlotte's contribution to the English novel. He says:

She was the first English novelist to present the impassioned heroine; impassioned not in man's sense, but woman's sense, in which love purifies itself of sensuousness without losing fervor. 24

May Sinclair goes more fully into the same idea:

But when her enemies accuse Charlotte Brontë of glorifying passion they praise her unaware. Her glory is that she did glorify it. Until she came passion between man and woman had meant animal passion...A woman's gentle legalised affection for her husband was one thing and passion was another. Thackeray and Dickens on the whole followed Fielding. To all three of them passion is wholly an affair of the senses. Thackeray intimated that he could have done more with it but for his fear of Mrs. Grundy. Anyhow passion was not a quality that could be given to a good woman; and so the good women of Dickens and Thackeray are conspicuously without it...Jane Austen gave it to one vulgar woman, Lydia Bennet, and to one bad one, Mrs. Rushworth...

And it was this thing, cast down, defiled, dragged in the mud, and ignored because of its defilement, that Charlotte Brontë took and lifted up....She showed it for the divine, the beautiful, the utterly pure...thing it is...She made it, this spirit of fire, incarnate in the body of a woman who had no sensual charm. 25

As we have indicated before, Charlotte Brontë's women were famous for the unhappiness of their lives. The impression one gets after reading the four novels is that the lot of woman is, on the whole, a hard one. A main cause for this is the recurring tragedy of unrequited love. When one reads Charlotte's poems on hopeless love, and when one thinks of the women in her books who either loved alone, or were tortured a long time before they learned that their love was returned, it is impossible not to think that in these cases, Charlotte herself is her own heroine. If it had not been for the Héger affair, it seems certain that Jane and Caroline and Lucy would have had happier, though probably less interesting lives.

Caroline Helstone has been hopelessly in love with her cousin, Robert Gerard Moore, for two years. She says nothing to him; she is almost bewildered by her suffering, which is minutely described:

At church only Caroline had the chance of seeing him, and there she rarely looked at him; it was both too much pain and too much pleasure to look: it excited too much emotion; and that it was all wasted emotion she had learned well to comprehend.

Once, on a dark wet Sunday, when there were few people at church...she had allowed her eye to seek Robert's pew, and to rest awhile on its occupant...By instinct Caroline knew, as she examined that clouded countenance, that his thoughts were...far away, not merely from her, but from all which she could comprehend, or in which she could sympathize...

"Different, indeed," she concluded, "is Robert's mental condition to mine: I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure to think of me. The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart; always there, always awake, always
astir; quite other feelings absorb his reflections, and govern his faculties. He is rising now, going to leave the church, for service is over. Will he turn his head toward this pew?—No— not once— he has not one look for me: that is hard: a kind glance would have made me happy till tomorrow; I have not got it; he would not give it; he is gone. Strange that grief should now almost choke me, because another human being's eye has failed to meet mine." 26

Lucy Snowe says almost the same pitiful thing of M.

Paul Emanuel:

A cordial word from his lips, or a gentle look from his eyes, would do me good, for all the span of life that remained to me; it would be comfort in the last strait of loneliness: I would take it—I would taste the elixir, and pride should not spill the cup. 27

It is not in the novels alone that we get this theme. It occurs depressingly often in Charlotte's poems. The poem Reason begins:

My life is cold, love's fire being dead,
That fire selfkindled, self consumed;
What living warmth ere while it shed,
Now to how drear extinction doomed!

Devoid of charm, how could I dream
My unasked love would ever return?
What fate, what influence, lit the flame
I still feel only, deeply, burn?

Alas! There are who should not love,
I to this dreary band belong;
This knowing, let me henceforth prove
Too wise to list delusion's song.

In Frances is the same lament:

Unloved I love, unwept I weep;
Grief I restrain, hope I repress:
Vain is this anguish—fixed and deep;
Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss:

One more from the many similar stanzas is enough. This poem has no name, but begins:

He saw my heart's woe, discovered my soul's anguish,
How in fever, in thirst, in atrophy it pined;
Knew he could heal, yet looked and let it languish,
To its moans spirit deaf, to its pangs spirit blind.

Bitter, but characteristically unflinching, are Caroline's reflections on the painfulness of love to women:
A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self contempt smiting in secret...You expected bread and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because your nerves are martyred: do not doubt that your mental stomach if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich's—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind, in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson of how to endure without a sob.28

It is perhaps no wonder that Caroline entertains such morbid ideas, when at seventeen she is told by Mrs. Pryor, who is really her mother:

My dear, it (love) is very bitter. It is said to be strong--strong as death. Most of the cheats of existence are strong. As to its sweetness--nothing is so transitory: its date is a moment,--the twinkling of an eye: the sting remains forever: it may perish with the dawn of eternity, but it tortures through time into its deepest night.29

Just as it is Lucy Snowe who loves the most passionately of Charlotte's women, so it is Lucy who suffers the most keenly from lack of love, from loneliness, and from jealousy:

Between twelve and one that night a cup was forced to my lips, black, strong, strange, drawn from no well but filled up seething from a bottom-

29. Ibid., vol.2, p.89.
less and boundless sea. Suffering brewed in temporal or calculable measure, and mixed for mortal lips tastes not as this suffering tasted. 30

Jealousy is practically non-existent in the heroines of Charlotte Brontë. In fact, Caroline Helstone has been called unnatural in not feeling jealous of Shirley when Robert Moore is devoting so much attention to her. Just once, however, Lucy Snowe succumbs to its pangs:

Something tore me so cruelly under my shawl, something so dug into my side, a vulture so strong in beak and talon, I must be alone to grapple with it. I think I never felt jealousy till now. 31

So overwrought does Lucy become over loneliness and lovelessness that little things give her either insane pleasure or exaggerated pain. She is not really in love with Graham Bretton; yet, when he promises to write to her, so important does this letter become that she works herself into a nearly hysterical frame of mind:

He may write once. So kind is his nature, it may stimulate him for once to make the effort. But it cannot be continued - it may not be repeated. Great were that folly which should build on such a promise - insane that credulity which should mistake this transitory rainpool holding in its hollow one draught, for the perennial spring yielding the supply of seasons. 32

And when Lucy really does get the letter, she says:

32. Ibid.; vol.1, p.382.
For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy...it was a godsend and I inwardly thanked the God who had vouchsafed it... Strange, sweet insanity! 33

Again, loneliness wrings from Lucy the following outcry:

The world can understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement. They see the long buried prisoner disinterred, a maniac or an idiot! How his senses left him - how his nerves, first inflamed, underwent nameless agony, and then sunk to palsy is a subject too intricate for examination, too abstract for popular comprehension. 34

Much more restrained, yet basically the same are Charlotte's own utterances in her private correspondence with her most intimate friend, Ellen Nussey. In 1852, she writes to her:

I am always for facing the stern truth; but still, life seems hard and dreary for some of us. And yet it must be accepted with submission. 35

A few months later she writes to Ellen again:

The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart lie in position; not that I am a single woman and likely to remain a single woman, but because I am a lonely woman and likely to be lonely. But it cannot be helped and therefore imperatively must be borne, and borne too with as few words about

34. Ibid., vol.2, p.37.
it as may be.\textsuperscript{36}

We suspect, however, that Charlotte was not entirely accurate in her diagnosis of her own unhappiness. For she seems to feel too keenly upon the position of "old maids" as she calls them, to make the letter above ring quite true. At any rate, there is no doubt that her heroine, Caroline Helstone, at the youthful age of seventeen, has a very definite fear of becoming an old maid. Caroline reflects:

I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder! Where is my place in the world?... That is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve: other people solve it for them by saying "Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted"...Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is.\textsuperscript{37}

In fact, so apprehensive of this fate is Caroline that she makes a careful study of several of the old maids of her acquaintance. Among them is Miss Mann, who is thus described:

Nature made her in the mood in which she makes her briars and thorns; whereas for the creation of some women, she reserves the May morning hours...to be fixed with Miss Mann's eye was no ordinary doom... Certainly Miss Mann had a formidable eye for one of the softer sex: it was prominent, and showed a great deal of white, and looked as steadily, as unwinkingly, at you as if it were a steel ball soldered in her head; and when, while looking she began to talk in an

\textsuperscript{36} Shorter, \textit{op. cit.}, vol.2, p.274.
indescribably dry monotonous tone...you felt as if a graven image of some bad spirit were addressing you...She was a perfectly honest, conscientious woman, who had performed duties in her day from whose severe anguish many a human Peri, gazelle eyed, silken tressed and silver tongued, would have shrunk appalled. 38

Caroline next visited Miss Ainsley, who, though very ugly, had done so much good for others that the Vicar of Nun- nely said "that her life came nearer the life of Christ than that of any other human being he had ever met with." 39

She concluded that these two old maids, at least, had been unnecessarily and cruelly ridiculed, and she resolved that henceforth she would think of them only with respect.

