

T H E U N I V E R S I T Y O F H U L L

CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND THE USES OF CREATIVE  
WRITING: A STUDY IN FUNCTION AND FORM

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## SUMMARY

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by

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on

Charlotte Brontë and the Uses of Creative Writing:

A Study in Function and Form

This study examines the functions of Brontë's "scribblemania" at each stage of her intellectual and emotional development, as well as the narrative forms, many originating in the exceptional visual qualities of her imagination, which she employed to shape her thoughts into fictional correlatives.

Young Brontë, while indifferent to contemporary fiction, aspired to become a painter, and looked upon her prose writings as a diary. Between 1829 and 1833, she recorded her visions of the realm of artists and poets in which she hoped one day to participate. In 1834 and early 1835, while the career in painting was becoming progressively elusive, she was baffled in her attempts to share in her imaginary Athens, but drew comfort from watching it through her narrator's eyes. During the Roe Head crisis, while at home for the holidays, she withdrew to the margin of Angria in order to allow her exhausted imagination to recover. Having failed in the later novelettes to devise a means of overcoming the burdensome reserve which shielded her imagination against an indifferent outer world, she resolved to leave Angria, but only for a while. Her half-hearted attempt to write a novel at the age of twenty-four was inspired by the hope of earning some money.

In The Professor, another financial venture, she charted the struggles of an imaginative person who, like herself, was determined to win a stake in life. She returned to this theme in Jane Eyre. While writing Volume One of Shirley, she perceived a role for herself as a social reformer. The project collapsed after Emily's death. In Villette, she affirmed her faith in her memory and imagination.

Three appendices discuss It is all up!, the dating of But it is not in Society (April 1839), and the dating of Brontë's letter to Hartley Coleridge (December 1841).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following table lists abbreviations for the principal texts referred to in this study. Publication details can be found in the concluding bibliography.

Alexander	Christine Alexander, <u>The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë</u>
BPM	Brontë Parsonage Museum
<u>BST</u>	<u>Brontë Society Transactions</u> , 1895-1988. References are keyed to the number of the volume (in Roman numerals) and the number of the part (in Arabic numerals), followed by the date and the page number.
Gaskell	Elizabeth Gaskell, <u>The Life of Charlotte Brontë</u>
Gérin	Winifred Gérin, <u>Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius</u>
<u>Heritage</u>	Miriam Allott, ed., <u>The Brontës: The Critical Heritage</u>
<u>Novelettes</u>	Winifred Gérin, ed., <u>Five Novelettes</u>
<u>Poems</u>	Victor A. Neufeldt, ed., <u>The Poems of Charlotte Brontë</u>
Ratchford	Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, <u>The Brontës' Web of Childhood</u>

Writings

Christine Alexander, ed., An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, vol. one (1826-1832)

WSC

Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington, eds., The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, 4 vols.

WSW

Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington, eds., The Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings of Charlotte and Patrick Branwell Brontë, 2 vols.

## TEXTUAL NOTE

All references to Charlotte Brontë's four novels are to the Clarendon Edition and will appear in parentheses within the text.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1787, at the age of twelve, Jane Austen was not only an avid and discriminating reader of novels, but had also already written several promising stories herself. Three years later she wrote Love and Friendship, her first novel. In 1797, at the age of twenty-one, she offered First Impressions, eventually renamed Pride and Prejudice, to a London publisher. Charles Dickens, another voracious reader of novels, wrote "certain tragedies . . . at the mature age of eight or ten."<sup>1</sup> Before long he was writing sketches of his uncle's barber and other acquaintances. At the age of thirteen, while he was at Wellington House Academy, he "used to write short tales on scraps of paper, pin them together so as to form books with a few leaves, and lend them to the other boys to read for the small charge of a piece of slate-pencil, etc."<sup>2</sup> In December 1833, at the age of twenty-one, he published his first story, "A Dinner at Poplar Walk." Charlotte Brontë, too, although no great reader of novels, was subject to "scribbling mania" or "scribblemania\*" from an early age.<sup>3</sup> Ever since Elizabeth

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to the Cheap Edition of Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> John Bowden, a fellow-pupil, quoted in Frederic G. Kitton, Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil, Including Anecdotes and Reminiscences Collected from His Friends and Contemporaries (London: Frank T. Sabin, 1890), p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> "'What is the matter with Lord Charles [Wellesley, Brontë's alter ego]? . . . -- have his good genius & has his scribbling mania forsaken him both at once?'" Partly unpublished manuscript, The Green Dwarf, A Tale Of The Perfect Tense (10 July-2 September 1833), Humanities Research Centre,



Gaskell revealed the existence of the Angrian manuscripts, therefore, it has been assumed that Brontë, like Austen and Dickens, was destined to become a novelist and indeed cherished this ambition throughout her formative years. Brontë, however, did not make her first, half-hearted attempt to write a novel until late 1840, when she was twenty-four. Her first novel, The Professor, was not begun until late 1845, when she was twenty-nine. Charlotte Brontë, in fact, never planned to become a novelist.

This study is not an exercise in bio-criticism, although nearly every chapter opens with an attempt to define Brontë's state of mind at a particular period in her life by means of her letters and other non-fictional evidence. Its first aim is to trace the process by which she eventually became a professional novelist. Its second aim is to describe the specific function which her "scribbling mania" fulfilled at each stage of her intellectual and emotional development. Its third aim is to describe the formal means -- such as characterization, plot, setting, and visual structures -- which she employed to create imaginative worlds in which she could work out her conception of the real world and her role in it.

The first half of this study deals with Brontë's juvenilia, written between 1828 and 1840. It examines the motives behind her compulsive writing and their effect on the contents and form of her early prose writings. In the first chapter it is argued that Brontë, while comparatively indifferent to contemporary fiction, had a passionate interest in more established arts and aspired to become a painter or poet. Her narratives of this period functioned as a private

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University of Texas at Austin (Stark Collection), leaf one. There is a facsimile of this leaf in Alexander, p. 98. "Wiggins [i.e., Branwell,] might indeed talk of scribblemania\* if he were to see me just now." Unpublished manuscript, "I'm just going to write because I cannot help it" (c. October 1836), BPM: B98(6). In quotations from unpublished manuscripts, mistakes in grammar and spelling have been left as written, attention being drawn to them by means of asterisks.

diary. The second and third chapters discuss the early juvenilia, which are a record of her initial hopes of an artistic career and of her efforts to come to terms with her disappointment when her great expectations proved illusive. Following an analysis of the Roe Head crisis, the fifth and sixth chapters are devoted to her attempts in the later juvenilia to re-define the role of her imagination in her relations with the real world; her ultimate decision to abandon Angria for a while; and her reasons for trying to write a novel in 1840.

The second half of this study deals with Brontë's four novels. In The Professor, discussed in the seventh chapter, she set out to dramatize her determination to adjust herself to life in a world dominated by trade and industry, but soon realized that her protagonist, a sensitive and imaginative person like herself, could not be expected to pursue this goal at the expense of his inner life. Crimsworth's efforts to establish a careful balance between his feelings, imagination, and determination to win a stake in the real world are successful. However, feeling that she had failed to translate these efforts into a satisfactory creative experience, Brontë explored both the problem and the answer once more in Jane Eyre. The origin and function of her principal narrative strategy in Jane Eyre, her visual approach, are outlined in chapter eight. In the next two chapters the four stages of Jane's progress are examined in some detail. The eleventh chapter discusses Brontë's interpretation of her role as a professional novelist and the effects on Shirley when Emily's death, and then Anne's death, diverted her from her original objective -- to write a novel promoting social reconciliation. Finally, the analysis of Villette in the twelfth chapter demonstrates that, faced with a life of solitude, Brontë tried to prove, both to herself and her readers, that in her God-given faculties of memory and imagination she possessed an inexhaustible source of consolation and inner strength.

## Chapter One

### THE DIARY OF A PAINTER AND POET

In July 1856 Elizabeth Gaskell was about half-way through her biography of Charlotte Brontë, when she visited Haworth Parsonage once more. To her astonishment she was entrusted with "a curious packet" containing "an immense amount of manuscript, in an inconceivably small space; tales, dramas, poems, romances, principally written by Charlotte, in a hand which it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass."<sup>1</sup> After a cursory inspection, she concluded that these early writings were "the wildest & most incoherent things . . . . They give one the idea of creative power carried to the verge of insanity."<sup>2</sup> Harassed by Smith, Elder, her publishers, who were becoming increasingly impatient with her protracted research, she rewrote some forty pages of her draft. Focusing on the very earliest, least illegible manuscripts, she briefly illustrated young Brontë's profound interest in politics and the pictorial arts, as well as the "wild weird" character of her "purely imaginative writing."<sup>3</sup> When Brontë "gives way to her powers of creation," she told her readers, "her fancy and her language alike run riot, sometimes to the very borders of apparent delirium."<sup>4</sup> She did not try to explain how Charlotte's apparently extravagant imagination could be reconciled with "the strong common sense natural to

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<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, pp. 111-112.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell to George Smith (25 July 1856), in J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, eds., The Letters of Mrs Gaskell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> Gaskell, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

her, and daily called into exercise by the requirements of her practical life."<sup>5</sup>

In October 1861 Arthur Bell Nicholls took his wife's manuscripts with him to Banagher, Ireland, where they lay at the bottom of "a dark cupboard," with the mailing wrapper, in which Gaskell had returned them, unbroken, until 31 March 1895, when Clement Shorter bought them on behalf of Thomas James Wise.<sup>6</sup> By this time interest in the Brontës had revived, even if it was rather pedestrian in nature: Reginald Smith, for example, "a long faced old lantern jawed man" who edited the Cornhill Magazine, kept Charlotte Brontë's "socks in a glass case in his drawing room."<sup>7</sup> Wise, a keen commercial brain, sold many of the manuscripts, often abroad, as literary curiosities, cutting up the longer ones into marketable quantities and occasionally forging Charlotte's signature to stories and poems by Branwell. The remaining manuscripts, all early ones, he published privately between 1896 and 1920 in red, green, and blue morocco bindings to boost his own reputation as a literary connoisseur. The stories which he printed were ruthlessly edited. Thus transformed into insipid tales of love and the supernatural, they merely confirmed the contemporary view that

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<sup>5</sup> Gaskell, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> Clement K. Shorter, "The Text of Emily Brontë," Times Literary Supplement (3 April 1924), 208. Shorter, recalling the event after thirty years, probably exaggerated, for Fannie Ratchford was told, possibly by Shorter (1857-1926) himself, that the manuscripts had been kept in Nicholls' desk ("Charlotte Brontë's Angrian Cycle of Stories," PMLA, 43, no. 1 [1928], 494). Alexander, quoting a letter from Nicholls to Shorter, suggests that the manuscripts were found carelessly tied up in a newspaper (Alexander, p. 4). Shorter, however, explicitly states that he received "a brown paper parcel" during his visit ("Text," 208). Indeed, Nicholls' letter refers to a second parcel, containing letters from Charlotte's mother to her father, which he later mailed to Shorter (C.K. Shorter, ed., The Brontës: Life and Letters [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908], pp. 19-20). Shorter's exaggeration and Alexander's confusion are minor examples of the unintentional but persistent tendency to romanticizing in Brontë scholarship.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Nicolson, ed., The Letters of Virginia Woolf, vol. 5 (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 96.

the author of Jane Eyre and sister of the author of Wuthering Heights must have been an arch-romantic as a young girl.

The publication in 1931 of George MacLean's scholarly edition of The Spell (1834) prepared the way for a serious assessment of the early writings.<sup>8</sup> This was followed in 1933 by Fannie Ratchford and William Clyde DeVane's Legends of Angria<sup>9</sup>, and in 1936 and 1938 by the two volumes of Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington's The Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings of Charlotte and Patrick Branwell Brontë.<sup>10</sup> Despite the inaccurate transcriptions and the comparatively small number of extant manuscripts included, most of them written before 1837, these two compilations remained the principal printed sources of information available to scholars for nearly forty years.

In 1941 Ratchford published a comprehensive study of the Brontës' early writings, The Brontës' Web of Childhood<sup>11</sup>, which was still the "best available conspectus" over thirty years later.<sup>12</sup> Ratchford, however, had a strong sense of genre, still firmly rooted in the late nineteenth-century literary critical tradition, which drew a sharp distinction between the romance -- "a story dealing more with adventure and with the tragic passions than with analytic character-drawing and observation of manners" -- and the novel.<sup>13</sup> Single-mindedly

<sup>8</sup> George Edwin MacLean, ed., The Spell: An Extravaganza (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931).

<sup>9</sup> Fannie E. Ratchford and William C. DeVane, eds., Legends of Angria: Compiled from the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington, eds., The Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings of Charlotte and Patrick Branwell Brontë, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936 and 1938).

<sup>11</sup> Fannie E. Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

<sup>12</sup> F.B. Pinion, A Brontë Companion: Literary Assessment, Background, and Reference (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> George Saintsbury, The Academy (1881); quoted in Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel: 1865-1900 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 64.

determined to make Brontë's juvenilia fit her narrow conception of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century romance fiction, therefore, she presented them as a coherent, extended romance, revolving round a hero, Zamorna, and a cluster of heroines. Convinced, moreover, that Brontë became all but addicted to her secret world of romance, she asserted that despite Brontë's profound feelings of guilt about her fantasies, she never managed to shake off the hold exerted by the Angrian characters over her imagination. While toning down her earlier claim that after the juvenilia Brontë "created practically nothing," but merely "re-shaped" the world of Angria in terms of her adult experiences, she nevertheless concluded her study by pointing out countless parallels between the juvenilia and novels.<sup>14</sup>

In 1954, in her seminal work on novels of the eighteen-forties, Kathleen Tillotson subscribed to Ratchford's interpretation of Brontë's juvenilia as a "vast cycle of romances," which formed "the dark hinterland of the novels."<sup>15</sup> She argued, however, that Brontë did not merely suffer pangs of conscience about Angria, but came to see that such a self-contained realm of romance "was dangerous to the claims both of art and life; a Frankenstein monster. [I]t was to be conquered, not fled from."<sup>16</sup> The struggle, begun in the late eighteen-thirties, was successful. The "backward drag of Angria" in The Professor, Tillotson acknowledged, made it "a broken-backed whole," but when "the Angrian plot-material in Jane Eyre is recognized, its subordination is seen to be a triumph of structure and emphasis."<sup>17</sup>

Tillotson's view was developed in 1967 by Winifred

<sup>14</sup> Ratchford, "Charlotte Brontë's Angrian Cycle of Stories," 499.