In a letter to her former teacher, Miss Margaret Wooler, Charlotte Brontë speaks of unmarried women without the varnish of fiction:

There is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without the support of husband or mother, and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend. 40

At times in her books Charlotte exhibits a strong mixture of concern and repulsion over what the Victorian age had

done to the unmarried woman. One of these outbursts occurs

in The Professor:

Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids—
the race whom all despise; they have fed themselves
from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and en-
durance. Many of them get ossified with the dry
diet; self control is so continually their thought,
so perpetually their object, that at last it absorbs
the softer and more agreeable qualities of their
nature; and they die mere models of austerity, fash-
ioned out of a little parchment and much bone.
Anatomists will tell you there is a heart in the with-
ered old maid’s carcase— the same as in that of any
cherished wife or proud mother in the land. Can this
be so? I really don’t know; but feel inclined to
doubt it. 41

Her next impassioned protest upon the condition of
the single woman is, however, found in Shirley, in which an
old maid is likened to a "St. Simeon Styliætes, lifted up
terrible on his wild column in the wilderness" and to a "Hindu
votary stretched on his couch of iron spikes." She makes the
plea that there should be more work for single women to do, for
they "have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing,
no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope,
in all their life to come of anything better." As a result
they decline in health, become narrow minded, continually plot
to get husbands. She ends:

Men of England! look at your poor girls, many
of them fading around you, dropping off in con-
sumption or decline, or what is worse, degenerating into sour
old maids...Do something! 42

Charlotte Brontë's heroines, like herself, were all preoccupied by love, or the lack of love. Their independence, their intellect, their freedom all sink into second place beside their complete dependence on sexual love to make their lives endurable. Such frank analysis of the love and passion felt by woman for man was, indeed, new in the Victorian novel. Blackwood's commented on this fact in 1857:

(Charlotte Brontë's genius) was in this case chiefly applied to the elucidation of a class of feelings which excites the curiosity of all men, and which had never before been thus microscopically examined. It was a new sensation to see that class of feelings which regulates the relation of the sexes mercilessly and minutely laid bare upon the woman's side and by the hand of a woman.

How men are influenced has often been told; how women are influenced has very seldom been told except in the most general terms, and simply because the novelists have principally been men who of necessity know very little of the sex--far less than they think they do.43

The thing that stands out in Charlotte Brontë's depiction of love is her ruthless frankness. Any Victorian woman or any woman of today might have loved in the manner of Charlotte's heroines. No Victorian woman and few women of today would so frankly admit passion at its birth, so faithfully recount each pitiful hope, each knife thrust of disappointment, each inevitable black and turbid hour of despair. Propriety would check the Victorian, for passion she must not admit,

unrequited love she must not confess, and only the mildest demonstrations of love could she indulge in before marriage. Pride would check the modern woman, for certainly to others, probably even to herself, she would warp the bald unpalatable truth a little this way or that, to save in one way or other some shred of her self esteem.

Charlotte Brontë indeed cleaved painfully to the truth when she wrote of love. But she was limited to love as she personally had known it. Each heroine, with the exception of Frances Henri, falls in love before she is wooed, and remains for a long time or forever in a tortured and feverous state of mind and emotion. Now while any woman may love so, every woman does not love so. Certainly there are women who are wooed before they are won. If Charlotte could have forgotten her own unhappy love affair just long enough to have given us one heroine uncrossed in love, her novels would be less depressing, and would escape a slight, but undeniable, taint of the morbid.
Chapter 5.

The Victorian Charlotte

A critic once described Charlotte Brontë as a "kind of prosaic, most demure and orthodox Shelley in the Victorian literature—with visible genius, an intense personality, unquenchable fire," and added that with all this passion she was still "a little, prim, shy, delicate, proud, Puritan girl!"

And the most interesting thing about Charlotte Brontë is just this contradiction. Passionate, and rebellious, often unconventional, as Charlotte and the characters she created undoubtedly were, they were at the same time "demure," and "orthodox", "prim and Puritan." In other words, although many readers of that age would have indignantly denied the fact, today it is very easy to see that these startling unVictorian heroines, and this shocking author were in many ways Victorian after all.

Although for the most part, passion takes the place

of sentimentality, still we find the latter creeping in here and there. Certainly the following scene from Villette is sentimental enough to have come from any Victorian pen:

Paulina sat between the two gentlemen: while they conversed, her little hands were busy at some work; I thought at first she was binding a nosegay. No; with the tiny pair of scissors, glittering in her lap, she had severed spoils from each manly head beside her, and was now occupied in plaiting together the grey lock and the golden wave. The plait woven-no silk thread being at hand to bind it—a tress of her own hair was made to serve that purpose; she tied it like a knot, imprisoned it like a knot, imprisoned it in a locket, and laid it on her heart.

"Now," she said, "There is an amulet made, which has the virtue to keep you two always friends. You can never quarrel so long as I wear this."

An amulet was indeed made, a spell framed which rendered enmity impossible. She was become a bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord. From them she drew her happiness, and what she borrowed, she, with interest, gave back.

Is there, indeed, such happiness on earth, I asked, as I watched the father, the daughter, the future husband, now united—all blessed and blessing.

But far more cloying is the scene of mother love depicted when Mrs. Pryor makes known to Caroline that they are mother and daughter. In fact, it seems to me that for sheer, unrelieved sentimentality this scene is equal to Dickens at his best:

"You love me, Caroline?"

"Very much,—very truly,—inexpressibly sometimes; just now I feel as if I could almost grow to your heart."....

"Then if you love me," said she, speaking quickly, with an altered voice: "if you feel as if to use your own words— you could 'grow to my heart,' it will be neither shock nor pain for you to know that that heart is the source whence yours was filled: that from my veins issued the tide which flows in yours; that you are mine— my daughter, my own child."

"Mrs. Pryor—!"
"My own child!"....
"But Mrs. James Helstone—but my father's wife whom I do not remember ever to have seen, she is my mother?"

"She is your mother: James Helstone was my husband. These features are James's own. Papa, my darling, gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair...."

"But if you are my mother, the world is all changed to me. Surely I can live— I should like to recover—"

"You must recover. You drew life and strength from my breast when you were a tiny, fair infant. Daughter! We have been long parted: I return now to cherish you again."

She held her to her bosom: she cradled her in her arms; she rocked her softly as if lulling a young child to sleep.

"My mother! my own mother!"

The offspring nestled to the parent: that parent, feeling the endearment and hearing the appeal, gathered her closer still. She covered her with noiseless kisses; she murmured love over her, like a cushion fostering its young.

Akin to sentimentality is the tendency on the part of the heroines to languish and pine away in accordance with the best Victorian tradition. When she was crossed in love, Caroline's pining became very serious indeed, so much so that "young ladies looked at her in a way she understood and from which she shrank. Their eyes said they knew she

had been "disappointed," as custom phrases it: by whom they were not certain... Most people said she was going to die."^4

Although Jane Eyre does not tell the reader specifically that she has been "pining away" because of an unfortunate love for her "master", she gives one much the same idea by saying, after Mr. Rochester has been kind to her, "My bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength."^5

Nor was "master" merely a term with Charlotte Brontë which might loosely mean "husband" or "lover" as the case might be. In external and superficial matters her heroines might think and act independently, but in the basic things of life they had a desire to be completely dominated by the male, which seems decidedly old-fashioned to the twentieth century reader. Jane, Lucy, Frances, and even Shirley used the term "master" over and over again. It is of course the greatest contradiction when it comes from the lips of Shirley Keeldar, "Esquire," who says to her uncle who is trying to force her to marry someone she does not love:

"Did I not say I prefer a master? One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward—whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it

impossible not to love, and very possible to fear." 6

The man whom Shirley does love is Louis Moore, whose proposal to her is prefaced by a statement of exactly how he would treat a wife:

"Oh, could I find her such as I imagine her. Something to tame first, and teach afterwards: to break in and then to fondle...to establish power over, and then to be indulgent to the capricious moods that never were influenced and never indulged before; to see her alternately irritated and subdued about twelve times in the twenty-four hours...she would watch on the threshold for my coming home of an evening; she would run into my arms...Find her, I must." 7

Only too willing to be the wife thus "broken" and "tamed", Shirley, a few moments later, acknowledges him as her "master."

By common consent, Mr. Rochester is an unpleasantly and unnecessarily dominant hero. L.E. Tiddeman wrote of him in Westminster in 1903:

Mr. Rochester is not a man's man...nor is he even a woman's man if judged by the present day standard. He is rather the man whom women were taught to worship in benighted times. He is a superior sort of slave driver...When Miss Brontë would impress us with his noble masterfulness, we are disgusted with his rudeness, and shocked that any woman with a rag of self respect should tolerate the presence of such an unmannerly boor for an instant, not to speak of encouraging his advances...Yet Charlotte Brontë's

genius makes us see him through Jane's eyes. We fall into the Rochester trap.8

Even in Victorian times the abject surrender of these too independent heroines did not escape comment. In 1857, we read of Charlotte's heroines in the *Living Age*:

They invariably fall victims to the man of strong intellect and generally muscular frame, who lures them on with affected indifference and simulated harshness; by various ingenious trials assures himself they are worthy of him, and, when his own time has fully come, raises them with a bashaw-like air from their prostrate condition, presses them triumphantly to his heart, or seats them on his knee, as the case may be, and indulges in a condescending burst of passionate emotion.9

One of the most outstanding traits in Charlotte's various heroines is a moral strength, so severe and unyielding that it amounts to Puritanism. Jane Eyre accepted the laws of God and man as they had been taught to her. In her mind, no set of circumstances could be conceived which could allow any questioning of accepted codes. We have an example of this in her answers to Rochester in the following conversation:

Rochester: I know what my aim is, what my motives are; and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians that both are right.

Jane: They cannot be, sir, if they require a new statute to legalize them.

Rochester: They are, Miss Eyre, though they absolutely require a new statute: unheard of combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules. Jane: That sounds a dangerous maxim, sir; because one can see at once that it is liable to abuse.

Rochester: Sententious sage! so it is; but I swear by my household gods not to abuse it. ...

Jane: The human and fallible should not arrogate a power which the divine and perfect alone can safely be entrusted.

Rochester: What power?

Jane: That of saying of any strange line of action—‘Let it be right.'  

Later, when the test came, Jane stands by the words which she has spoken. According to many a modern code, she had every justification for becoming Rochester's mistress. His wife was a maniac from whom he could not be free. He not only loved Jane, but also needed her desperately. Without her, she had good reason to think his life would be a living hell. Jane, on the other hand, had neither relative nor friend to know or care what she did; she had no money and no shelter to which to turn, and she loved him passionately. Yet her moral code held. She did not yield an inch. When she learned that he was technically a married man, that was enough.

"Now he made an effort to rest his head on my shoulder; but I would not permit it. Then he would draw me to him; no." Within twenty-four hours of her discovery she

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had disappeared, leaving him no clue by which to trace her.

There were many contemporaries who appreciated Jane's moral qualities. In 1857, for example, the North American Review said of Jane Eyre:

> Her moral strength and her unswerving instinct are out of the range of ordinary minds, as the sphere of her conflict is removed from commonplace environments. Isolated alike from praise and from blame, she is clothed in a God-given armor of proof, and wins the victory in the very strength of her woman's weakness.  

Puritan, too, was Charlotte Brontë's intolerance for anything even remotely bordering on the sensual or the licentious. We see this, for example, in Villette, in Graham Bretton's condemnation of Ginevra Fanshawe:

> Ay, flirtation! that might be an innocent girlish wile to lure on the true lover; but what I refer to was not flirtation: it was a look marking mutual and secret understanding - it was neither girlish nor innocent. No woman, were she as beautiful as Aphrodite, who could give or receive such a glance shall ever be sought in marriage by me.

The hero of The Professor gives voice to the same idea when he expresses his distaste for M. Pelet:

> He was not married, and I soon perceived he had all a Frenchman's, all a Parisian's, motions about matrimony and women. I suspected a degree of laxity in his code of morals, there was something so cold and blasé in his tone whenever he alluded to what he called "le beau sexe."... I hated his

fashion of mentioning love, I abhorred, from my soul, mere licentiousness.\textsuperscript{14}

It is, interestingly, in her own private correspondence that Charlotte Brontë expresses her most Victorian ideas.

As early as 1840, she wrote to Ellen Nussey some advice on love which is not shocking in the least; unless it be because of its dogmatic restraint:

I hope you will not have the romantic folly to wait for what the French call "une grande passion." My good girl, "Une grande passion" is "une grande folie"...Moderation in the senses is superlative wisdom...No young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the ceremony performed, and the first half year of wedded life has been passed away. A woman may then begin to love, but with great precaution, very coolly, very moderately, very rationally. If she loves so much that a harsh word or a cold look cuts her to the heart she is a fool.\textsuperscript{15}

It seems hardly possible that these sentiments of caution and restraint should come from the same pen which a few years later created a Jane Eyre and a Lucy Snowe who loved not "coolly", not "moderately", not "rationally", but with "une grande passion." The explanation is probably that this letter was written before she had met and loved M. Héger.

Throughout her life, Charlotte was consistently,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Charlotte Brontë, \textit{The Professor}, pp.93-94.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} C.K.Shorter, \textit{The Bronte's Life and Letters}, vol.1, p.197.
\end{itemize}
surprisingly, Victorian in her attitude toward the domestic duties of a woman. Never did it occur to her that her career or her fame could excuse her for a moment from one household care or responsibility. She was a woman, and she must be "womanly" first of all. At the age of twenty-one, she had written to the famous poet, Southey, asking his advice about a literary career. His reply had been discouraging. Fame, he intimated, should play no part in a woman's scheme of life. To this letter, our little Victorian meekly replied:

In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble anyone else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of preoccupation or eccentricity which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits...I have endeavored not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfill, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing, I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewards me for the privation.16

Twelve years later, after the successful publication of Jane Eyre, Charlotte is still putting duty first:

Care of papa and Anne is necessarily my chief present object in life, to the exclusion of all that could give me interest with my publishers or their connections. Should Anne get better, I think I could rally, and become Currer Bell once more.17

"Womanly" and Victorian, too, was Charlotte in her final submission to fate. She was often termed a rebel, and

her heroines were rebellious; yet if they cried out against destiny in one breath, they submitted in the next.

Lucy Snowe at length became resigned enough to say:

Towards the last of these long seven weeks I admitted, what through the other six I had jealously excluded—the conviction that these blanks were inevitable; the result of circumstances, the fiat of fate, a part of my life's lot, and—above all—a matter about whose origin no question must ever be asked, for whose painful sequence no murmur ever uttered.  

Charlotte, at the age of thirty-seven, wrote to Ellen Nussey:

If, in one point of view, it is sad to have few ties in this world, in another point of view it is soothing; women who have husbands and children must look forwards to death with more pain, more fear, than those who have none. To dismiss this subject, I wish (without cant, and not in any hackneyed sense) that you and I could always say in this matter—the will of God be done.  

So easily do we, from our distance, detect these nineteenth century characteristics in the writings of Charlotte Brontë; that we wonder why they did not appeal more of the Victorian critics. The answer seems to be—they do not predominate. Any literary work ahead of its age must in the nature of things contain enough of the age in which it was written to date it, more or less, for future readers.

The average reader of Charlotte Brontë's time had no reaction one way or the other when her heroines waxed sentimental or lovesick. That was the way of woman. No more was the average reader moved to enthusiastic or stressed approval when these heroines pursued their household duties, or submitted to fate, or showed a granite-like adherence to the moral code. These things, too, were synonymous with the word "woman." One did not think any more of finding them in a novel than of finding a chapter number or a paragraph of description.

We have already discovered the things that the readers did notice. They noticed with disfavor the appearance of the heroines. They were offended by a great deal of the conduct which to us seems exemplary. For a heroine to be independent in thought or action was "unwomanly"; for her to be interested in "men's topics" of conversation was "strong minded". Finally, to fall passionately in love, and to analyse this emotion frankly and minutely was "coarse" if not "immoral". Naturally, in the Victorian age, it was the non-Victorian which stood out.