<sup>15</sup> Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954; rpt. 1985), p. 270.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 288, 286.

Gérin, who endeavoured to trace Brontë's progress from romance to realism in some detail in her Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius.<sup>18</sup> While applying Ratchford's concept of romance to the earlier juvenilia, Gérin argued that by 1838 Brontë was increasingly forcing herself to concentrate on English settings, psychological analysis and moral evaluation of her characters, and "critical and artistic composition" generally.<sup>19</sup> To account for such a change, she concluded that the religious depression from which Brontë suffered between 1836 and 1838 must have been caused by her conviction, derived from her Calvinist aunt, that fantasies are sinful and lead to culpable dereliction of duty. By embedding her cast of Angrian characters, and her idol, Zamorna, in particular, in a more realistically conceived moral and physical environment, she succeeded in pacifying her conscience. In addition, Gérin discerned a "newfound self-criticism" and sense of artistic direction in the later juvenilia, which resulted in such "almost faultless" novelettes as Mina Laury.<sup>20</sup> By the time Brontë began writing The Professor, she had overcome her predilection for romance.

Despite Barbara Hardy's caution that "there is more depth in one footnote by Kathleen Tillotson,"<sup>21</sup> Gérin's analysis of the origin and evolution of Brontë's juvenilia was widely praised. Hardy's reservation proved well-founded, for when Gérin's Five Novelettes appeared in 1971, the manuscripts she included hardly bore out her renewed suggestion that they marked the transition from "a drug-like dream" to "artistic independence."<sup>22</sup> The initial response of such critics as Tom Winnifrith was to minimize the significance of any further

<sup>18</sup> Winifred Gérin, Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967; rpt. 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 118, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Hardy, Review of Gérin's Charlotte Brontë, in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23 (September 1968), 242.

<sup>22</sup> Winifred Gérin, ed., Five Novelettes (London: Folio Press, 1971), p. 18.

study of the early writings: "closer study will reveal not fresh clues to the Brontës but instead a fresh trail of red herrings."<sup>23</sup> When the dust settled and more manuscripts were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, interest revived and two schools of thought emerged. Some scholars, like William Holtz, argued that although the juvenilia are "low grade ore," much could be said for "Ratchford's earlier suggestion of a complex genesis, an enriching persistence of the adolescent into the mature."<sup>24</sup> Others continued to give qualified support to Gérin's theory of a decisive evolution towards realism. Thus Meg Harris Williams perceives "a constant preoccupation with the idea of literary form" in the early writings, particularly in the "series of relatively sophisticated 'novelettes.'"<sup>25</sup>

The most valuable contribution to the study of the juvenilia in recent years is Christine Alexander's The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë.<sup>26</sup> While following Ratchford in presenting the Angrian writings as a coherent saga, Alexander adheres to the basic conclusions of Gérin's thesis, although with some caution. Conceding that the juvenilia are often "naive and crude," she evades a discussion of her reasons for presupposing that Brontë had an early passion for romance, which she only overcame after a prolonged struggle.<sup>27</sup> Instead, she concludes her inventory of the Angrian writings with a

<sup>23</sup> Tom Winnifrith, The Brontës (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> William Holtz, Review of Christine Alexander's The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 39 (March 1985), 472-473. See also Margaret Blom, "Apprenticeship in 'the World Below': Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia," English Studies in Canada, 1 (Autumn 1975), 290-303.

<sup>25</sup> Meg Harris Williams, "Book Magic: Aesthetic Conflicts in Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia," Nineteenth-Century Literature, 42 (June 1987), 29, 40. See also Merryn Williams, Women in the English Novel 1800-1900 (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 89-91. Frances Beer, ed., The Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 19-30.

<sup>26</sup> Christine Alexander, The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 6.



somewhat summary examination of such uncontentious issues as the visual qualities of Brontë's early imagination. As a result, her work lacks a firm critical framework in which the reader can place the new information, fascinating though it is, which she supplies.

The disagreement among scholars over the proper critical criteria by which to study and evaluate Brontë's early writings can be traced to an understandable misinterpretation of the motives behind her compulsive writing during the 1830s. Describing the origin of The Professor in late 1849, Brontë wrote: "A first attempt it certainly was not as the pen which wrote it had been previously worn down a good deal in a practice of some years."<sup>28</sup> Yet this does not necessarily imply that, like The Professor, the juvenilia were consciously conceived as literary efforts.<sup>29</sup> Describing the origin of the Bells' Poems in September 1850, Brontë did admit that she and her sisters "had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors."<sup>30</sup> The context, however, indicates that she was speaking of poetry only, not novels. There is, in fact, strong evidence to suggest that throughout the 1830s Charlotte shared Branwell's aspiration to become a professional painter or poet, and regarded her writing of prose as a strictly private occupation.

During the sixteen months Brontë spent at Miss Wooler's boarding-school at Roe Head -- from January 1831 to May 1832 -- her fellow-pupils were intrigued by the

<sup>28</sup> "Preface," The Professor, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Brontë's next remark in the "Preface" does suggest a heightened critical awareness: "in many a crude effort destroyed almost as soon as composed I had got over any such taste as I might once have had for the ornamented and redundant in composition" (p. 3). It is generally agreed, however, that she is referring here to manuscripts written after 1840, since nearly all the earlier ones have been preserved.

<sup>30</sup> "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell"; in Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack, eds., Wuthering Heights (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 436.

extraordinary eagerness with which, as Mary Taylor recalled, she "picked up every scrap of information concerning painting, sculpture, poetry, music, &c., as if it were gold."<sup>31</sup> Also she

used to draw much better, and more quickly, than anything we had seen before, and knew much about celebrated pictures and painters. Whenever an opportunity offered of examining a picture or cut of any kind, she went over it piecemeal, with her eyes close to the paper, looking so long that we used to ask her 'what she saw in it.' She could always see plenty, and explained it very well. She made poetry and drawing, at least exceedingly interesting to me . . . .<sup>32</sup>

Brontë had evidently been studying the theory and practice of the art of painting for a considerable time before she came to Roe Head. Indeed, as early as 1829 she compiled a "list of painters whose works I wish to see":

Guido Reni, Julio Romano, Titian, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Coreggio, Annibal Carracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Bartolomeo, Carlo Cignani, Vandyke, Rubens, Bartolomeo Ramerghi.<sup>33</sup>

By 1830 she was writing minute criticisms of paintings and engravings.<sup>34</sup>

During the twelve months after her return from Roe Head, Brontë wrote only three poems, a fragment of prose interspersed with poetry, and one story, which was written because she was "weary of study."<sup>35</sup> By study she meant her drawing lessons and the homework these required. An art teacher had visited the Parsonage regularly as early as 1829, but in 1832 or 1833 a superior drawing master, William Robinson, was engaged at two guineas a lesson.<sup>36</sup> It has been assumed that

<sup>31</sup> Taylor to Gaskell (18 January 1856), in Gaskell, p. 576.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-131.

<sup>33</sup> Gaskell, pp. 117-118. The manuscript is dated 1829. Only the second leaf has been preserved (BPM: B80[13]).

<sup>34</sup> See Writings, pp. 281-283.

<sup>35</sup> The Bridal (14 July-20 August 1832), Writings, p. 338.

<sup>36</sup> Ellis H. Chadwick, In the Footsteps of the Brontës (London: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1914), p. 102

Robinson was engaged principally to teach Branwell. Bearing in mind, however, Charlotte's strongly held belief that women "need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do," and that "it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags," it <sup>suggests that</sup> was probably she as much as her younger brother, who persuaded their father to engage Robinson.<sup>37</sup>

Despite her evident passion for drawing and painting, sixteen-year-old Charlotte's artistic intentions are frequently confused with those of twenty-three-year old Lucy Snowe:

I sat bent over my desk, drawing -- that is, copying an elaborate line engraving, tediously working up my copy to the finish of the original, for that was my practical notion of art; and, strange to say, I took extreme pleasure in the labour, and could even produce curiously finical Chinese fac-similes of steel or mezzotint plates -- things about as valuable as so many achievements in worsted-work, but I thought pretty well of them in those days.<sup>38</sup>

Brontë, too, according to Gaskell, "copied nimini-pimini copper-plate engravings out of annuals . . . , every little point put in, till at the end of six months she had produced an exquisitely faithful copy of the engraving."<sup>39</sup> By concentrating on such copying, however, Brontë did not reduce the art of drawing to a mere mechanical skill or a pastime, for, as Susan Foister has pointed out,

such copying was a standard method of instruction in drawing: even the seven year old John Everett Millais was set by his drawing-master in 1836 to copying engravings after precisely those sixteenth and seventeenth century old masters whose work Charlotte had wanted to see seven years earlier.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Jane Eyre, p. 133.

<sup>38</sup> Villette, p. 577.

<sup>39</sup> Gaskell, p. 507.

<sup>40</sup> Susan R. Foister, "The Brontë Portraits," BST, XVIII, 95 (1985), 341.

The seriousness of Brontë's artistic ambitions, therefore, cannot be in doubt. Indeed, the parallel with young Millais goes further. Gaskell was twice told by Brontë herself that at the age of "sixteen or seventeen, she wanted much to draw" and "had the notion of making her living as an artist."<sup>41</sup> This is confirmed by Francis Leyland, a close friend of Branwell's, who was told that "Charlotte even thought of art as a profession for herself; and so strong was this intention, that she could scarcely be convinced that it was not her true vocation."<sup>42</sup> It is also confirmed by Ellen Nussey's report that during the summer of 1833 Brontë spent up to nine hours a day painting.<sup>43</sup>

Gaskell mistakenly assumes that Brontë had to abandon her ambition to become a professional artist because her close application to her drawing studies spoilt her "eyesight, which

<sup>41</sup> Gaskell, pp. 507, 154. Brontë mentioned her youthful ambition to Gaskell during their first meeting in August 1850. According to Gaskell's letter of 25 August 1850, she was told that it was upon her return from Brussels that Brontë "tried to teach herself drawing and to be an artist" (WSC, III, p. 144). In 1844, however, Brontë suffered from severe eye-trouble. She had, in fact, referred to her return from another boarding-school, Roe Head. Gaskell got the date right in a letter written just after her visit to Haworth in September 1853, when Brontë once more told her of her painting ambitions (WSC, IV, p. 87).

<sup>42</sup> Francis A. Leyland, The Brontë Family: With Special Reference to Patrick Branwell Brontë (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1886), 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 126-127.

<sup>43</sup> Nussey's report, made in an unpublished manuscript, which I have not seen, is summarized by Tom Winnifrith as follows:

At about this time, she says, and she is presumably talking of 1838, the year of the Bolton Abbey expedition, Charlotte was very busy painting, spending nine hours with scarcely an interval at her work. Anne and Emily were also busy with their pencils, but chiefly as a recreation or to teach others should the need arise.

Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith, Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 129-130. Winnifrith's dating, 1838, is probably a misprint, because the Bolton Abbey expedition took place during Nussey's first visit to Haworth in July 1833, as she later told Wemyss Reid (T. Wemyss Reid, Charlotte Brontë: A Monograph [London: Macmillan, 1877], pp. 29-33).

prevented her doing anything for two years, from the age of seventeen to nineteen."<sup>44</sup> Leyland's suggestion that Brontë reluctantly accepted that she did not have sufficient talent may be nearer the truth. However, Brontë's remark in Jane Eyre that "brothers" are not the only ones who need "a field for their efforts" suggests another reason. In the course of 1833, the decision was taken to send Branwell to London to study at the Royal Academy. Since this was going to stretch the family income to its limits, it was inevitable that Charlotte, being the eldest child, should have to find employment soon.

Charlotte may have rebelled when her high hopes were so cruelly dashed. Before long, however, she diverted her artistic ambitions to her other passion, poetry, which could more easily be pursued in combination with a job. From the middle of 1833, therefore, her output of poetry steadily increased, culminating in the long poem she submitted to Robert Southey in December 1836. Despite Southey's discouraging reply, she continued to write with undiminished vigour. After 1838, her spirits flagged. Upon her return from Brussels, however, she not only edited a collection of her poems and transcribed

<sup>44</sup> Gaskell, p. 507. Gaskell's explanation is accepted by all later biographers. If this were true, however, Brontë would hardly have been painting nine hours a day during the summer of 1833, as Nussey reported. Moreover, a considerable number of drawings and paintings have been preserved which she made in 1833 and 1834, such as a portrait of Anne Brontë (17 April 1833; BST, XVIII, 91 [1981], opposite title-page); a watercolour representing a castle (6 July 1833; Alexander, p. 99); a watercolour portrait (14 August 1833; Alexander, p. 109); "Harbour Scene" (17 December 1833; BST, VII, 41 [1931], p. 306); a copy of William Finden's "Geneva" (23 August 1834; Alexander, p. 126); "English Lady" (15 October 1834; Alexander, p. 82); "The Cross of Rivaulx" (23 December 1834; Alexander, p. 235). Also, there are some thirty extant prose manuscripts written between 1833 and early 1835, whose dates of composition suggest that Brontë was writing almost continuously throughout this period. Presumably, therefore, she had been telling Gaskell about 1844 and early 1845, when she is known to have suffered from severe eye-trouble. Thus she wrote to Constantin Heger on 24 July 1844: "my sight is too weak to write. -- Were I to write much I should become blind. This weakness of sight is a terrible hindrance to me" (WSC, II, p. 13).

them in a copy-book<sup>45</sup>, but also sent a translation of "some French verses" to a magazine, which published them.<sup>46</sup> In the autumn of 1845, she ventured upon the ambitious undertaking of publishing the Bells' Poems. She even persuaded her sisters to publish them at their own expense.

Whereas there is a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that Brontë aspired to become a painter or poet, there is little to suggest that at any time before 1841 she contemplated a career as a writer of fiction. The majority of the earliest manuscripts are indeed handsewn booklets, complete with title-page, bibliographical details, and printed script in imitation of typography. Most of these, however, are editions of her poems<sup>47</sup> and issues of the Young Men's Magazine, in which, as in their model, Blackwood's Magazine, poetry and articles on art and (Angrian) history predominate. The other booklets describe episodes in the lives of Angrian characters, that is, people who, in Brontë's eyes, lived in a secret world coexistent and contemporary with her own. As such, they are not fiction, but a species of journalism.<sup>48</sup> In the course of 1834,

<sup>45</sup> Poems (c. 1844-1845), Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection MA 2692.

<sup>46</sup> Brontë refers to this translation, published anonymously, in her letter of 15 December 1847 to W.S. Williams (WSC, II, p. 163). Although this is her first published work, it is not mentioned in any of the bibliographies or biographies, or in the introductions to the collected editions of her poems.

<sup>47</sup> For example: The Evening Walk/ A Poem By the Marquis of Douro in Pindaric Metre (28 June 1830), BPM: 11; Miscellaneous Poems (31 May 1830), Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection MA 2538; The Violet/ A Poem/ With Several Smaller Peices\*/ By The Marquis of Douro (14 November 1830), Princeton University Library: Robert H. Taylor Collection. Brontë spent as much time and effort on framing her drawings and paintings. The frames were acquired from Mr. Wood, the village carpenter, in exchange for specimens of her work. See Chadwick, Footsteps, p. 102.

<sup>48</sup> Branwell, the driving force behind the booklets, wrote four letters to Blackwood's between 1835 and 1837 to offer his services as a writer of articles (WSC, I, pp. 133-135, 150-

Brontë became progressively indifferent to the form of her manuscripts. By 1836 she no longer bothered with titles, page numbering, chapter divisions, or punctuation, nor did she make fair copies or attempt to write legibly.

Also, though Brontë is known to have been a voracious reader, there is hardly any mention of novels in her letters and writings before 1847. An inventory of books she read before 1840 would include a vast number of miscellaneous works on travel, geography, natural history, and history, and especially biographies. Among her favourites in 1834 were:

Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Southey's Life of Nelson, Lockhart's Life of Burns, Moore's Life of Sheridan, Moore's Life of Byron, Wolfe's Remains.<sup>49</sup>

It would also include the Bible; works by Audubon and Gilpin, which she used for her art studies; drama from Shakespeare to Sheridan; and an enormous amount of poetry.<sup>50</sup>

An inventory of the fiction Brontë read before 1840 would begin with the often-quoted confession in her letter to Hartley Coleridge of an early taste for the Ladies' Magazine. After citing such tales as Count Albert or The Haunted Castle and Evelina or The --- of the Lake, she wrote in the draft of her letter:

151). As he told William Wordsworth, he wished to contribute "[s]ensible and scientific prose," not fiction (WSC, I, p. 152). The opening of Charlotte's letter to Hartley Coleridge, written in December 1841, suggests that she may once have shared Branwell's ambition: "I was almost as much pleased to get your letter as if it had been one from Professor Wilson containing a passport of admission to Blackwood" (Melodie Monahan, ed., Ashworth: An Unfinished Novel by Charlotte Brontë, Studies in Philology, 80 [Fall 1983], p. 128. Monahan prints genetic and clear texts of the draft letter [pp. 123-127] and a clear text of the fair copy [pp. 128-130]).

<sup>49</sup> Brontë to Ellen Nussey (4 July 1834), WSC, I, p. 122.

<sup>50</sup> For a brief survey of Brontë's early reading, see Alexander, pp. 13-16. An index of literary allusions in her novels can be found in The Professor, pp. 330-335. There is no comprehensive survey or study of her early reading.

I recollect when I was a child getting hold of some antiquated odd volumes and reading them by stealth with the most exquisite pleasure . . . My aunt . . . thinks the tales of the Ladies' Magazine infinitely superior to any trash of modern literature. So do I, for I read them in childhood, and childhood has a very strong faculty of admiration but a very weak one of criticism.<sup>51</sup>

Brontë's suggestion that she shared the literary tastes of an elderly aunt who had never sympathized with her niece's imaginative nature does not ring true. Indeed, the satirical self-depreciation which characterizes both the draft and fair copy of her letter confirms that she was writing tongue-in-cheek. The fair copy, moreover, continues: "it is long, very long since I perused the antiquated print in which those tales were given forth -- I read them before I knew how to criticize an object."<sup>52</sup> Since the earliest juvenilia show that she already had clearly defined views on art and poetry at the age of thirteen, she probably read these romantic tales "as a treat on holiday afternoons" in 1826 or 1827.<sup>53</sup> Soon afterwards she had outgrown any such taste for romance, as she told W.S. Williams: "The standard heroes and heroines of novels are personages in whom I could never from childhood upwards take an interest, believe natural, or wish to imitate."<sup>54</sup>

Brontë is further known to have read the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, "some mad Methodist Magazines,"<sup>55</sup> and "a few old English Classics"<sup>56</sup>: Pilgrim's Progress, Gulliver's Travels, Rasselas, The Vicar of Wakefield, Anne Radcliffe's

<sup>51</sup> Monahan, Ashworth, p. 126. Monahan's clear text, quoted here, reads "ladies' magazine."

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 129. Monahan's text reads "criticize or object." In this instance I have followed Fran Carlock Stephens' transcription of this letter in "Hartley Coleridge and the Brontës," Times Literary Supplement, 14 May 1970, p. 544.

<sup>53</sup> Monahan, Ashworth, p. 129.

<sup>54</sup> Brontë to W.S. Williams (September 1848), WSC, II, p. 255.

<sup>55</sup> Shirley, p. 440.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



The Italian, an abridgement of Henry Brooke's The Fool of Quality, and some of Samuel Richardson's novels. Among contemporary novelists she is only known to have read Bulwer Lytton and Walter Scott: "For fiction -- read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless."<sup>57</sup> In 1839 and 1840, she read a considerable number of French novels, but only because they gave "one a thorough idea of France and Paris -- and are the best substitute for French Conversation I have met with."<sup>58</sup> Apart from a memorandum about Nicholas Nickleby, neither Dickens nor Thackeray is mentioned.<sup>59</sup> Jane Austen's works she had not read by 1848.

Since Brontë had no access to a circulating library, it is assumed that she borrowed novels from the Keighley Mechanics' Institute.<sup>60</sup> Yet this does not explain her almost complete silence on the subject of novels, novelists, and the art of fiction throughout the 1830s and early 1840s. Her early writings, which are teeming with references to poetry, painting, architecture, the theatre, and the opera, are conspicuously bare of even the faintest allusion to novels.<sup>61</sup> Among her large cast of characters, there is only one novelist, Captain Tree, a lowbrow and low-bred manufacturer of romances, who is

<sup>57</sup> Brontë to Nussey (4 July 1834), WSC, I, p. 122. The context of this letter, in which Brontë is advising Nussey what to read in order to improve herself, suggests that she did not mean to praise Scott so much as to recommend Nussey not to spend too much time on novels.

<sup>58</sup> Brontë to Nussey (20 August 1840), WSC, I, p. 215.

<sup>59</sup> On the reverse of her manuscript "I have now written a great many books" (c. April 1839, BPM: B125), Brontë made the following note: "Boy-Destroyer/ Mr Squeers/ Dotheboys-Hall Greta Bridge/ Yorkshire/ Favoured by Chas Dickens Esqre."

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, like Gérin and other biographers, assumes that "Mr Brontë joined the Keighley Mechanics' Institute as soon as it was founded in 1825 so that his children might borrow books from the library" (Alexander, p. 20). In fact, he only joined sometime during the year ending 8 April 1833 (Ian Dewhirst, "The Rev. Patrick Brontë and the Keighley Mechanics' Institute," BST, XIV, 75 [1965], 35).

<sup>61</sup> The only exception is The Green Dwarf (1833), which contains elements of Scott's Ivanhoe and Kenilworth. As Alexander points out, however, this is not a romance but a parody or "mock-romance" (Alexander, p. 97).

duly ignored by the poets and artists who rule Verdopolis. Brontë's narrator, Charles Wellesley, is not a novelist, but a kind of society journalist and roving reporter.

Young Brontë, therefore, was inclined to regard the novel as mere entertainment. This bias can in part be traced to her father's influence. Mr Brontë, who himself was the author of several instructive tales, in which he endeavoured to "allure to well-doing" by "a species of innocent guile," had a deep-rooted aversion to other forms of popular fiction, because he felt that they tended to corrupt the mind.<sup>62</sup> As the heroine's father in The Maid of Killarney says:

The generality of Novels are what you Englishmen say of us Irishmen, when you liken us to our own bogs -- green, smooth, and tempting, on the surface, but concealing underneath, the miry slough, or deadly pool; . . . they are so many poisonous boluses, sufficiently incrustated with honey to make them palatable, but in no degree adequate to counteract their pernicious effects on the constitution. Our libraries want to pass through such another fiery ordeal as the library of the renowned Don Quixote did, when it was scrutinized by the Priest and Barber. But I must say of my girl, that she subsists on no such food. She reads nothing of the kind alluded to, but what first passes through my hands, and meets my approbation. And there are a few Novels which I have handed over for her perusal, which are not only harmless, but very entertaining and instructive.<sup>63</sup>

Mr Brontë himself kept a similar careful eye on what his daughters were reading, as his treatment of the volumes of the Ladies' Magazine shows: "One black day my father burnt them because they contained foolish love-stories."<sup>64</sup>

The principal reason for Brontë's indifference to novels, however, was that contemporary fiction must have appeared a barren field to this votary of the Muses. Growing

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Brontë, "Preface" to The Maid of Killarney; or, Albion and Flora: a Modern Tale; in which are interwoven some cursory remarks on Religion and Politics (1818); rpt. J. Horsfall Turner, ed., Brontëana: the Rev. Patrick Brontë, A.B., His Collected Works and Life (Bradford: privately printed, 1898), p. 133.

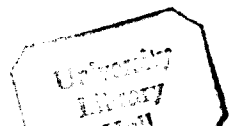
<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>64</sup> Monahan, Ashworth, p. 129.

up in an age of silver-fork romances, Newgate novels, and "harmless, but very entertaining and instructive" tales, she cannot be blamed for "undervaluing the labour of the novelist," or be accused of "slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them."<sup>65</sup> With the possible exception of Dickens, there were no novelists in the 1830s who came up to her high standards in art and literature, and thus no-one to open her eyes to her true vocation.

Any attempt to force Brontë's early writings into the traditional framework of romance versus realism is bound to fail because they were not designed as literary compositions. In writing her Angrian narratives, she was neither trying to imitate the works of novelists whom she admired, nor training herself for the novelist's craft, nor pursuing the artistic excellence which one day would bring her literary fame. Writing prose fiction was a strictly private occupation. Her juvenilia are the diary-like writings of a girl passionately aspiring to become an artist or poet and to enjoy the company of other artists and poets. Only in those terms can they be considered her apprenticeship as a novelist.

<sup>65</sup> Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey; in John Davie, ed., Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sandition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 22.



## Chapter Two

### THE ATHENIANS (1826-1831)

Between June 1826 and early 1829, the Brontë children engaged in three oral plays, comparable to avant-garde radio plays in which each actor improvises his role and contributes to the story-line. The earliest one was the "Young Men's Play," which was based on the epic struggle between Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington, and the subsequent efforts of twelve soldiers to establish a colony in Africa. Next followed "Our Fellows' Play," based on Aesop's fables, in which the children pretended that they each had an island inhabited by giants. The last play, the "Islanders' Play," involved adventures on a fairy-tale island. In addition, there were Charlotte and Emily's "bed plays," about which little is known since they were "secret plays."<sup>1</sup>

On 12 March 1829, having already tried her hand at a sixteen-page illustrated biography of her sister Anne<sup>2</sup>, Charlotte took stock of her creative experiences during the past three years.<sup>3</sup> Her object was quite specific: to record for each play the moment when the imaginations of Branwell, Emily, Anne, and herself made them leap out of domestic reality into a far more exciting sphere of existence. In the case of the "Islanders' Play" she found the experience so curious that she wrote a second, more dramatic account three months later:

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<sup>1</sup> The History of the Year (12 March 1829), Writings, p. 5. Alexander has regularized Brontë's spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

<sup>2</sup> "There was once a little girl and her name was Anne" (c. 1826-1827), Writings, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> The History of the Year, Writings, pp. 4-6.

The play of the Islanders was formed in December 1827, in the following manner. One night, about the time when the cold sleet and dreary fogs of November are succeeded by the snow storms and high, piercing, night winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm, blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candle having been produced. A long pause succeeded which was at last broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, 'I don't know what to do.' This was re-echoed by Emily and Anne.

Tabby: Wha ya may go t'bed.

Branwell: I'd rather do anything [than] that.

and Charlotte: You're so glum tonight, Tabby. [?Well] suppose we had each an island.

Branwell: If we had, I would choose the Island of Man.

Charlotte: And I would choose [the] Isle of Wight.

Emily: The Isle of Arran for me.

Anne: And mine should be Guernsey.

Charlotte: The Duke of Wellington should be my chief man.

Branwell: Herries should be mine.

Emily: Walter Scott should be mine.