It is interesting before leaving the women of Charlotte Brontë to consider them from one more viewpoint, that of today. Of course they are not shocking. On the other hand, they are by no means as outmoded as one might expect.
It is not as Victorian women that they appeal to us, but simply as women. For they are agelessly, universally feminine. We might know any of them. Independent enough, intellectual enough, conscientious and dutiful, essentially they have nothing without the love of the man whom they desire. We wish they had been braver about it; we wish they had been less self-engrossed; we should like to teach them to shrug their shoulders and say "Laugh it off," or "Life is like that." In fact, in an age when we pride ourselves upon calling a spade a spade, we are, strangely, uncomfortable at hearing a heart called a heart. And paradoxically, we can not rid ourselves of the idea that these heroines, like Charlotte Brontë herself, by needing our sympathy so very very much, somehow forfeited the right to it.
CHAPTER SIX.

There are so many ways in which the "gentle" youngest sister, Anne, reminds us of Charlotte that it seems logical to discuss her works next. To a large extent, we shall find that the characteristics exhibited by her heroines have their counterpart in those which we have already discovered in Frances Henri, Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar, Caroline Helstone, and Lucy Snowe. We shall also find that Anne's own reactions to the lot of the middle-class, mid-Victorian spinster are strongly reminiscent of Charlotte's.

Because of these similarities, and because Anne's work is less touched by genius, Anne was referred to in the first chapter of this thesis as a "pale copy" of her oldest sister. The phrase, however, was used strictly from the viewpoint of the reader, who is usually familiar with all of Charlotte's works, before opening either of Anne's two novels,
Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. It would perhaps have been more accurate to have called Charlotte a more vivid copy of Anne, in view of the fact that Agnes Grey preceded all of Charlotte's works except The Professor, and that The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was published before either Shirley or Villette.

This chronological order of publication is brought sharply to our attention by Mr. George Moore in the Bookman for 1923. In fact, Mr. Moore goes so far as to say that Charlotte "stole" a great deal from Anne. With this, however, we cannot agree. The same ancestry and background, practically identical experiences, naturally produced like subject matter and a like mode of expression in the two sisters. What we do recognize is merely the similarity and the fact that Anne's work usually seems less significant.

Nevertheless, since Anne's two little-known works remind us of Charlotte's familiar ones, it is from the usual viewpoint that we are about to trace characteristics of her heroines in the same order in which we found like characteristics in the heroines of Charlotte. We shall stop, however, to point out one or two instances in which Anne's work is, as has been said, distinctly unique.

We recall that the Victorian readers disliked many things about Charlotte's women. They disliked their plain looks and their sober dress; they distrusted their intellect and their independence, and so on through a long list of what passed for faults. They disapproved just as strongly of Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon. As for appearance, what could be more unattractively plain than the picture Agnes Grey gives of herself on her arrival at the house where she is to enter upon her duties as governess?

I was somewhat dismayed at my appearance on looking in the glass—the cold had swelled and reddened my hands, uncurled and entangled my hair, and dyed my face of a pale purple; add to this my collar was horribly crumpled, my frock splashed with mud, my feet clad in stout new boots, and as the trunks were not brought up there was no remedy; so having smoothed my hair as well as I could, and repeatedly twitched my obdurate collar, I proceeded to clomp down the two flights of stairs, philosophizing as I went, and with some difficulty found my way into the room where Mrs. Bloomfield awaited me.

The picture is not attractive. One might, however, charitably blame it all on the weather and the trip Agnes had just taken, if she had improved in her appearance after she had thawed out and received her trunks. But such is not the case. Under perfectly normal circumstances, many weeks later, she again looks in the glass, and we learn that she can "discover no

2. Anne Bronte, Agnes Grey, p.35.
beauty in those marked features, that pale, hollow cheek, and ordinary dark brown hair." 3 Like Lucy Snowe, she decides that she is too plain to be loved. In a speech which one would call reminiscent of Lucy, except for the already mentioned fact that Agnes Grey was written before Villette, Agnes says to herself:

If you would but consider your own unattractive exterior, your unamiable reserve, your foolish diffidence—which must make you appear cold, dull, awkward, and perhaps ill-tempered too;—if you had but rightly considered these from the beginning, you would never have harboured such presumptuous thoughts: and now that you have been so foolish, pray repent and amend, and let us have no more of it! 4

Not content with creating so plain a character, Anne, like her sister Charlotte, goes a step farther. She tacitly slanders the usual beautiful Victorian heroine when she expresses her opinion that the woman who is outwardly well-favored is seldom admirable. Agnes Grey says:

I wondered why so much beauty should be given to those who made so bad a use of it, and denied to some who would make it a benefit to themselves and others. 5

Beautiful clothes and jewels come under the same ban as beautiful women. To refuse to wear anything bright or gay

4. Ibid., p.261.
5. Ibid., p.196.
is with Anne's heroines, as with Charlotte's, a high moral obligation. Helen Huntingdon goes up to London for the season with her wealthy young husband. He wishes to be proud of her. He insists that she appear at various social functions fashionably dressed. Helen thus describes this painful necessity:

It was something to feel that he considered me a worthy object of pride; but I paid dear for the gratification, for in the first place to please him, I had to violate my cherished predilection—my almost rooted principles in favour of a plain, dark, sober style of dress; I must sparkle in costly jewels, and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had long since determined I would never do. 6

W.F. Lord, in an article on The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, in the Nineteenth Century in 1903, makes some interesting comments upon this particular attribute of the heroine. He suggests that the husband might not have taken to drink if Helen had not been so exacting over trifles, and goes on:

The lady was an heiress; her husband had a large establishment. It was only reasonable that he should have liked to see her wear the family jewels, and a "plain, dark and sober style of dress", which would be the very thing for housekeeping in the morning in the country, is not the right thing for the opera. In short, the young lady did not know how to dress and would not be taught. 7

Passing to the more flagrant faults of independence and strong-willedness, we find that, although specific instances of these traits are fewer in Anne's writings than in Charlotte's, nevertheless those that do appear are notably contrary to the

spirit of the times. Agnes Grey has the same unVictorian wish for both personal and financial independence which actuates all of Charlotte's heroines. With no real necessity for leaving a pleasant home, Agnes exclaims:

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter into a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance... to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed.

Neither Agnes nor Helen shows quite the range of interest in politics, history, literature, and other "men's topics" which is so noticeable in Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. But the Brontë habit of independence of thought led Anne to put in Helen Huntingdon's mouth an interpretation of the Christian religion decidedly opposed to the usual belief of the time. The two pages in which Helen assembles various Bible passages to prove that a sinner is not condemned to eternal punishment are not comparable to anything ever written by Charlotte. Charlotte was sometimes blamed for showing too little interest in Christianity, but Anne consciously and defiantly disputed an accepted tenet. In these pages "strongmindedness" became heresy:

"Not forever," I exclaimed, "only till he has paid the uttermost farthing;" for 'If any man's work abide not the fire, he shall suffer loss, yet himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;' and He that ' is able to subdue all things to Himself will have all men to be

8. Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey, p.27.
saved', and 'will in the fulness of time, gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus, who tasted death for every man, and in whom God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in Heaven.'

"Oh, Helen! where did you learn all this?"

"In the Bible, aunt. I have searched it through, and found nearly thirty passages, all tending to support the same theory."

"And is that the use you make of your Bible? And did you find no passages tending to prove the danger and falsity of such a belief?"

"No: I found, indeed, some passages that, taken by themselves, might seem to contradict that opinion; but they will all bear a different construction to that which is commonly given, and in most the only difficulty is in the word which we translate 'everlasting' or 'eternal'. I don't know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means for ages, and might signify either endless or long-enduring."

This passage is indeed one of the most daring in any of the Brontë works. Will Hale points out the remarkable strength of character that it took so boldly to defy the conventional Victorian doctrine of eternal damnation.

May Sinclair says of it:

She (Anne) was a resurgent in religious thought. Not to believe in the dogma of eternal punishment was, in mid-victorian times and evangelical circles to be almost an atheist. When, somewhere in the late seventies, Dean Farrar published his Eternal Hope, that book fell like a bombshell into the ranks of the orthodox. But long before Dean Farrar's book, Anne Brontë had thrown her bomb. There are two pages in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall that anticipate and sum

10. Will T. Hale, Anne Bronte: her Life and Writing, Indiana University Studies, No.3.
up his now innocent argument. 11

After finding such irreligious doctrine in the work
of an author, contemporaries naturally expected the worst in
the matter of profane and coarse language.

So although Victorian readers were horrified, they
were not surprised, when Miss Matilda, in Agnes Grey shouted,
"No,--damn it, no!" 12 or when the villainous Hattersley said
to Hargrave in the presence of Helen, "and if you choose to
bear malice for it after all the handsome things I've said,
do so and be d--d." 13 Of course one might wonder if even in
Victorian times a villain might not be expected to use profane
language. The answer is, that although a wicked Victorian
might use improper language, Anne Brontë was still guilty on
two charges. If she had made her heroine enough of a lady,
even a villain could not have spoken profanely in her presence;
and again, let a wicked man curse as he will, a pure woman
does not need to repeat this cursing verbatim in her novel.
As for Miss Matilda, she was, of course, unspeakable.

But it is in page after page depicting scenes of
debauchery in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall that Anne most com-
pletely shocked the Victorian reader and critic. Beside these
pages, every line that Charlotte ever wrote was orthodox.

Anne was meek and timid and pious. She drew these scenes, in fact, from a pious wish to show the painfulness and horror of sin. But she wrote as neither Dickens nor Thackeray would have dared to write. May Sinclair says in reference to these pages:

There are scenes, there are situations in Anne's amazing novel, which for sheer audacity stand alone in mid-victorian literature, and which would hold their own in the literature of revolt which followed. Helen Morrison, the heroine of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, marries Arthur Huntingdon in spite of the extreme disapproval of her aunt, who has pointed out to Helen that Arthur is a worthless young man. Shortly after the wedding Helen begins to realize that her aunt is right. Disillusionment gradually changes into desperation and despair, as Helen finds this wilfully chosen husband to be coarse, vulgar, dissipated, and immoral.

Even in the first months of her married life she is forced to listen to conversation which shocks and pains her.

His favourite amusement is to sit or loll beside me on the sofa, and tell me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl, or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation he lays it all to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheek.

Improper conversation with his wife is, however, the very least of Arthur's faults. Drunkenness becomes frequent. Finally, Helen learns that Arthur is unfaithful to her, and that his mistress is one of the guests they have been entertaining for a prolonged visit. According to Will T. Hays, Anne's greatest defiance of Victorian propriety is in the two scenes which begin with Helen's finding her husband with Lady Lowborough in his arms. The injured wife shrinks into the shade of the shrubbery, and hears the following conversation:

"Ah, Huntingdon!" said she reproachfully, pausing where I had stood with him the day before, "it was here you kissed that woman." (Helen)

"Well, dearest, I couldn't help it. You know I must keep straight with her as long as I can. Haven't I seen you kiss your dolt of a husband scores of times?--and do I ever complain?"

"But tell me, don't you love her still--a little?" said she....

"Not one bit, by all that's sacred!" he replied, kissing her glowing cheek.

Although she is stunned by this revelation, Helen summons the courage to confront her husband that very evening. The scene which follows between Helen and Arthur, is couched in unbelievably frank language for the times:

Helen: Will you let me take our child and...go?
Arthur: No.
Helen: Then I must stay here to be hated and despised. But henceforth we are husband and wife only in the name.

16. Will T. Hays, Anne Brontë, her Life and Writings, Indiana University Studies, no. 53.
Arthur: Very good.
Helen: I am your child's mother and your housekeeper, nothing more....
Arthur: Very well, if you please. We shall see who will tire first.18

Nearly as startling is the scene in which Arthur, coming into the breakfast room of his own home, and finding both his wife and his mistress there, ignores the former and openly makes love to the latter.19

Up to this point, aside from being guilty of some rather frank language, Helen, herself, seems the innocent victim of a brutal husband. But the discerning Victorian reader found Helen extremely guilty in her own right. For it is indeed clear from nearly the first of the book that she, a married woman, loves, and practically admits loving, Gilbert Markham. Here Anne Brontë did not have even the excuse of the moral duty to expose sin in all its ugliness, for Helen was her heroine, and Helen was intended to stand out in admirable and pure relief against a sullied background. Yet Helen makes it possible for Gilbert to say:

One moment I stood and looked into her face, the next I held her to my heart, and we seemed to grow together in a close embrace from which no physical or mental force could rend us. A whispered "God bless you!" and "Go-go" was all she said; but while she spoke, she held me so fast that without violence I could not have obeyed her.20

Even had Gilbert and Helen had every legal right to love each other, it is doubtful whether many Victorian readers would have approved of this scene, for such frank descriptions of love making as the Brontës indulged in were not common. Anne and Emily offended in this way much more than did Charlotte. The passage just mentioned undoubtedly called down the strongest censure of anything of the sort written by Anne. Yet Gilbert was acting in the modern rather than in the mid-Victorian manner when, although he was not engaged to Eliza Millward, the vicar's daughter, he followed her "into the dimly lighted passage, where, under pretence of helping her on with her shawl, I fear I must plead guilty to snatching a kiss behind her father's back."21

With the same frankness Anne describes Mr. Huntington's ardour when Helen accepts his proposal of marriage.

"Will you bestow yourself upon me?—you will!" he cried, nearly squeezing me to death in his arms... And again he caught me in his arms and smothered me with kisses.22

In Agnes Grey we have a milder, unrequited love treated much in the manner of Charlotte. Agnes' outbursts are somewhat less passionate, yet she strongly reminds us of Caroline Helstone and Lucy Snowe in her longing for marriage and her long silent worship of a man who apparently does not return her love. When she says that she heard Mr. Weston preach "with no alloy to

22. Ibid., vol.1, p.237.
such felicity except the secret reproaches of my conscience which would too often whisper that I was deceiving my own self, and mocking God with the service of a heart more bent upon the creature than the Creator," we immediately recall that this exact thought (loving the creature more than the creator) was used twice by Charlotte. Again, however, we must in fairness to Anne, remember that it was she who wrote it first.

Similarly, just as Lucy Snowe treasures every minute thing about the man she loves, so does Agnes Grey, in thinking of Mr. Weston, recall "every intonation of his deep, clear voice, every flash of his quick, brown eye, and every gleam of his pleasant but too transient smile."

The sadness, chiefly caused by loneliness and dearth of love, that fills Jane Eyre, Shirley, and Villette, as well as many of Charlotte's poems, is, with Anne, confined primarily to her poetry. We do, nevertheless, find a touch of it here and there in Agnes Grey; as, for example, when the heroine says:

"I have lived nearly three-and-twenty years, and I have suffered much and tasted little pleasure yet; is it likely my life all through will be so clouded? Is it not possible that God may hear my prayers, disperse these gloomy shadows, and grant me some beams of heaven's

25. Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey, p.188.
sunshine yet? Will he entirely deny to me those blessings which are so freely given to others, who neither ask them nor acknowledge them when received? May I not still hope and trust? 26

But in the poems the painfulness, for a woman, of a life without love is stressed again and again. A poem called Dreams is typical of many others:

While on my lonely couch I lie,
I seldom feel myself alone,
For fancy fills my dreaming eye
With scenes and pleasures of its own.

Then I may cherish at my breast
An infant's form beloved and fair,
May smile and sooth it into rest
With all a Mother's fondest care.

How sweet to feel its helpless form
Depending thus on me alone!
And while I hold it safe and warm
What bliss to think it is my own!

And glances then may meet my eyes
That daylight never showed to me;
What raptures in my bosom rise
Those earnest looks of love to see,

To feel my hand so kindly pressed,
To know myself beloved at last,
To think my heart has found a rest
My life of solitude is past!

But then to wake and find it flown,
The dream of happiness destroyed,
To find myself unloved, alone,
What tongue can speak the dreary void?

Poor unhappy Anne! After all, this author who was more daring than Thackeray or Dickens was only a little mid-Victorian girl who wanted desperately and hopelessly to be loved. True to her times, she believed that for a woman a happy marriage was all that made life worth living.

In other ways, too, Anne, like her oldest sister, was Victorian. Her ideas of the household duties of a woman were strictly orthodox. When Gilbert Markham went to the vicarage to call on Eliza Millward, he "found her, as usual, busy with some piece of soft embroidery (the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced) while her sister was seated at the chimney corner with the cat on her knee, mending a heap
of stockings." 27

But Gilbert's mother, upon visiting Mrs. Graham (Helen Huntingdon), did not find so satisfactory a domestic picture, as she made clear to Gilbert on her return home.

"She betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it."

"On what points, mother?" asked I.