Anne: I should have Bentinck.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the crudeness of the idea, thirteen-year-old Charlotte was amazed that by means of her imagination she could adopt the personality of an illustrious public figure and participate in exciting events. In the "Young Men's Play" she had not merely played but actually been Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. In "Our Fellows' Play" she had been "Hay Man," and in the "Islanders' Play" she had been the "Duke of Wellington and son, North and Co." and "Mr Abernethy."<sup>5</sup>

Yet there is also a note of nostalgia in Brontë's evocations of the domestic scenes out of which arose the plays. The identification with her heroes had depended heavily on the imaginative atmosphere she and the others created between them, in which each child fully acknowledged that the others actually were the superior beings they pretended to be in their shared realm of make-believe. When she recreated the Young Men's world on paper, therefore, she tried to compensate for

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<sup>4</sup> First Volume of the Tales of the Islanders (30 June 1829), Writings, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> The History of the Year, Writings, p. 6.

the loss of such immediate confirmation of her assumed identity by casting herself as a "Genius," protecting and guiding rather than identifying with her heroes.<sup>6</sup> Thus the illusion of immediate participation in a superior reality at least was maintained. Such a peripheral role, however, did not satisfy her, and when she recorded the adventures of the Islanders in her next narrative, she cast herself and the other three children as "Little King and Queens," who mingle with their heroes and supervise the Duke of Wellington, the Governor of their "Vision Island."<sup>7</sup>

By the time Brontë recorded the origins and plots of the plays, she had already grown weary of their contents. In The Twelve Adventurers, therefore, she attempted to draw the narrative focus away from the exotic landscapes and continual battles which the domineering Branwell had introduced into the "Young Men's Play," to a more English setting and the adventurers' efforts to build a city rich in palaces and public buildings, the Glass Town. In Tales of the Islanders, after recording the plot of the original play in the first volume, she turned to the contemporary crisis in British politics and other topical issues, and in brief episodes featuring the Duke of Wellington and his sons tried her hand, as Alexander suggests, at "political allegory."<sup>8</sup> Being a little queen, however, neither satisfied her craving for a more distinct role within her own imaginary world, nor offered her sufficient scope to express her emerging interest in poetry and art. Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine, established by Branwell in January 1829, answered both these needs. In July 1829, having already contributed several poems and a story, she rebelled against the dullness of Branwell's many historical articles.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Twelve Adventurers (15 April 1829), Writings, pp. 7-18.

<sup>7</sup> First Volume of Tales of the Islanders, Writings, pp. 25, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> "lines written by one who was tired of dullness upon the same occasion" (27 November 1829), Poems, pp. 17-19. Neufeldt prints the genetic text.

On 1 August she took over the editorship of the magazine, which ran until December 1830.

Brontë's interests as editor and principal contributor were wide-ranging. Discussions of the architectural beauties of stately homes and the principles of the picturesque in natural scenery as well as reports of the conversations held by artists and poets found a place in her magazine. So did political discussions and stories dealing with supernatural phenomena, supposedly based on personal experiences. Also, she included series of comic advertisements, some of them pointedly ironic. Among the advertized books, for example, are:

A Treatise on the Nature of Clouds, by Captain Snuff.  
 A Book of Utility, by Monsieur Heregos, price 3 half-pence.  
 . . .  
How to Curl One's Hair, by Monsieur Whats-the-reason.  
 A Treatise on Perfumery, by Captain Coxcomb, price 1s.  
The Magician. A Wild Romance. by Captain Tree, price £1 1 shilling.<sup>10</sup>

And:

The Elements of LYING BY LORD CHARLES WELLESLEY in one vol., duodecimo/ Price 2s 6d/ With some account of those who practice it.  
Sogast, a Romance. By CAPTAIN TREE/ in 2 volumes, oct. price 20d.<sup>11</sup>

As the inclusion of Tree's works in these lists suggests, Brontë scorned romances.<sup>12</sup>

Pride of place in the magazine was given to painting

<sup>10</sup> Young Men's Magazine (October 1829), Writings, pp. 77-78.

<sup>11</sup> Young Men's Magazine (October 1830), Writings, p. 239.

<sup>12</sup> In Visits in Verreopolis, vol. one (11 December 1830) Brontë refers to "Tree's horrible romance of The Incorporeal Watcher" (Writings, p. 315). Other titles are Alphonso Howard, A Year of Horrors, and The Forgotten Ring (title-page of The Foundling [31 May-27 June 1833], WSW, I, p. 221). Tree's "snivelling tales" remain a butt of ridicule until the end of 1833 (The Green Dwarf [10 July-2 September 1833], Ratchford and DeVane, eds., Legends of Angria, p. 102). Alexander believes that Tree's romances are probably early manuscripts by Brontë, now lost (Writings, p. 78 n. 7, p. 315 n. 16).

and poetry. Brontë wrote advertisements of paintings: "TO BE SOLD/ A Magnificent painting of Britannia, Hibernia and Caledonia personified, under the patronage of THE DUKE of WELLINGTON."<sup>13</sup> She composed poems inspired by works of art, such as "On seeing a Beautiful Statue and a Rich Golden Vase full of Wine, lying beside it in the Desert of Sahara."<sup>14</sup> And she wrote several detailed reviews of engravings and paintings, such as "Review of the painting of the Spirit of Cawdor Ravine/ By Dundee, a private in the 20th"<sup>15</sup>, and "Review of 'The Chief Genii in Council,' by Edward De Lisle."<sup>16</sup> That Brontë cherished ambitions which transcended the amateur's interest in skill and execution can be inferred from The Swiss Artist. This two-part narrative describes how one day a wealthy *maecenas* happened to seek shelter in a hut in a remote Alpine village (read: Haworth). Noticing a series of drawings "which hung upon the walls of the hut, he expressed his admiration in warm terms and eagerly requested to be informed who was the artist who had produced such excellent specimens of painting with the rough materials he must necessarily have had."<sup>17</sup> Being told that the possessor of this "remarkable genius for the sublime art of painting"<sup>18</sup> was nine-year-old Alexandre, he took him along to Paris to study in the Louvre, and later to "the Palace of the Medici in Fiesole, etc."<sup>19</sup> With his patron's

<sup>13</sup> Young Men's Magazine (December 1829), Writings, pp. 97, 98 (facsimile).

<sup>14</sup> Young Men's Magazine (October 1829), Writings, pp. 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> Young Men's Magazine (September 1829), Writings, pp. 64-65.

<sup>16</sup> Young Men's Magazine (December 1829), Writings, pp. 113-115. Several other reviews were not included in the magazine, such as "Campbell Castle," "The Will," and "The Minstrel Boy" (30 September 1830), Writings, pp. 281-283. Their contents and style confirm that Brontë made a thorough study of art reviews.

<sup>17</sup> The Swiss Artist (20 November 1829), Young Men's Magazine (December 1829), Writings, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> The Swiss Artist Continued (10 December 1829), Young Men's Magazine (December 1829, second issue), Writings, p. 117.



help Alexandre became "a wealthy and far-famed artist."<sup>20</sup>

Apart from occasional poetry, the magazine contains transcriptions of what Brontë probably considered her most successful shorter poems to date. Printed under the pseudonym of Arthur Wellesley, Marquis of Douro, the Duke of Wellington's elder son, most of these poems are melancholy meditations upon the mutability of human life. Also, they are ultra-orthodox in form, as these lines from Douro's "Morning" illustrate:

Lo! The light of morning is flowing  
Through radiant portals of gold,  
Which Aurora, in crimson robes glowing,  
For the horses of fire doth unfold.

See Apollo's burnished car  
Glorifies the East afar;  
As it draws the horizon nigher,  
As it climbs the heavens higher . . .

Now, while the woodland choir are singing,  
Opening buds fresh odours flinging;  
And while nature's tuneful voice  
Calls on all things to rejoice.  
I cannot join the common gladness:  
'Tis to me a time of sadness:  
All these sounds of mirth impart,  
Nought but sadness to my heart.<sup>21</sup>

In such poems Brontë is trying to express what Gaskell diagnosed as her "constitutional . . . hopelessness," but finds herself cramped by her conventional conception of metre, rhyme,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 117. Brontë continued to believe in patronage at least until 1843, as one of her *devoirs*, written in Brussels, shows. This "Lettre d'un pauvre Peintre à un grand Seigneur" (17 October 1843) has been transcribed and translated by Sue Lonoff, "On the Struggles of a Poor and Unknown Artist: A *Devoir* by Charlotte Brontë," BST, XVIII, 95 (1985), 373-382. The author of the letter is "George Howard."

<sup>21</sup> Young Men's Magazine (October 1830), Writings, pp. 233-234. In the manuscript (BPM: B85) Brontë writes "choir" in line 9, using it as a plural noun. Alexander changes this to "choirs," but fails to mention her emendation in her textual notes. Also, though the absence of punctuation in the manuscript is confusing, Alexander's punctuation is hardly helpful. The full stop at the end of line 12, for example, is out of place.

and diction.<sup>22</sup> This strict adherence to standard models from earlier periods, which also characterizes all her later poetry, suggests that she was bound to fail as a poet, because it prevented her from conveying her thoughts and emotions in an authentic voice.<sup>23</sup>

While Douro embodies Brontë's creative side, the Duke's younger son, Charles Wellesley, is a vehicle for her interest in supernatural phenomena and the theory of art and poetry. One article, for example, records Wellesley's discussion with De Lisle, the painter, about "the reason why the ancients excelled us in statuary but fell far short in painting."<sup>24</sup> In another article, Wellesley ridicules the excessive reliance on inspiration of Soult, the poet, and De Lisle. When Soult faints as he recalls the "delightful kind of insanity" he recently experienced "tout a la coup in the midst of mountains that clave the whirlwind-swept heaven," Wellesley calls out in mock-concern: "Bring hartshorn, cold water, vinegar, salvolatic, [?salzaikaling] and sal everything else! The poet has fallen into an inspiration dream! Haste, haste, if you mean to save his life!"<sup>25</sup> Wellesley develops his own concept of inspiration in The Poetaster, a play too long to be included in the magazine, by drawing a contrast between Rhymer, a poet starving in his garret, who believes that

<sup>22</sup> Gaskell, p. 143. Douro is also the author of a tragedy in verse entitled "Necropolis, or the City of the Dead" (Albion and Marina [12 October 1830], Writings, p. 292). Fifteen years later, when Crimsworth falls prey to hypochondria, he too has a vision of "Necropolis!" (The Professor, p. 228). Brontë suffered from bouts of hypochondria throughout her life.

<sup>23</sup> Brontë's paintings are equally orthodox in subject and form, suggesting that she would also have failed as a painter. Her view that only the traditional muses were worth courting, made her indifferent to the art of fiction. Ironically, this enabled her to become a major novelist, for had she considered novels in the same light as painting and poetry, she would probably have adhered as rigidly to the standards set by earlier masters of the novel.

<sup>24</sup> Conversations, Young Men's Magazine (December 1830), Writings, p. 266.

<sup>25</sup> Conversations, Young Men's Magazine (October 1830), Writings, pp. 236, 237.

"thoughts should come spontaneously as I write or they're not the inspirations of genius," and Captain Tree, a plodder who has become rich by turning out romances in great numbers with scant regard to quality, who claims that

most people in general are deceived in their ideas of great authors. Every sentence is by them thought the outpourings of a mind overflowing with the sublime and beautiful. Alas, did they but know the trouble it often costs me for me to bring some exquisite passage neatly to a close, to avoid the too frequent repetition of the same word, to polish and round the period and to do many other things. They would soon lower the high standard at which our reputation is fixed.<sup>26</sup>

According to Wellesley, and Brontë, genius and inspiration as well as close study and application are essential to the creation of great art.

The intellectual excitement of editing the magazine did not altogether satisfy Brontë. Although she was "Genius C[harles] W[ellesley]," the editor, and contributed under several other pseudonyms as well, the magazine was only a pale reflection of the dynamic imaginary worlds which had given her such a strong sense of belonging during the three years of oral plays. Her renewed interest in the Young Men's world in early 1830 and her subsequent contribution to the evolution of the world of Angria, therefore, originated in her efforts to recover her former sense of intimate participation in a superior reality. Only this time, this imaginary world had to reflect her interest in politics, poetry, and the arts.

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<sup>26</sup> The Poetaster, A Drama in Two Volumes (3-12 July 1830), Writings, pp. 181, 192. Both Christine Alexander and Melodie Monahan suggest that Tree is speaking for Brontë (Alexander, p. 66; Monahan, "Charlotte Brontë's The Poetaster: Text and Notes," Studies in Romanticism, 20 [Winter 1981], 478). This is to miss the fact that the antithesis between the views of Rhymer and Tree depends on these characters both being objects of ridicule, in this manuscript and others. In the passage quoted here Tree is referring to such works as The Incorporeal Watcher. Shortly after The Poetaster, Tree is caught stealing "a cock and hen" by Wellesley ("Song" [27 August 1830], Writings, p. 250).

Brontë proceeded by elaborating the character of Douro and creating an environment which harmonized with her conception of him as the hero as poet. In December 1829, she wrote this idealized sketch:

In appearance he strongly resembles his noble mother. He has the same tall, slender shape, the same fine and slightly Roman nose . . . His character also resembles the Duchess's, mild and humane but very courageous, grateful for any favour that is done and ready to forgive injuries, kind to others and disinterested in himself. His mind is of the highest order, elegant and cultivated. His genius is lofty and soaring, but he delights to dwell among pensive thoughts and ideas rather than to roam in the bright regions of fancy.<sup>27</sup>

Over the next months, Douro evolves into a peerless hero, whose physical beauty, "equal in the magnificence of its proportions to that of Apollo Belvedere," is a perfect mirror of his "mental faculties, . . . being of the highest order."<sup>28</sup> He is "well-versed in the ancient languages, and deeply read in the Greek and Roman Classics, in addition to the best works in the British, German and Italian tongues."<sup>29</sup> He is "a devoted worshipper of the divine works that the Grecian tragedians have left for all succeeding ages to marvel at, particularly those of Sophocles the Majestic; and his mind was deeply imbued with the spirit of their eagle-like flights into higher regions than that of earth, or even Parnassus."<sup>30</sup> He is "one of the greatest poets of the age."<sup>31</sup> By the end of 1830, moreover, he is not only the patron of De Lisle, Dundee, Le Brun, and other famous painters, but also "MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIANS: PRESIDENT FOR 1830 OF THE LITERARY CLUB: HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF ARTISTS & TREASURER TO THE SOCIETY FOR THE SPREAD OF CLASSICAL KNOWLEDGE: CHIEF\* SECRETARY OF THE

<sup>27</sup> Characters of the Celebrated Men of the Present Time (16 December 1829), Writings, pp. 124-125.

<sup>28</sup> Albion and Marina (12 October 1830), Writings, p. 288.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

CONFEDERATE HUNDRED FOR PROMOTING GYMNASTIC EXERCISES & C & C & C."<sup>32</sup> Here is the perfect modern Athenian.

At the same time Brontë continued to elaborate the picture of the Glass Town which she had drawn in The Twelve Adventurers. While lamenting that "Athens & Sparta are no more,"<sup>33</sup> she created a capital city bearing "the character of a dream or gorgeous fiction,"<sup>34</sup> the proper environment for artists and poets. Before long renamed Verreopolis, its

palaces were of radiant white marble, richly ornamented with massive silver imagery and the architecture was the soul of nobleness, grandeur, magnificence and elegance combined, and all the other dwellings were majestic and beautiful likewise. The public buildings were resplendent with grace, symmetry, majesty and proportion, and an immense bridge which gloriously spanned the [?Dronooke], like streams of a river, was a perfect model of bold, light, simple architecture.<sup>35</sup>

Douro lives just outside Verreopolis in a country house built of "dove-hued Italian marble."<sup>36</sup>

While her imaginary world of Verreopolis was expanding, however, Brontë's commonsense warned her that she would be deluding herself if she straightforwardly identified with Douro, as she had done with his father in the oral plays. By upbringing and education she was not qualified to move in superior circles, nor was the process of identifying with the characters in her imagination as simple as she had hitherto assumed. In A Day at Parry's Palace and Strange Events, both written in August 1830, she expressed her misgivings about the

<sup>32</sup> The Violet/ A Poem/ With Several Smaller Peices\*/ By The Marquis of Douro (14 November 1830), Poems, p. 400. Douro's last function is a reference to the emphasis on physical exercise and skill in ancient Greece. Douro himself has won many "wreaths of myrtle, laurel, etc., etc., . . ." in the great African Biennial Games" (The Bridal [14 July-20 August 1832], Writings, p. 342).

<sup>33</sup> "The Violet" (10 November 1830), Poems, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> Albion and Marina, Writings, p. 290.

<sup>35</sup> The Adventures of Mon Edouard de Crack (22 February 1830), Writings, pp. 138-139.

<sup>36</sup> "About 9 months after my arrival at the Glass Town" (c. late 1830), Writings, p. 335.

possibility of participating intimately in the world of Douro.

In A Day at Parry's Palace, Charles Wellesley describes his visit to Parry and Ross, that is Emily and Anne, who live in a remote part of the country:

All the houses were ranged in formal rows. They contained four rooms, each with a little garden in front. No proud castle or splendid palace towers insultingly over the cottages around. No high-born noble claimed allegiance of his vassals or surveyed his broad lands with hereditary pride. Every inch of ground was enclosed with stone walls. Here and there a few regularly planted rows of trees, generally poplars, appeared; but no hoary woods or nodding groves were suffered to intrude on the scene. Rivers rushed not with foam and thunder through meads and mountains, but glided canal-like along, walled on each side that no sportive child might therein find a watery grave. Nasty factories, with their tall black chimneys breathing thick columns of almost tangible smoke, discoloured not that sky of dull hazy [?colourless] hue. Every woman wore a brown stuff gown with white cap and handkerchief; glossy satin, rich velvet, costly silk or soft muslin broke not in on the fair uniformity.<sup>37</sup>

Alexander suggests that Charlotte is retaliating in this passage against Emily's hypothetical criticism of her "fondness for romance."<sup>38</sup> She is supposed to be pouring scorn on "the unromantic scenery" and general lack of "dream-like vision" in the stories of Emily and Anne.<sup>39</sup> Aristocrats, the inhabitants of castles and palaces, however, were to Charlotte patrons of the arts and the driving force behind the intellectual and cultural life of a town or region. Architecture and landscapes had to be picturesque in order to stimulate the imagination.

<sup>37</sup> A Day at Parry's Palace (22 August 1822), Writings, p. 230.

<sup>38</sup> Christine Alexander, "Angria Revalued: Charlotte Brontë's Efforts to Free Herself from her Juvenilia," AUMLA, 53 (May 1980), 55.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, Early Writings, p. 63. Alexander assumes that there are "nasty factories" in Parry's land, although her own transcription ("discoloured not") contradicts this. The same mistake occurs in Stevie Davies, Emily Brontë: the Artist as a Free Woman (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983), p. 26.

"Nasty factories" were essential to the prosperity of a town. Verreopolis, she well knew, could only be "the gigantic emporium . . . of arts, of god-like wisdom, of boundless learning and of superhuman knowledge" by virtue of the wealth generated by its "thousand self-moving engines"<sup>40</sup> and its "lofty mills and warehouses piled up storey above storey to the very clouds, surmounted by high tower-like chimneys vomiting forth huge columns of thick black smoke."<sup>41</sup> Her aim in describing Parry's land, therefore, is to highlight the absence of all stimulus to the mind and the imagination.

Wellesley next describes Parry's Palace, recognizably Haworth Parsonage, and the effect of their environment on the inhabitants of the palace. The palace proves to be no more than "a square building of stone, surmounted by blue slates," with a "wash-house, back-kitchen, stable and coalhouse," and a paddock with "one cow . . . ; one horse, to draw the gig, carry their Majesties and bring home provisions from market; together with a calf and foal as companions for both."<sup>42</sup> The inhabitants are bumpkins, who speak an unintelligible dialect, have uncouth table manners, and are excessively shy in the presence of the sophisticated visitor from Verreopolis, staring him "idiot-like" full in the face.<sup>43</sup> Their intellectual horizon does not extend beyond a keen relish for "preserved cucumbers."<sup>44</sup> Wellesley, finding his visit "intolerably dull," leaves next morning.<sup>45</sup> A Day at Parry's Palace is not an insensitive satire on Emily and Anne, but a satire on Haworth and a projection of Charlotte's anxiety lest spending her formative years in a remote Yorkshire parsonage is stunting the growth of her intellectual and creative powers, thus making it mere wish-

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<sup>40</sup> The Bridal (20 August 1832), Writings, p. 338. The adjective in "Nasty factories," as in "fair uniformity," is evidently used ironically.

<sup>41</sup> The Adventures of Mon Edouard de Crack, Writings, p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> A Day at Parry's Palace, Writings, p. 230.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

fulfilment to hope to be able one day to claim the company of such superior beings as Douro, or even to identify with them within the bounds of her fictional world.

Seven days later, in Strange Events, Brontë recorded a "reverie," in which Wellesley reflects on the status of imaginary characters.<sup>46</sup> On an "extremely wet and foggy" morning, being in low spirits and having considered the "common remedies -- razor, rope and arsenic," he repairs to the Public Library.<sup>47</sup> There he falls "into the strangest train of thought that ever visited even" his mind:

It seemed as if I was a non-existent shadow, that I neither spoke, eat, imagined or lived of myself, but I was the mere idea of some other creature's brain. The Glass Town seemed so likewise. My father, Arthur and everyone with whom I am acquainted, passed into a state of annihilation; but suddenly I thought again that I and my relatives did exist, and yet not us but our minds and our bodies without ourselves. Then this supposition -- the oddest of any -- followed the former quickly, namely, that WE without US were shadows; also, but at the end of a long vista, as it were, appeared dimly and indistinctly, beings that really lived in a tangible shape, that were called by our names and were US from whom WE had been copied by something . . . . I was roused by a loud noise above my head. I looked up and . . . saw books removing from the top shelves and returning, apparently of their own accord . . . I felt myself raised suddenly to the ceiling, and ere I was aware, behold two immense, sparkling, bright blue globes within a few yards of me. I was in [a] hand wide enough almost to grasp the Tower of All Nations, and when it lowered me to the floor I saw a huge personification of myself . . . . I was now perfectly convinced of my non-existence except in another corporeal frame which dwelt in the real world, for ours, I thought, was nothing but idea. After I had gazed for an unconscionable time at this vision, the door opened and Colonel Crumps entered.<sup>48</sup>

The despondency which induces Wellesley's reflections, his subsequent sense of being threatened in his identity, and his utter helplessness in the hands of a Brobdingnagian author, mirror Brontë's preoccupation with the integrity of her

<sup>46</sup> Strange Events (29 August 1830), Writings, p. 257.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 257-258.



imaginative world. The object of her "reverie," however, is not Wellesley but, through him, Douro. On the one hand, she felt the urge to take complete charge of Douro, to identify with him, and thus satisfy her craving for intimate participation in the exciting world of Verreopolis. On the other hand, her subtle perception of the fragility of her imaginative realm cautioned her that such interference would vitiate her portrayal of Douro as an authentic poet-hero, and by implication reduce the Athenian realm of which he was the embodiment to a mere subjective mindscape.

By the time Brontë wrote A Day at Parry's Palace and Strange Events, she had already compromised between being a central character and being only an onlooker by identifying with Charles Wellesley and, to a lesser extent, Marian Hume. Before early 1830, she had given equal prominence to the high-spirited, outgoing Wellesley and the melancholy, introverted Douro, whose natures reflected the two contrasting sides to her own personality. Wellesley had taken as active a part in Verreopolitan events and had been as important a contributor to the magazine as his elder brother. As Douro's star began to rise in early 1830, however, Wellesley's status as a major character suffered a proportionate decline, despite his resistance. In June 1830, for example, having received confidential information about a midnight burial of books, he speeds to Verreopolis with his exciting news and finds that there is indeed a tremendous uproar there about a theft from the Public Library. Nearly bursting with his knowledge that Captain Tree has perpetrated the outrage, he is about to make a considerable impression on the gathering of notabilities by exposing the criminal, when he is checked:

Tree (reddening): What do you mean, sir?

Me: Many a thing.

I was going on but Arthur restrained me with 'Charles, Charles, hush love.' He then took hold of my hand and hurried me away from the walk.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent

After this anti-climax, Wellesley progressively contents himself with witnessing events and recording them for his readers so that in their eyes at least he is seen to belong to Douro's world.

Marian Hume, who lives with her father in the remote highlands of Scotland, is principally interested in "drawing (for which she had an exact taste), playing on the harp," and "reading the best English, French and Italian works (both which languages she understood) in her father's extensive library."<sup>50</sup> Also, she has fallen in love with Douro because, as she sings, in his

dark orbs lustre lay  
Borne from the worlds of thought  
But brightest shone that wondrous ray  
From holy regions brought

Where spirits of the favoured few  
Alone may ever dwell  
Where clearer than Parnassian dew  
A hundred fountains well

The fountains sweet of poesy,  
That nectar of the sky,  
Where wreaths of immortality  
In hallowed beauty lie.<sup>51</sup>

Douro in his turn falls in love with Marian after seeing "her portrait in the character of Hebe," painted by De Lisle.<sup>52</sup> His love for her, however, is greatly envied by Zenobia Ellrington, a Verreopolitan aristocrat, admired for her formidable knowledge of dead languages, who makes vigorous efforts to replace the "Dull, simple creature" in his affections.<sup>53</sup> The

Persons of the Present Time (18 June 1830), Writings, p. 176. Cf. Judith Chernaik's transcription in "An Unpublished Tale by Charlotte Brontë," Times Literary Supplement, 23 November 1973, p. 1454: "'Many a thing,' I was going on, but Arthur . . . ." Alexander's punctuation is often awkward.

<sup>50</sup> Albion and Marina, Writings, p. 289.

<sup>51</sup> A Fragment (11 July 1831), Writings, pp. 329-330.

<sup>52</sup> Conversations (1 September 1830), Writings, p. 264. See also Douro's "Lines on seeing the portrait of — [Marian Hume] Painted by De Lisle" (10 November 1830), Poems, p. 70.

<sup>53</sup> Visits in Verreopolis, vol. one (7-11 December 1830), Writings, p. 307.

consequent insecurity of Marian's position, which is underlined by Wellesley's scornful observations on Douro's infatuation, reflects Brontë's feeling that she is indulging in wish-fulfilment by allowing a girl of humble origins -- similar to her own -- to become engaged to Douro: "Doth the royal rider of the storm/ Ere look upon the dove?"<sup>54</sup> In October 1830, therefore, Brontë interfered: while Douro is abroad, alive and well, "tidings came to the village that he was dead. The news broke [Marian's] faithful heart and the day after, she was no more."<sup>55</sup> In a note Wellesley confesses that this sad ending was concocted "out of revenge" and was "wholly destitute of any foundation in truth," but Brontë's change of heart did not last long.<sup>56</sup> A few months later, Wellesley espies "the disconsolate maiden" in a glen, lamenting Douro's marriage to "the fair Lady Julia."<sup>57</sup>

Between early 1829 and early 1831, Brontë reshaped the world of the oral plays into an appropriate setting for artists and poets. Yet the creative experience had been marred by her realization that her own background was not compatible with a central role in Verreopolis. Neither could she assert her power as author to bend the laws of verisimilitude, lest she compromise the status of Verreopolis as an objective representation of a nineteenth-century Athens and reduce Douro to a creature of her own fantasy. Only through the peripheral characters of Charles Wellesley and Marian Hume had she established a tenuous foothold in Verreopolis.

On 17 January 1831 Brontë left Haworth for Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head.