"On household matters, and all the little niceties of cookery, and such things, that every lady ought to be familiar with, whether she be required to make a practical use of her knowledge or not." 28

We might possibly include under domestic duties, the duty that Anne believed a wife owed to a degraded, utterly bestial husband. In the first place she shared his disgrace; in the second place, as a Christian wife, she lost no opportunity to try to inspire and reform him, however unwelcome or impossible her attempts. Helen Huntingdon does just these two things.

Since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel for his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own; I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself. 29
She does more than this, however. She exhorts him very frequently, as, for example:

"You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hope, and conscience and reason, and every other requisite to a Christian character if you choose to employ them: but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad strengthens by exercise: therefore, if you choose to use the bad, or those which tend to evil, till they become your masters, and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame. But you have talents, Arthur, natural endowments both of heart and mind and temper, such as many a better Christian would be glad to possess, if you would only employ them in God's service..." 30

Arthur, sad to relate, does not benefit by any of Helen's exhortations. Consequently, like a good Victorian novelist, Anne brings him to a bad end. To the same bad end does she bring the dissolute Grimsby, and also, which interests us more, Lady Lowborough, Huntingdon's mistress.

Lady Lowborough...went dashing on for a season, but years came and money went: she sank, at length, in difficulty and debt, disgrace and misery, and died, at last, as I have heard, in penury, neglect and utter wretchedness. 31

How antiquated does this pointing of a moral sound today! How stilted, the long wifely exhortations! In short, how typically Victorian is a large part of Anne's writing.

Just as Charlotte does not equal Anne in open defiance and disregard for certain traditions, neither does she equal her in exaggeratedly Victorian qualities. Anne's work moves from one extreme to the other. Perhaps it is because, after all, she had less of a story to tell, and thus the interest of her writing almost never takes either author or reader away from a consciousness of its style and its conformity or non-conformity to the standards of the era.
Emily Bronte's strange novel, *Wuthering Heights*, contains but five woman characters. One of these, the servant, Zillah, who is mentioned only once or twice, with practically no characterization, is negligible. Of the other four, Nelly Dean and Isabella Linton are distinctly minor, although they are interesting to us in certain respects. It is the two Cathys who compel the major portion of our interest and attention.

To say that these two heroines are without parallel in Victorian literature is, indeed, the truth. But it is much less than the whole truth. The older Cathy, especially, like the book of which she is a part, is without parallel in the whole panorama of English literature. In spirit and action she is, as a nineteenth century critic aptly remarked, strangely like "some flaxen haired daughter of the cavemen,"
the belle of her aboriginal tribe."  

The elder Cathy is lawless, not because she wilfully disregards laws of conventions, but because she seems totally unaware of their existence. She is dominated by a savagely passionate love which she takes for granted and expects others to take for granted. When Emily said of herself "I am as God made me," and intimated that she "had no concern how God made anyone else," she might have been speaking of her heroine, Catherine Earnshaw, for she created her as the very personification of this spirit.

Unlike the plain little heroines of Charlotte and Anne, Emily's two Cathys are as lovely in appearance as they are lawless in action. Nellie Dean's description of the elder Cathy as a child leaves us with a distinct impression of these two qualities:

Certainly she had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; and she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day: from the hour she came downstairs till the hour she went to bed, we had not a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at high water mark, her tongue always going--singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip she was; but she had the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and lightest foot in the parish; and after all, I believe she meant you no harm, for when once she made

2. Charles Simpson, Emily Brontë, p.115.
you cry in good earnest, it seldom happened that she would not keep you company, and oblige you to be quiet, that you might comfort her.5

In fact, the beauty and wild charm with which Emily has chosen to endow Catherine Earnshaw throws a certain glamour over scenes in which Cathy's conduct would never stand the test of disinterested reason. For there is no question but that Cathy can be hot tempered, cruel, and deceitful. These qualities are shown nowhere more clearly than in a scene to which the eighteen-year-old girl is entertaining her suitor, Edgar Linton. The housekeeper, Nellie Dean, has been previously instructed by her master, Cathy's older brother, to remain in the room during Edgar's call. Nellie recounts how Cathy gave various hints and finally commands her to leave the room. When the faithful house-keeper refused,

She, supposing Edgar could not see her, snatched the cloth from my hand, and pinched me, with a protracted wrench, very spitefully on the arm...she hurt me extremely, so I started up from my knees, and screamed out--

"Oh, miss, that's a nasty trick! You have no right to nip me..."

"I didn't touch you, you lying creature!" cried she, her fingers tingling to repeat the act, and her ears red with rage...

"What's that then?" I retorted, showing a decided purple witness to refute her.

She stamped her foot, wavered a moment, and then, irresistibly impelled by the naughty spirit within her, slapped me on the cheek a stinging blow that filled

3. Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, p.60.
both eyes with water.

....Little Hareton...commenced crying...which drew her fury on to his unlucky head. She seized his shoulders, and shook him until the poor child waxed livid, and Edgar thoughtlessly laid hold of her hands to deliver him. In an instant one was wrung free, and the astonished young man felt it applied over his own ear in a way that could not be mistaken for jest. 4

Nevertheless, before the evening is over, the infatuated Edgar has obtained Cathy's consent to their marriage.

From this point on, a study of Catherine Earnshaw. is a study of her childish, superficial love for Edgar, whom she marries, as contrasted with that vastly more important love, her dominating, elemental, and blind passion for the waif, Heathcliff.

When asked why she loves Edgar, Cathy answers that it is "because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with...young and cheerful", and because "he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband." When Nelly tells her that her reasons are bad, she adds:

"I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether." 5

Her sincerity is beyond question. Even the fact that

4. Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, p.103-104.
5. Ibid., p.114.
she confesses to Nelly that her main object in marrying Edgar is that it will enable her to aid Heathcliff, does not give the lie to her love for Edgar. She is warm hearted and affectionate; she loves Edgar in exactly the way she has said. She loves him so till the day of her death. But, nevertheless, all her passion, all her soul belongs to Heathcliff. She knows on the evening she promises to marry Edgar that she is wrong:

"You love Edgar, and Edgar loves you. All seems smooth and easy—where is the obstacle?"

"Here! and here!" replied Catherine, striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast: "in whichever place the soul lives—in my soul, and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!"\(^6\)

She relates a dream she once had in which she thought that she was in heaven and says:

"I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; when I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire."\(^7\)

She indignantly denies that marrying Linton will mean

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7. Ibid., p.118.
her separation from Heathcliff.

"Who is to separate us, pray? Not as long as I live, Ellen—for no mortal creature. Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff. Did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power?...My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries;...my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it...I am Heathcliff—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being—so don't talk of our separation again."

'Heathcliff disappears at the time of the marriage of Cathy and Linton. For years nothing is heard from Heathcliff, and for years, Cathy and Linton are seemingly happy. When the wanderer returns, self-educated, powerful, ruthless, however, the three are immediately plunged into tragedy. Heathcliff is obsessed by two ideas. He has come back to take revenge upon those who looked down upon him, and kept him from Cathy, in his youth; and his revenge is to be cruel to the point of fiendishness. He has come back also because he must see Cathy, whom he loves with the same fierce, strange love which she feels for him.

It is Cathy's response to this situation that makes

her stand out from both Victorian and modern heroines. For without any sense of guilt, without any hesitation, she rushes in joy and abandon into Heathcliff's arms in the presence of her husband, whom she accuses of being both unkind and unreasonable when he shows a controlled displeasure. Heathcliff becomes—as indeed he has never ceased to be—the one reality of her life. Yet her affectionate love for Edgar remains the same. She tries, finally, to protect the two from each other, when she realizes their mutual hatred. A bitter and violent scene between Heathcliff and Linton drives Cathy into one of her fits of passion. She locks herself into her room, and becomes nearly mad in an illness from which she never fully recovers.

The lovemaking between Heathcliff and Cathy, while possibly not sensuous in the finest sense of the word, is startling when one considers that Cathy is ill and pregnant with Edgar's child.

In a stride or two (Heathcliff) was at her side, and had her grasped in his arms. He neither spoke nor loosed his hold for some five minutes, during which period he bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before, I dare say... In her eagerness she rose and supported herself on the arm of the chair. At that earnest appeal he turned to her, looking absolutely desperate. His eyes, wide and wet, at last flashed fiercely on her; his breast heaved convulsively. An instant they held asunder, and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked
in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive. 9

Although Catherine is released alive, Nellie Dean's fears are not entirely unfounded, as Catherine dies within twenty-four hours, at the premature birth of her child.