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<sup>54</sup> A Fragment, Writings, p. 330. "Ere" is possibly a misprint because, according to Alexander herself, the manuscript reads "e're," which Brontë undoubtedly meant to be "e'er" (Alexander, "Some New Findings in Brontë Bibliography," Notes and Queries, 228 [June 1983], 234).

<sup>55</sup> Albion and Marina, Writings, p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>57</sup> A Fragment, Writings, p. 333.

## Chapter Three

### TWO WIVES AND A BROTHER (1832-1835)

On 16 May 1832 Brontë returned to Haworth and, it is believed, entered upon the "halcyon period" of her early writing.<sup>1</sup> During her school-days at Roe Head or slightly later, so the argument runs, she read Thomas Moore's Life of Byron (1830), which not only lent new vigour to her passion for Byron's poetry, but also intensified her "abiding fascination with the figure of the Byronic hero."<sup>2</sup> This resulted in her conception of Zamorna, a fusion of Douro and the likes of Manfred and Childe Harold, whose character evolved "over the years with the very movement of organic growth," and became a blueprint for her portrait of the ideal husband, Rochester.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is hardly any evidence to support this theory. Lines from Byron's poems can indeed be found in Brontë's juvenilia from June 1829 onward. Yet to suggest, as Gérin does, that his poems are quoted "with glib familiarity"<sup>4</sup> distorts the fact that Brontë quotes primarily from the Bible, "Cowper, Young, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey and Shelley in her juvenilia."<sup>5</sup> It is equally misleading to emphasize that she "had memorized passages of Byron's Cain and Manfred by the time she was thirteen,"<sup>6</sup> for, as a school-friend recalled, Brontë "was acquainted with most of the short pieces

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Beer, ed., The Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Gérin, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Novelettes, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander, p. 260, n. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Beer, p. 8, n. 4.

of poetry that we had to learn by heart; would tell us the authors, the poems they were taken from, and sometimes repeat a page or two, and tell us the plot."<sup>7</sup> It was, in fact, "Scott's sweet, wild, romantic Poetry,"<sup>8</sup> which Brontë loved most, and especially Marmion (1808), which she eulogized in Jane Eyre as "one of those genuine productions . . . of those days -- the golden age of modern literature."<sup>9</sup> As Q.D. Leavis suggests, this preference was only "natural, for the Brontës were the heirs of the first generation of Romantics even more than of Byron."<sup>10</sup>

The case for an early hero-worship of Byron's personality, based on the assumption that Brontë avidly studied the elegies and tributes which appeared in the press upon his death in 1824<sup>11</sup> and devoured Moore's biography, is equally weak. In her letters, his name occurs only once before 1840.<sup>12</sup> In the oral plays, she preferred being "North and Co." and "Mr Abernethy" to Byron or a *giaour*.<sup>13</sup> In the written stories, nearly all the names of people and places are drawn from her reading, yet not a single one is borrowed from Byron's works or life. His name is only mentioned four times. In May 1834, when she paraphrases a line from a poem ("As Byron says").<sup>14</sup> In February 1834, to underline Mary Percy's infatuation with her husband ("Wellington never was false, Arthur cannot be so. The Poet who surpassed Byron, the warrior who equalled my father").<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mary Taylor to Elizabeth Gaskell, Gaskell, p. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Brontë to Ellen Nussey (4 July 1834), WSC, I, p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Eyre, p. 473.

<sup>10</sup> Q.D. Leavis, ed., Jane Eyre (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 487, n. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Beer, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Brontë to Nussey (4 July 1834), WSC, I, p. 122 -- a recommendation of Byron's, and other poets', works.

<sup>13</sup> The Origin of the Islanders (12 March 1829), Writings, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> A Peep into A Picture Book (30 May 1834), WSW, I, p. 362.

<sup>15</sup> High Life in Verdopolis (20 February-20 March 1834), WSW, I, p. 338 (facsimile only).

In October 1834, when she satirizes Branwell's inordinate self-esteem as a poet and artist ("as a Poet he surpassed Byron, as a Painter, Claude Loraine yielded to him").<sup>16</sup> And in December 1839, when she is describing a "raw, flighty & romantic" girl.<sup>17</sup> The last three references suggest that she associated a love of Byron's poetry with excessive admiration, the source possibly being Branwell.

Brontë, moreover, probably did not read Moore's Life of Byron until late 1833. When Friendship's Offering and other Annuals arrived at the parsonage in the late 1820s, she had immediately set out to copy the prints and engravings which they contained. When Mr Brontë bought William Finden's Landscape and Portrait Illustrations to Life and Works of Lord Byron in 1833, she again immediately tried her hand at reproducing the prints.<sup>18</sup> The surviving copies of Finden's illustrations to Moore's biography of Byron, however, were all made in 1834, suggesting that Brontë did not read the first or second editions, which were not illustrated, but the third, illustrated edition, published in March 1833.<sup>19</sup> Its price, £2 5s., suggests that Mr Brontë bought the book, not for its subject-matter, but the engravings, possibly at the recommendation of Robinson.<sup>20</sup>

Late 1833 is also suggested by the fact that Douro's Byronic heritage does not manifest itself until A Leaf from an Unopened Volume, written between 5 and 17 January 1834. Douro's Byronic extravagance culminates in High Life in Verdopolis (20

<sup>16</sup> My Angria and the Angrians (14 October 1834), WSW, II, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Caroline Vernon (c. July-December 1839), Novelettes, pp. 309, 311.

<sup>18</sup> See Gérin, pp. 41-50.

<sup>19</sup> "Geneva" (23 August 1834; Alexander, p. 126), "English Lady" (15 October 1834; Alexander, p. 82), "Lausanne" (1834; Gérin, p. 50). Thomas Moore, ed., Letters and Journals of Lord Byron. With 44 engravings by William and Edward Finden, from designs by Turner, Stanfield, etc. (London: John Murray, 1833), 3 vols. octavo.

<sup>20</sup> The cheapest edition of Finden's Illustrations, in 3 vols., quarto, was £4 12s.

February-20 March 1834), a long narrative, which Ratchford calls "a delightful orgy of Byronism."<sup>21</sup> In A Brace of Characters (30 October 1834) Brontë acknowledges the source of her new conception of Douro by disclosing that in his youth he had married into the family of "the dark -- malignant, scowling Gordons."<sup>22</sup> By this time, however, Douro's character is already losing its Byronic edge.

It is unlikely that at the ripe age of eighteen Brontë indulged in a Byronic fling, especially because, as she later wrote, "at eighteen, drawing near the confines of illusive, void dreams, Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front."<sup>23</sup> Byron's life and works, therefore, should not be taken as a starting-point for an examination of her writings after 1831. Moore's Life of Byron did play a central role in her creative process, but only, it will be seen, because she happened to read it at a point in her writing when, by borrowing aspects from its representation of Byron's personality, she could express her own ideas more clearly.

When Brontë returned from school in May 1832, her thoughts did not run on Douro, Byron, or story-writing, because she was resolved to become a professional painter. For the next twelve months, most of her time was occupied by "drawing, and walking out with her sisters."<sup>24</sup> During the summer, to take her mind off her studies, she completed one manuscript, in which she repudiated the sad picture drawn in A Fragment: the low-born Marian Hume has married Douro after all. They are living happily in a country house, "built in the purest style of Grecian architecture" and containing "one of the most splendid, select and extensive libraries now in the possession of any individual. [Its] picture and statue galleries likewise contain

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<sup>21</sup> Ratchford, p. 84. Each chapter of High Life in Verdopolis is prefaced with an appropriate quotation from Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

<sup>22</sup> A Brace of Characters (30 October 1830), WSW, II, p. 53 (facsimile only).

<sup>23</sup> Shirley, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Gaskell, p. 144.

many of the finest works, both of the ancient and modern masters, particularly the latter, of whom the Marquis is a most generous and munificent patron."<sup>25</sup> Douro himself has recently been awarded a gold vase by "the Academy of Modern Athenians . . . , as being the composer of the best epigram in Greek."<sup>26</sup> Brontë evidently felt in a winning mood: an artistic career lay ahead, which one day would enable her to claim the company of the likes of Douro.

By the late summer of 1833, however, it was becoming plain to Charlotte that she would not be able to carry out her ambitious plans, for it had been decided that Branwell should go to the Royal Academy, which would drain the family's financial resources. In a more sober mood, therefore, she returned to her writing, producing poetry and prose with increasing regularity. In her poems, she found an outlet for her creative ambitions, not least because "her notion of literary fame" was that it offered "a passport to the society of clever people."<sup>27</sup> In her narratives, she tried once more to recreate Verreopolis, and thus recover her sense of belonging to an, albeit imaginary, realm of art, artists, and "clever people."

For several months after Brontë's return to Verreopolis, renamed Verdopolis, there is a strong emphasis on its many fascinations. Describing the impressions of several newcomers to the city, she lovingly lingers over its situation

at the mouth of a wide valley which was embosomed in long low hills, rich in hanging groves and gardens, vineyards, cornfields, meadows, &c. &c. The background was closed by lofty peaked mountains whose azure tint almost melted into the serene horizon, and all was faintly seen through a mellowing veil of mist which enhanced instead of depreciating the charms of this earthly paradise.<sup>28</sup>

With gusto she evokes its cultural life, such as the theatres, where the "brilliant lights, the ceaseless hum of voices, the

<sup>25</sup> The Bridal (20 August 1832), Writings, p. 341.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Taylor to Elizabeth Gaskell, Gaskell, p. 589.

<sup>28</sup> The Foundling (31 May-27 June 1833), WSW, I, p. 227.



busy and visionary stage, all conspire to raise indescribable feelings in the soul."<sup>29</sup> With relish, too, she records the activities of the artists, whose studios are visited; of the literati, who meet in the Rotunda of Bravey's Hotel; and of the politicians and intellectuals, who gather in the various salons, where one can listen to "the noble sentiment, the brilliant wit, the exhaustless knowledge, and the varied information which, clothed in the purest language and uttered in the soft subdued tones which perfect refinement dictates, formed a conversazione of [a] fascinating brilliancy."<sup>30</sup>

Still, a peripheral role as onlooker was not to her taste. Like Lofty Macara, one of the newcomers to Verdopolis, she wanted "to become a more immediate partaker of the feast of reason and the flow of soul [she] witnessed."<sup>31</sup> In several narratives, therefore, she tried to achieve a greater degree of participation by describing how a girl of lowly origins becomes intimately acquainted with Douro, the main exponent of her imaginary Athens, or with one of his equals. Each time, however, her commonsense cautions her against such fantasizing, so that these stories all end unhappily. In May 1833, for example, she recalled an episode from Douro's past. Having been shot by Captain Tree, Douro is nursed back to health by a country-girl, Mina Laury, in her father's humble cabin:

my reader will perhaps inquire what detained him in a country so distant from all his connections. I will answer briefly & satisfactorily: it was 'Love.' Yes the proud, Aristocratic, high-minded, refined, elegant Marquis of Douro had actually fallen in love with a poor low-born Peasant's Daughter! & his affection was not unanswered. Mina indeed could not be said so much to love as to worship him. he appeared to her in the light of a superior being, as an angel, an archangel, & a species of awe filled her mind whenever she looked at him.<sup>32</sup>

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29 The Tragedy and The Essay (6 October 1833), WSW, I, p. 302.

30 Ibid., p. 304.

31 Ibid.

32 Something about Arthur (1 May 1833), Christine Alexander, ed., Something about Arthur. By Charlotte Brontë (Austin: Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at

The intervention of the Duke of Wellington, however, prevents the marriage.

In the autumn of 1833, Douro's character begins to deteriorate. In particular, he becomes "scorney" and arrogant.<sup>33</sup> In The Tragedy and The Essay, for example, Wellesley not only dwells on Douro's role as the leader of the Verdopolitan "bel-esprits," whose patronage is eagerly sought by aspiring poets and dramatists, but also on "that cool, keen, composed aspect of contempt which he sometimes assumed in order to torture the wretches dependent on his favour."<sup>34</sup> Also, Douro begins to neglect and ill-treat his wife, Marian Hume. In The Secret, for example, Marian is deceived by a former governess into believing that she is the daughter of Lord Ellrington, Douro's most hated rival, and resorts to secret courses to destroy the evidence of her parentage. When she refuses to disclose the secret to her husband, fearful lest she lose his love, Douro's annoyance, though justifiable, is unduly selfish and autocratic: "if I find my commands . . . are disobeyed I shall consider our interest as thenceforth separate, it is no part of my plan to allow the existence of a counteracting influence to my own in that heart & family where I ought to reign paramount," he tells Marian early on.<sup>35</sup> And later:

I understand that silence, you have chosen to follow the direction of your own weak inclinations & to disregard my wishes[.] I have told you before that the consequences of such a line of conduct would be an immediate separation, it is my custom to make my words & deeds conformable[.] therefore this very day & before three hours elapse the travelling carriage will be in readiness to take you to my father's country-house in Wellington's land. Good bye, this is in all probability our last interview for I cannot love a disobedient wife[.]<sup>36</sup>

All ends well for Marian, however, for the time being.

Austin, 1981), p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> The Secret (7 November 1833), William Holtz, ed., Two Tales by Charlotte Brontë: 'The Secret' & 'Lily Hart' (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> The Tragedy and The Essay, WSW, I, pp. 303, 301.

<sup>35</sup> Holtz, ed., Two Tales, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

"Branwell appears to have been tired of Charlotte's spotless hero and determined to alter him," Alexander suggests.<sup>37</sup> Charlotte, however, had a distinct purpose of her own. She was casting about for a means of conveying the impenetrability of her imaginary world. In making Douro, its principal representative, a paramount hero who is yet arrogant and domineering towards lesser characters, she was trying to dramatize her sense of frustration at being a mere onlooker. So far, however, she had succeeded only in creating a domestic tyrant. Then, in late 1833, she read Moore's Life of Byron, which clarified her perception of what Douro should be like.

On 6 January 1834, Douro apparently is still an Athenian among Athenians:

Near the precincts of the royal park stood several magnificent houses, placed at regular intervals along the banks of the Grand Canal, but isolated from each other & for the most part surrounded by groves of lofty forest trees. These mansions had been erected by (Douro) as residences for many of his principal favourites, especially such as were Professors of the fine arts, of which, as is well known, he was a generous & discriminating patron. [Douro] loved the arts. In the highest, poetry, he was himself a mighty master, as his glorious works testify & none have ever excelled him as a judge, & an encourager of Music, Painting, Architecture, &c. The adepts in these sciences were treated by him with great distinction, & as much familiarity as was consistent with his proud Nature; & In order to have them close round him, and as much as possible in his interest, he built these classic palaces & dedicated each to some son either of the Lyre, the Pencil, the Chisel, or the Pen.<sup>38</sup>

Yet "Faults" he has, "great & dark ones."<sup>39</sup> He is a "stern, black-hearted, remorseless, haughty, ungovernable, yet superb & noble Despot."<sup>40</sup> These faults, which become increasingly prominent over the next weeks, cannot be explained simply by listing strings of Byronic attributes, for they are too closely

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> A Leaf from an Unopened Volume (5-17 January 1834), Charles Lemon, ed., A Leaf from an Unopened Volume (Haworth: Brontë Society, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

bound up with his role as the personification of Brontë's inner world.<sup>41</sup> Neither is Douro an early Rochester, whose Byronic imperfections cloak a lovable personality, for his selfishness, pride, and narcissism are at all times perceived by Brontë and her characters as absolute impediments, preventing them from fully sharing in the fascinations of his mind and imagination, and in the world which he controls. Indeed, Douro's Byronism was not inherently interesting to Brontë, but served to dramatize the tantalizing elusiveness of her imaginary Athens.

Unlike Rochester, therefore, who exploits his Byronic heritage creatively and is instinct with the same vitality as Jane Eyre herself, Douro remains a static figure, almost an emblem, who exists primarily by virtue of his being perceived and responded to by Charles Wellesley and several female satellites. In January 1834, for example, he is described thus:

A swarthy hue . . . darkened his brow & deeply embrowned the complexion which in youth had been almost of feminine delicacy. There was in [his] aspect an awful majesty, a stern decision & a superhuman pride, which proclaimed the imperial despot . . . [T]he superb mould of his form, the withering keenness\* of his glance, the high soaring of his insatiable ambition & the dark yet deep & exhaustless Genius which looked out through all his thoughts, words & actions, gave those who saw him the idea of something more than mortal. It looked . . . as if heaven, being wrath with mankind, had sent Lucifer to reign on Earth in the Flesh.<sup>42</sup>

In May 1834, by now called Zamorna, he is described thus:

Fire! Light! What have we here? Zamorna's self, blazing in the frontispiece like the sun on his own standard . . . Keen, glorious being! Tempered and bright and sharp and rapid as the scimitar at his side, when whirled by the delicate yet vigorous hand that now grasps the bridle of a horse to all appearance as viciously beautiful as himself. O Zamorna! what eyes those are glancing under the deep shadow of that raven crest! They bode no good. Man nor woman could ever gather more than a troubled, fitful happiness from their kindest light . . . Impetuous

<sup>41</sup> For such lists see Gérin, pp. 53, 89; Alexander, p. 117; Beer, p. 23, n. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Lemon, ed., A Leaf from an Unopened Volume, p. 45.

sin, stormy pride, diving and soaring enthusiasm, war and poetry, are kindling their fires in all his veins, and his wild blood boils from his heart and back again like a torrent of new-sprung lava. Young duke? Young demon!<sup>43</sup>

And in October 1834, he is seen standing

with the red firelight flashing over him, one foot advanced, his head proudly raised, his kindled eyes fixed on the opposite wall and filled with a most inspired glory -- that tinge of insanity which certainly mingles with his blood, was looking through their fierce dilated zones, as if it glared out at visions which itself had poured through the air . . . I verily believe . . . his imagination is burning as a hot coal.<sup>44</sup>

As these passages indicate, Brontë did not substantially develop Zamorna's character in 1834. Instead, she concentrated on vivid visual presentations, often employing paintings and painting analogies, and often employing sharp, definite language, thus creating images which almost defy any further interpretation of his personality.

This visual intensity extends to Zamorna's physical environment, which progressively becomes an, albeit crude, objective correlative of his fascinating but inaccessible personality. Thus he is seen parading on his own through

proud saloons glowing with brilliant fires & dazzling chandeliers, whose warm ruddy beams slept on rich carpets, silken sofas, cushions, ottomans, gleaming groups of statuary . . . , ample tables covered with splendid engravings, portfolios, magnificently bound volumes, Gold musical boxes, enamelled miniature vases, guitars of elaborate & beautiful workmanship, clocks & lamps of alabaster & or molu\* &c. &c. &c.<sup>45</sup>

At other times, he may be seen in his "splendid carriage":

the first flash of its rich emblazonry told who was the

361. <sup>43</sup> A Peep Into A Picture Book (30 May 1834), WSW, I, p.

<sup>44</sup> My Angria and the Angrians (14 October 1834), WSW, II, pp. 30-31.

<sup>45</sup> High Life in Verdopolis (20 February-20 March 1834), WSW, I, p. 331 (facsimile only).

occupant, the vehicle of polished, glorious green, the rising sun blazing in gold on its pannels\*, the outriders in the emerald livery of the house of Wellesley, the magnificent horses foaming & tossing their heads like chargers of the Sun, all as they dashed glancing and flashing forwards proclaimed the young Monarch of awakening Angria.<sup>46</sup>

By October 1834, Zamorna has acquired his own country, Angria, and is building a capital, Adrianopolis, even more gorgeous than Verdopolis. Thus he becomes the ruling spirit of a visually opulent superior reality, a personified but elusive ideal.

When Brontë transformed Douro into Zamorna in early 1834, she decided to kill off Marian Hume, probably because she felt that it would be mere wish-fulfilment to continue with a low-born wife. Marian dies in early January 1834 of a broken heart because "the sunshine of those eyes which had been her idolatry was withered."<sup>47</sup> Zamorna nevertheless continues to have "the basilisk's fascination" for women.<sup>48</sup> His vigorous imagination acts as "a charm, a talisman . . . which wins all hearts and rivets chains round them which can never be undone."<sup>49</sup> By early 1835, he has bewitched Zenobia Ellrington, Ellen Grenville, Maria Sneachie, Mina Laury, Rosamund Wellesley, and twenty-two daughters of Verdopolitan noblemen.<sup>50</sup>

None of these women "ever gather[s] more than a troubled, fitful happiness" from Zamorna's interest in them.<sup>51</sup> Feeling that they are "particularly susceptible of his influence, he crushes [them] with a most merciless yoke -- totally heedless whether their peace of mind be ruined or

<sup>46</sup> A Day Abroad (15 June 1834), WSW, I, p. 371 (facsimile only). Alexander's clear text of this passage incorrectly reads "charges of the Sun" (Alexander, p. 240).

<sup>47</sup> A Peep Into A Picture Book, WSW, I, p. 360.

<sup>48</sup> High Life in Verdopolis, WSW, I, p. 336.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> None of these girls, it should be emphasized, becomes Zamorna's mistress.

<sup>51</sup> A Peep Into A Picture Book, WSW, I, p. 362.

confirmed by his manoeuvres[.] he seeks only so to attach to chain them to himself, that they shall no more think of shaking off the fetters he imposes than of escaping the restraints of life itself."<sup>52</sup> None of them wishes to escape his "all-clutching grasp"<sup>53</sup> despite his habit of bringing them tantalizingly close to entering the inner sanctum of Verdopolis and, more especially, close to sharing his own exciting inner life, while never allowing them to make the ultimate step. In narrative terms this is represented by Zamorna's habit of first raising great expectations by declarations of love, which seem to promise a stimulating life among artists, poets, and scholars, and then settling his victims in one of his remote country houses. Thus "Helen Victorine, the young and beautiful lily of Loch Sunart, died in the sickness of hope deferred" at Grassmere Manor.<sup>54</sup> Later Mina Laury is sent there too. And Rosamund Wellesley languishes and dies at Scar House on the remote Angrian moors.

Zamorna's principal victim, however, is his new wife, Mary Percy, the aristocratic successor to Marian Hume. Years before their marriage, and before they had even met, Mary "had dreamt about him . . . , seen him through the haze of his glorious poetry, conversed with him in thought, wandered with him in idea through all the scenes his works describe."<sup>55</sup> She "had thought of him only as the inspired boy-minstrel, the life-giving form in a grand landscape."<sup>56</sup> When they get married in February 1834, it seems that "the blessings of heaven above & of the deep that lieth under [are going] to be

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<sup>52</sup> A Late Occurence (c. November 1834), WSW, II, p. 82 (facsimile only). The manuscript is undated, but from the contents and, as Neufeldt suggests, "from its placement among the dated items in A Scrapbook it would seem to have been written in November or December 1834" (Poems, p. 417, n. 103). The events described take place in "November" (p. 85).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> A Brace of Characters (30 October 1834), WSW, II, p. 51 (facsimile only).

<sup>55</sup> The Spell (21 June-21 July 1834), MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

showered on the lovely angel who was imparadised in such sweet flesh."<sup>57</sup> Before long, however, Zamorna becomes "unaccountably cool," though not unkind; "but it is the kindness of a friend rather than a husband."<sup>58</sup> Suspecting that he is unfaithful to her, Mary has "sudden pangs of jealousy and moments of unuuterable darkness":

And when I could find Zamorna alone, I begged him to kill me at once, and kneeled before him, and bathed his hand in tears that he himself said were scalding. He always heard me, he always pitied me, but he said I was foolish and mistaken, and tried to cheer me with his wild musical laugh, and never in vain, for that laugh, when not fierce or scornful, is a cordial itself to my ears.<sup>59</sup>

This is during the summer of 1834. A wife's jealousy, however, Charlotte felt to be too stale an emotion to serve as a means of expressing her own sense of frustration at her exclusion from Angria. Soon afterwards, Branwell engineered yet another war in the Glass Town Confederacy. Mary's father, Northangerland, heads a rebellion against Zamorna's autocratic regime, is defeated, and exiled. It is in Mary's heroic efforts to persuade her husband to pardon her father, that Charlotte discovered an appropriate channel for her pent-up longings to participate in Zamorna's world.

Mary's anxiety about Northangerland is evidently only a narrative device, for in each of the long, dramatic scenes in which she is supposedly pleading her father's case, Brontë focuses almost exclusively on Mary's affirmations of her love for and allegiance to her capricious husband. In October 1834, for example, she is watching Zamorna as he is reading a letter from Northangerland:

With an unconscious movement she stole by degrees nearer to him till she stood at his side. Then weary of standing she kneeled on one knee, and resting against his sofa, looked up into her lord's face with so fond, so tender,

<sup>57</sup> High Life in Verdopolis, WSW, I, p. 339 (facsimile only).

<sup>58</sup> MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.



so appealing an expression, that nothing I have seen either in sculpture or painting could equal the feeling of pathos it conveyed.<sup>60</sup>

She then breaks out into an impassioned appeal, ending:

My King, my Husband, my very Deity, smile at me once more . . . . Am I to lie down on a sleepless pillow to-night Zamorna? Am I to eat the bread and drink the waters of bitterness, or blessed with the forgiving light of your countenance, am I to sleep in peace and awake in safety?<sup>61</sup>

Zamorna lets his hand "slowly fall on his Queen's head, bowed before him like a storm-beaten lily," but remains inexorable in his repudiation of that "Machiavel," her father.<sup>62</sup> Zamorna never responds to Mary's appeals, except for the occasional caress; yet in making Mary speak out for herself, Brontë could, if not protest, at least release her frustration.

Despite the failure of Mary Percy and other female characters to share intimately in Zamorna's life, the world of Verdopolis was not slipping through Brontë's fingers altogether, for there is a compensatory movement centring on her narrator, Charles Wellesley. The disagreement among scholars over Wellesley's function suggests that this movement is not as obvious as it may seem. According to Ratchford, the progressive antagonism between Wellesley and Zamorna "reflects a growing conflict within Charlotte herself, as her conscience condemns while her romantic imagination rejoices in the moral lapses of her hero. To satisfy conscience she shapes Lord Charles into [an] instrument of censure through which she roundly denounces the sins that made her hero glorious."<sup>63</sup> Gérin, noting that Wellesley is "malicious, vain, cowardly, [and] small-minded," and thus hardly convincing as a moral commentator, argues that by adopting a masculine pseudonym, Brontë could "assume an equality of outlook that dispensed

<sup>60</sup> My Angria and the Angrians, WSW, II, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ratchford, p. 71.

with judgement," and speak as a man about men, with "complete licence."<sup>64</sup> Alexander, while uneasily echoing both arguments, ultimately tends to the view that Wellesley is "an accomplished reporter of Glass Town gossip by the end of 1830" and thus "the ideal vehicle for the young author eager to submerge her identity in her imaginary world." Later he "degenerates into a mere reporter of his brother's liaisons," and "ceases to be a plausible character."<sup>65</sup>

Brontë was likely to have had more definite aims. In Wellesley's unremitting feelings of envy and spite towards Zamorna, and in his ceaseless reviling of Zamorna's "capricious, double-dealing, unfathomable, incomprehensible, torturing, sphinx-like manner," she found a means of releasing her anger at remaining a mere onlooker in Verdopolis.<sup>66</sup> The Spell, for example, was written because, having been excluded from Zamorna's town palace, Wellesley refuses "to lie down like a flogged spaniel":

Here I fling him my revenge. He will not like the morsel. In this book I have tampered with his heart-strings . . . There are passages of truth here which will make him gnash his teeth with grating agony . . . [H]e will know thereby that there is one person at least in Verdopolis thoroughly acquainted with all the depths, false or true, of his double-dealing, hypocritical, close, dark, secret, half-insane, character.<sup>67</sup>

Wellesley's impotent rebelliousness is thus closely bound up with the sufferings of the women in Zamorna's life.