The most striking thing about Catherine Earnshaw's passion for Heathcliff is that it contains little of sensuality. Whether or not Heathcliff's love is of the flesh does not immediately concern us in this study, but it may be observed in passing that at all times in the novel, the reader is given the impression that Catherine and Heathcliff regard each other in exactly the same way. However, such violent physical expression is given to their love, and so overpowering is their emotion that Maeterlinck says of the girl who created Wuthering Heights:

We feel that one must have lived for thirty years under chains of burning kisses to learn what she has learned; to dare to so confidently set forth, with such minuteness, such unerring certainty, the delirium of those two lovers of Wuthering Heights; to mark the self-conflicting movements of the tenderness that would make suffer, and the cruelty that would make glad, the felicity that prayed for death, and the despair that clung to life, the repulsion that demanded, the desire shrunk with repulsion—love surcharged with hatred, hatred staggering beneath its load of love. 10

May Sinclair quotes Maeterlinck's words, and adds:

True: but the passion that consumes Catherine and Heathcliff, that burns their bodies and destroys them is nine tenths passion of the soul. It taught them nothing of the sad secrets of the body. Thus Catherine's treachery to Heathcliff is an unconscious treachery. It is her innocence that makes it possible. She goes to Edgar Linton's arms with blind eyes, in utter childlike ignorance, not knowing what she does till it is done and she is punished for it. She is punished for the sin of sins, the burning of the body from the soul. All her life after she sees her sin. She has taken her body, torn it apart and given it to Edgar Linton, and Heathcliff has her soul.

Abbé Dimnet in his Les Soeurs Brontë, discusses the quality of Catherine's love for Heathcliff:

L'idée de l'amour est aussi pure, aussi dépouillée, pour Emily, que l'idée et le mot de mariage le sont pour les enfants. Certains détails feraient même croire à des ignorances de parfaite innocence. L'amour, tel qu'elle le conçoit et le peint, est trop inquiet pour qu'on puisse la mettre dans quelque sphère céleste où les âmes vivraient de la vie des hommes, mais il irait parfaitement à un monde de génies incorporels et fougueux. C'est une attraction souveraine où la matière n'a point de part, mais dont les âmes sont les jouets sans résistance.

In 1887, a critic, writing in the Atlantic, said:

The burning question at the core of poor Emily Brontë's volcanic essay is, whether or no a love like that of Catherine Earnshaw, fierce, organic, self-consuming, may be a fire of purification as well as of torment, and win the subject of it forgiveness in

the end for her neglect of natural humanities and her scorn of written law.\textsuperscript{13}

Tragic and tempestuous, lovely and lawless, Catherine Earnshaw stands, a vivid figure, apart from all the heroines of her age.

Although Catherine Earnshaw's daughter, Catherine Linton, who is usually referred to as the younger Cathy, resembles her mother in certain ways, she has a distinct and engaging personality of her own.

Nelly Dean thus describes her at the age of twelve:

She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house—a real beauty in face, with the Earnshaws' handsome dark eyes, but the Linton's fair skin, and small features, and yellow curling hair. Her spirit was high and not rough, and qualified by a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother; still, she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice and pensive expression. Her anger was never furious; her love never fierce, it was deep and tender.\textsuperscript{14}

It is only after Cathy has been trapped into the marriage with her dying cousin Linton, and imprisoned, a child-widow, at Wuthering Heights to bear the abuse of the malevolent Heathcliff and the churlishness of Joseph and Hareton, that she exhibits temper and stubbornness. W.D. Howells was referring

\textsuperscript{13} Atlantic Monthly, vol. 60, p. 705.
\textsuperscript{14} Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, p. 280.
to the Cathy goaded on by circumstances when he wrote:

It might be thought that Catherine(Earnshaw) Linton was sufficiently involved in her ungoverned impulses, but her daughter Catherine is of still more labyrinthine lawlessness. She has her father's violent temper, as well as his complexion; her malice, if qualities can be assigned a tint, is peculiarly blond, while her mother's fury was brunette....She effectively lives Heathcliff's prisoner till he dies, but she never yields in spirit to him....It is an exposition of woman's nature unparalleled in some traits. She has been delicately bred...but she seems not to feel the insult of Heathcliff's blows so much as to dread the mere pain; and you cannot help believing these are the facts of the case. You know it to be also true that he never relents to her out of tenderness for her mother's memory; and that in the mere wantonness of her power she is quite capable of lacerating the proud, ignorant soul of the only man who could have protected her against his ferocity.15

But when Heathcliff dies, the natural sweetness of the young Cathy's disposition reasserts itself. Ashamed of the scorn which she has heaped on the ignorant but admirable Hareton, she wins his confidence, encourages his ambition, and finally is glad to accept his love. The last picture we have of her is both conventional and charming.

Isabella Linton is lightly sketched. We know that she is beautiful. We know that she lives with her brother, Edgar, and his wife, Catherine. Beyond that we are scarcely aware of her until she falls in love with Heathcliff. Because Heathcliff either ignores her or treats her with scorn, with Victorian

promptness she becomes thin, weak, and also extremely irritable. This irritability is very annoying to the household, but they "excused her to a certain extent on account of ill health--she was dwindling and fading before our eyes." 16

When Heathcliff is informed by Catherine of Isabella's surprising and misplaced sentiments, he forms the idea that to marry Isabella, whom he despises, will be one more step in his revenge on the Lintons. Cathy, who is really fond of Isabella, warns her that Heathcliff is "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man." 17 For Cathy's love does not prevent her from an accurate estimate of Heathcliff's character. Isabella does not believe Catherine, and persists in throwing herself in Heathcliff's way until he finally elopes with her.

She is indeed both silly and headstrong. Much less deep than Catherine's passion for Heathcliff, her infatuation contains, according to May Sinclair, more of the sensual. Miss Sinclair states that Isabella's feeling for Heathcliff is the only physical thing in *Wuthering Heights*. However, she does not consider it passion, but characterizes it as impure sentiment. Only a sentimentalist could make a hero out of the blackguard Heathcliff, or could be so self-deceived as to believe in his love. 18

17. Ibid., p.151.
It took less than twenty-four hours after her elopement for Isabella to awake from her dream. Instead of the tears and the collapse one would have expected, the independence which characterizes all of the Brontë heroines asserts itself. She stands up to Heathcliff, and she is brave enough to keep suffering from her brother. On the occasion when the faithful Ellen Dean visits her and Heathcliff, and the latter has spoken with particular malice and deceit, Isabella says:

"Take care, Ellen...Don't put faith in a single word he speaks. He's a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being! I've been told I might leave him before; and I've made the attempt, but I dare not repeat it! Only, Ellen, promise you'll not mention a syllable of his infamous conversation to my brother or Catherine. Whatever he may pretend, he wishes to provoke Edgar to desperation: he says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him; and he shan't obtain it--I'll die first! I just hope, I pray, that he may forget his diabolical prudence and kill me! The single pleasure I can imagine is to die or to see him dead!" 19

Later, Isabella escapes to some obscure town outside London, where her son is born, and where she brings him up, in ignorance of his father, until her death.

A critic in the Living Age once wrote, "Isabella Linton is one of the silliest and most credulous girls that fancy ever painted." 20 Many years later another critic wrote

in the same magazine, "Isabella Linton... shows glimpses of a noble dignity when face to face with the dreadful life she has to lead at Wuthering Heights." If we put the two together we have a sketchy but accurate description of Isabella's development from girlhood to womanhood.

The fourth woman character is Nelly Dean, who relates most of the story. In a quick reading of the novel one hardly notices her, for she never speaks of herself except as the witness to the various scenes and incidents which she relates. A more careful reading, however, does make us conscious that she is a very lovable woman. In the capacity of house-keeper and nurse, she has known from childhood each of the main characters of the story. She has been uniformly kind to them, and has loved them impartially, with the possible exception of Heathcliff. Even to him, as a child, she was motherly and protective. Dotted through the book one finds many lines which give evidence of the sweetness and complete unselfishness of Nelly Dean's character. She "made a sad parting" from little Hareton when she left Wuthering Heights to go to Thrushcross Grange.

And so I had but one choice left, to do as I was ordered...I kissed Hareton, said goodbye; and since then he has been a stranger, and it's very queer to think it, but I've no doubt he has completely forgotten all about Ellen Dean, and that he was ever more than all in the world to her, and she to him.

21. Living Age, vol.199, p.84.
She "learned to be less touchy, not to grieve a kind master." She even braves Heathcliff's anger in an effort to help Isabella.

"My young lady is looking sadly the worse for her change of condition," I remarked. "Somebody's love comes short in her case, obviously: whose, I may guess:..."

"I should guess it was her own," said Heathcliff. "She degenerates into a mere slut."

"Well, sir," returned I, "I hope you'll consider that Mrs. Heathcliff is accustomed to be looked after and waited on;...you must let her have a maid to keep things tidy about her, and you must treat her kindly."

Nelly Dean, in addition to being devoted, kindly, and fearless, is of an independent and somewhat philosophical mind. Although pious, her views are not those of the orthodox Victorian Christian. Life has softened her creed. We find this expressed in her reflections as she looks at the corpse of the elder Cathy:

I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me, but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death...I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter--the Eternity they have entered--where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton's, when he so regretted Catherine's blessed release. To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt

24. Ibid., p.223.
in season of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitant. 25

Nelly Dean is indeed much more than a background.

This sketch of the characteristics of the women of _Wuthering Heights_, brief as it has been, serves to show us that Emily's heroines contain even less of the Victorian than do those of her sisters. It would be impossible to find a strictly Victorian trait in either Catherine Earnshaw or Catherine Linton. In Isabella, there is, indeed a certain sentimentality and a lovesickness which do recall the period, but the fearlessness and independence of the latter part of her life are so un-Victorian that we can by no means class her as a typical heroine of the period. With Nelly Dean, much the same thing is true. Victorian readers would doubtless approve of her fidelity and unselfishness, but with what distaste would they view her tolerance for the lawlessness of her young charges, and with what horror, her unorthodox opinions of life after death?

It is no wonder that early reviewers frequently scourged Emily's novel in terms no less sweeping than those in which they condemned her sisters' works.

In 1849, the _North British Review_ said:

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25. Emily Brontë, _op.cit._, pp. 245-246.
With Wuthering Heights we found it totally impossible to get along. It commences by introducing the reader to a perfect pandemonium of low and brutal creatures, who wrangle with each other in language too disgusting for the eye or the ear to tolerate, and unredeemed, so far as we could see, by one single particle either of wit or humor or even psychological truth....How it terminates we know not, for the society which we encountered on our first introduction was so little to our taste that we took the liberty of declining the honour of a farther acquaintance. 26

We find in the Living Age for 1851:

The two Catherines, mother and daughter, are equally exaggerations, more than questionable in some parts of their procedure, and absurdly unnatural in the leading incidents of their lives. 27

The Galaxy, in 1877, was similarly scathing:

Its characters are detestable, but drawn with such boldness that we are appalled at the nerve of the writer who could conceive such a group of beings... And the girl who projected them against the background of that inhuman story was diseased in feeling and in judgment unsound. 28

Emily's writing was indeed out of harmony with her times. In this, she was like Charlotte and Anne. There are other ways, too, in which Emily's writing resembles that of her sisters, although she is not nearly so much like either of them as they are like each other. Nevertheless, there is

a certain quality which we may call the "Brontë touch" which runs through the family. W. F. Lord was so much impressed by this similarity that he went so far as to say:

If we take up any one work of the Brontës, it would be hard for a practised critic to say who wrote it. In each case is a microscopic accuracy of detail...the same laudable determination to see the soul of the character through all untoward circumstances...the same gallant disregard for convention.29

It seems to me, on the contrary, that a "practised" critic should be able to distinguish Charlotte's self-consciousness, Anne's weakness, and Emily's powerful aloofness. However, in so far as the women characters created by all three sisters are distinctly at variance with the usual heroines of the age, they resemble one another.

Independence of thought and action, mental and physical bravery appear in practically every Brontë heroine. Perhaps the most outstanding similarity, as well as the most outstanding Brontë trait, is the emphasis on and analysis of woman's love. Rosamond Langbridge, in comparing the sisters, says:

There was only one kind of love for the Brontë sisters: the love that gave all, if it got nothing in return; sacramental love, strong as death, tenacious of its ground as Life itself; fierce, individual and unwavering love, the love that Emily describes in her poem Remembrance, and in Wuthering Heights, that

Charlotte painted in all her novels... The Brontes knew only one way to love: with every fibre of their soul's loyalty.  

Although, as we have pointed out, it is Anne's work that especially closely parallels Charlotte's, yet, because of the greater fame of the two older sisters, a comparison of Charlotte and Emily is of more interest to us. Aside from the common Bronte touches already noted, there is an unusually striking similarity in the characters of Jane Eyre and Catherine Earnshaw. J. Walham Dembleby, in the Key to the Bronte Works, points out this similarity, page by page, using parallel columns to drive home his point. Two examples will suffice to show that Jane and Cathy are indeed akin:

Cathy

"It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now, so he shall never know how I love him; and that not because he's handsome... but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."

Jane

"I feel akin to him... I have something in my brain and heart that assimilates me mentally to him... I know I must conceal my sentiments... Yet while I live and think I must love him."

Cathy

Catherine dreams she is in heaven, but breaks her heart to come to earth again, upon which the angels fling her out near Heathcliff's abode, where she wakes sobbing for joy. Catherine preferred her lover to Heaven.

Jane

Jane finds refuge with the Rivers family. She is tempted to enter upon a religious life. "Angels beckoned, and Heaven rolled together like a scroll," but she hears Rochester's voice, though he is miles away. Jane preferred her lover to Heaven.  

30. Rosamond Langbridge, Charlotte Bronte, p. 79.
31. J. Walham Dembleby, Key to the Bronte Works, chapter 11.
Dembleby's conclusion, however, is exaggerated. He argues that these and many other parallel passages prove *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* to be the works of one author, Charlotte. To come to such a conclusion, he either willfully or blindly disregards all the context and all the atmosphere that lies behind the fragments he has plucked.

The likenesses between these two characters are interesting and unmistakable. Just as unmistakable, on the other hand, are the differences between the two books, and the two authors. Charlotte's heroines are unconventional, but not lawless; self pitying, not stoical; passionate with an intensely feminine passion, not with a passion so strange and so devouring that it seems above sex. Charlotte's women are in revolt against many Victorian traditions and customs. They are pioneers in the cause for the liberation of women. On the other hand, although a chasm separates Emily's Cathys from all other Victorian heroines, they are not in revolt. The era and its viewpoint do not exist for them. They are themselves, and they are, like Emily, timeless.

Furthermore Dembleby, in drawing his unjustifiable conclusion, omits one more important consideration. He does not take into account the complete harmony between Emily's poems and her novel. When Emily writes, in the *Desert Moor* is *Dark*,
Oh! could I see thy lids weighed
down in cheerless woe;
Too full to hide their tears, too stern
to overflow;
Oh! could I know thy soul with equal
grief was torn,
This fate might be endured--this anguish
might be borne,

*she* She is expressing a sentiment that Charlotte never expressed, and exactly the same sentiment that Catherine Earnshaw gives voice to when she says to Heathcliff:

"I wish I could hold you... till we both were dead! I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do! Will you forget me? Will you be happy when I am in the earth?"

Similarly we have something of the younger Cathy, and of Isabella Linton, as well as what seems to be, as far as it is in anyone's power to judge, the very essence of Emily's own personality in the following stanzas:

Strong I stand, though I have borne
Anger, hate, and bitter scorn;
Strong I stand, and laugh to see
How mankind have fought with me.

Shade of history, I condemn
All the puny ways of men;
Free my heart, my spirit free,
Beckon, and I'll follow thee.

To the Bronte student there can be no mistaking of the intense individuality of Emily and her heroines. But our interest in the women she created takes second place to our interest in the woman Emily Brontë was. It was not of the Cathys but of Emily herself that Maeterlinck wrote his beautiful tribute:

Not a single event paused as it passed her threshold; yet did every event she could claim take place in her heart, with incomparable force and beauty, with matchless precision and detail. We say that nothing ever happened, but did not all things really happen to her much more directly and tangibly than with most of us, seeing that everything that took place about her, everything that she saw or heard was transformed within her into thoughts and feelings, into indulgent love, admiration, adoration of life......?

Of her happiness none can doubt. Not in the soul of the best of all those whose happiness has lasted longest, been the most active, diversified, perfect, could more imperishable harvest be found than in the
soul Emily Brontë lays bare. If to her there came nothing at all that passes in love, sorrow, passion, or anguish, still did she possess all that abides when emotion has faded away. 33

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