Moreover, during her editorship of the Young Men's Magazine, Brontë had increasingly identified with Wellesley, the chronicler of the Verreopolitan artistic and literary scene, because being an author with an albeit peripheral role in actual events gave her a sense of belonging. It is by elaborating Wellesley's role as a writer who observes events and shares his impressions with his readers, that Brontë

<sup>64</sup> Gérin, pp. 82, 88.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander, pp. 61, 219-220.

<sup>66</sup> MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 144.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

succeeded in assuaging her desire for greater participation.

In the narratives written between 1831 and early 1833, Brontë usually introduces Wellesley as a chance observer in significant scenes. In A Fragment, for example, he finds himself in a "light-winged pinnace," which, "as if soul-taught," has "wafted itself into a little willow-fringed fairy bay." Disembarking, he perceives "by the clear moonlight a figure clad in white, sitting on an overhanging cliff and bending over a harp."<sup>68</sup> This is Marian Hume, lamenting Douro's marriage to Lady Julia. In The Bridal, Wellesley is wandering through the countryside:

My bodily faculties of eye and ear were absorbed in the contemplation of this delightful scene . . . . At length I entered a glade in the wood, in the midst of which was a small but exquisitely beautiful marble edifice of pure and dazzling whiteness. On the broad steps of the portico two figures were reclining, at sight of whom I instantly stepped behind a low, wide-spreading fig-tree, where I could hear and see all that passed without fear and detection. One was a youth of lofty stature and remarkably graceful demeanour, attired in a rich purple vest and mantle, with closely fitting pantaloons of white woven silk, displaying to advantage the magnificent proportions of his form . . . . The other form was that of a very young and slender girl, whose complexion was delicately, almost transparently, fair. Her cheeks were tinted with a rich, soft crimson, her features moulded in the utmost perfection of loveliness . . . .<sup>69</sup>

Thus he witnesses and vicariously shares in the happiness of the newly-wed Douro and Marian Hume.

Brontë reverts to the somewhat crude device of an omnipresent observer throughout 1833 and 1834. In most of these narratives, Wellesley is Lord Charles, the author and young man about town. In others, he is a little boy, whose curiosity is continually "hissing at white heat" and who is

<sup>68</sup> A Fragment, Writings, p. 327.

<sup>69</sup> The Bridal, Writings, pp. 338-339. Clement Shorter's transcription reads "fear of detection" instead of "fear and detection" (ll. 8-9), which Brontë is more likely to have written (Clement Shorter, ed., The Twelve Adventurers and Other Stories [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925], p. 124).

notorious for his "prying eyes" and "vile inquisitive looks."<sup>70</sup> Possibly, as Alexander suggests, Brontë failed to realize that her use of a narrator "who must play the role of a child in his own story is often awkward and inappropriate."<sup>71</sup> However, it was not an interest in the art of fiction which induced Brontë to attempt this experiment with her narrator's angle of perception, but the need to reflect her changing visual approach to her imaginary world. Before 1833, she used to sit down at the kitchen-table with pen and paper in order to copy each of the pictures her imagination presented before her eyes, relying heavily on the vocabulary and descriptive techniques of drawing and painting. The resulting descriptions being like so many paintings on easels, she was effectively compelled to create an artificial physical distance between her perceiving narrator and the scene observed, as in the passage from The Bridal quoted above. In the course of 1833, however, she increasingly based her writing on anterior imaginative experiences. At Roe Head she was to recall wistfully the

past twilight hours -- spent in that little unfurnished room -- There have I sat on the low bed-stead[,] my eyes fixed on the window, through which appeared no other landscape than a monotonous stretch of moorland [and] a grey church tower . . . . Pen cannot pourtray\* the deep interest of the scenes, of the continued trains of events, I have witnessed in that little room . . . .<sup>72</sup>

When Brontë sat down to write, it was no longer to copy incidental mental pictures, but to recall vividly realized visions of Angrian scenes and characters. When transferred to Wellesley, these visual experiences retained both their original immediacy and flexibility, as in this example:

Are they come? Are they come? I asked hurriedly of the landlord of the Victoria Hotel in Zamorna, as sweating with haste & the dread of being too late I thrust through the crowd . . . . '[G]o into my private parlour. you can

<sup>70</sup> MacLean, ed., The Spell, pp. 113, 122.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander, p. 226.

<sup>72</sup> "My Compliments to the weather" (c. March 1837), unpublished manuscript, BPM: B98(6).

have a splendid view of their departure from the window . . . . ' -- Stationing myself at the open window I looked out -- No Street lay beneath only the broad stretch of the Verdopolitan Road -- now a sea of heads, for Zamorna had turned out the whole mass of her population to greet the return of her warlike children. It was a bright sunny day & Percy mills towering to the right hand over the Olympian [River], breathed no stain of smoke from their gigantic chimneys on the blue & perfectly cloudless ether . . . . 'Are those the carriages?' I asked looking down on the area under the House, where grooms & postillions were bringing round from the stables & arranging in procession, several splendid barouches, shining in green & gold & lined with scarlet of dazzling brilliancy --<sup>73</sup>

Brontë can never for long resist employing a pictorial terminology, for drawing and painting continued to dominate her creative thought:

No landscape is complete without figures, and my pencil, or rather pen, shall now depict one or two of these animating adjuncts on the canvas. Slowly mounting the flowery hill on whose summit I was posted, I saw a fair and youthful lady. . . . A little child lay in her arms, and another, Ernest Fitzarthur, ran on before her. Both these were likewise uncovered, their ringlets danced in the morning wind, and their lovely cherub faces glowed with pleasure and exercise. Ernest was on the brow presently. He flung himself down immediately under the wall of turf when he reached it.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, as this example illustrates, such terminology does not affect the fluidity of her visions. Indeed, Wellesley has become a camera lens moving within the dynamic world of Brontë's imagination.

Such a transformation of anterior visions into recorded perceptions accounts for the visual immediacy and flexibility of Brontë's writings after 1832, although an exception must be made for the intensely pictorial descriptions of Zamorna. It also accounts for the complete absence of self-consciousness in Brontë's narrator, in contrast to contemporary novelists like "Monsieur Sue," whose

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<sup>73</sup> Duke of Z & E Percy (24 January 1835), WSW, II, p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 106.

respect for lacqueys, furniture, carpets, titles, bouquets, and such aristocratic appendages, is too great. He slips quietly over the carpet, and peers at the silk hangings, and looks at Lafleur handing about the tea-tray with too much awe for a gentleman. He is in a flutter in the midst of his marquesses and princes -- happy, clever, smiling, but uneasy.<sup>75</sup>

Sue, living in Paris, had the advantage over Brontë, who derived her conception of a superior sphere of existence from her reading. Yet Sue, like Captain Tree, was a hack, spilling his undigested fantasies on paper at so many francs a page, whereas Brontë first induced her imagination to create vivid visual experiences, which she assimilated into her intellectual life. Only then did she sit down to write, approaching the act of writing with an imaginative intensity which sustained the illusion that she was delineating a world which she had actually seen and was thoroughly familiar with.

The women in Zamorna's life fail to resign themselves to the impossibility of sharing intimately in the realm of art and artists which he controls, thus acting out Brontë's reluctance to admit the dangers inherent in wish-fulfilling dreams of participation, against which her commonsense had been cautioning her ever since A Day at Parry's Palace and Strange Events. Charles Wellesley, on the other hand, although rebellious, succeeds, because he appreciates that Zamorna exists only within the confines of the imagination and should therefore be approached in terms of the imagination. By late 1834, Wellesley operates primarily as a narrator, whose visual approach to the world around him not only forges a link between Brontë and her imaginary Athens, but also embraces the elusive Zamorna. It is thus, in terms of inward seeing, that Zamorna, who has all along existed in a visual dimension, is assimilated into Brontë's imagination and belongs to her.

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<sup>75</sup> William Thackeray, "Jerome Paturot. With Considerations on Novels in General -- In a Letter from M.A. Titmarsh," Fraser's Magazine (September 1843), rpt. The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), vol. 25, p. 15.

On 29 July 1835, Brontë left Haworth to teach at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head. Before long, she resigned herself to the fact that Angria was a world of the imagination, in which perception was the only mode of participation. Zamorna was only "a mental King." Nevertheless:

I owe him something, he has held  
 A lofty, burning lamp to me  
 Whose rays surrounding darkness quelled  
 And shewed me wonders, shadow free

And he has been a mental King  
 That ruled my thoughts right regally  
 And he has given me a steady spring  
 To what I had of poetry . . .

Our grand dream is his wide abode,  
 And there for me he dwells divine<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "But once again, but once again" (December 1835-January 1836), Poems, pp. 187-188.

## Chapter Four

### THE ROE HEAD CRISIS (1835-1838)

In her Life of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell included extracts from ten letters which Brontë wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey between 10 May 1836 and 24 August 1837.<sup>1</sup> Nine were written from Roe Head and Dewsbury Moor and one from Haworth. In these letters Brontë confessed that she was being driven to despair by her "evil wandering thoughts" and "corrupt heart."<sup>2</sup> She even expressed her conviction that "if the Doctrine of Calvin" were true, she was "already an outcast."<sup>3</sup> It was only a temporary "nervous disturbance," Gaskell concluded, due to ill-health, overwork, and "something of an over-ascetic spirit."<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, a different view emerged, which focused on one particular passage in the letter of 10 May 1836:

Don't deceive yourself by imagining that I have a bit of real goodness about me . . . If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel Society as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity and I dare say despise me.<sup>5</sup>

This confession, and the allusion to her "fiery imagination" in particular, was interpreted both by the many literati dabbling

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<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, pp. 161-165, 169-170, 176-179. She incorrectly attributes the letter on pp. 178-179 to December 1837 instead of 1836.

<sup>2</sup> Brontë to Nussey (6 December 1836), WSC, I, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Brontë to Nussey (1836), WSC, I, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Gaskell, pp. 164, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Brontë to Nussey (10 May 1836), WSC, I, p. 139.



in semi-fictional biography and by serious students of Brontë's works as a thinly veiled reference to her irrepressible urge to write about Angria. It was concluded that "the puritanism which surrounded her from her cradle, and which entered into her very bones,"<sup>6</sup> had made her "a little prim . . . Puritan girl," whose moral convictions were in perpetual conflict with her creative imagination.<sup>7</sup>

The publication between 1923 and 1941 of extracts from the six autobiographical fragments known as the Roe Head Journal, which Brontë wrote between February 1836 and October 1837, confirmed the view that at one time she considered her imagination to be at the root of all her wickedness.<sup>8</sup> Ratchford's The Brontës' Web of Childhood in particular proved

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Gosse, "A Word on Charlotte Brontë," in Butler Wood, ed., Charlotte Brontë 1816-1916: A Centenary Memorial (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1917), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Frederic Harrison, Studies in Early Victorian Literature (London: L. Arnold, 1895), p. 156. The late-Victorian view of Brontë's character and conflicting moral and creative urges is discussed in Jos Bemelmans, "'A Permanent Interest of a Minor Kind': Charlotte Brontë and George Gissing's The Unclassed," BST, XVIII, 95 (1985), 383-391.

<sup>8</sup> The Roe Head Journal comprises:  
 "Well here I am at Roe-Head" (4 February 1836), Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection.  
 "Now as I have a little bit of time" (c. 5 February 1836), Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection.  
 "All this day I have been in a dream" (11 August-14 October 1836), BPM: B98(8).  
 "I'm just going to write because I cannot help it" (c. October 1836), BPM: B98(6) and (7).  
 "My Compliments to the weather" (c. October 1837), BPM: B98(6).  
 "About a week since I got a letter from Branwell" (c. October 1837), BPM: B92(1).

Excerpts have been published in C.W. Hatfield, "The Early Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë: A Bibliography," BST, VI, 33 (1923), 162-164 and BST, VI, 34, 221-224; F.E. Ratchford, "Charlotte Brontë's Angrian Cycle of Stories," p. 497; F.E. Ratchford and W.C. DeVane, eds., Legends of Angria, pp. xxvii-xxxvi; F.E. Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood, pp. 106-114, 127-128; WSW, II, pp. 123-124, 255-257; Gérin, pp. 101-107; Alexander, pp. 143-144, et passim; Poems, pp. 422-423, 430.

influential. Presenting the Roe Head Journal and the ten letters to Ellen Nussey as complementary texts, it gave a highly dramatic account of the struggle between Brontë's "tyrannical conscience" and her besetting sin, "idolatry, the worship of the creatures of her own imagination."<sup>9</sup> Again and again after yielding to her "fiery imagination," she tried to expiate her "mortal sin" by pouring out her guilt in letters to Nussey.<sup>10</sup> Again and again, however, the "blissful, but soul-destroying poison of her imagination" proved more potent than her determination "to apply rack and torch to extirpate the heresy. A fifteen years war was on."<sup>11</sup>

By the time Gérin started work upon her biography, a picture of Brontë's divided self had evolved which, in its bare outlines, was by no means implausible. After all, many girls born early in the nineteenth century, such as Edmund Gosse's mother, had found themselves in a similar predicament:

When I was a very little child, I used to amuse myself and my brothers with inventing stories, such as I read. Having, as I suppose, naturally a restless mind and busy imagination, this soon became the chief pleasure of my life . . . I had not known there was any harm in it, until Miss Shore [a Calvinist governess], finding it out, lectured me severely, and told me it was wicked. From that time forth I considered that to invent a story of any kind was a sin. But the desire to do so was too deeply rooted in my affections to be resisted in my own strength . . . . The longing to invent stories grew with violence . . . . The simplicity of truth was not sufficient for me; I must needs embroider imagination upon it, and the folly, vanity, and wickedness which disgraced my heart are more than I am able to express. Even now [at the age of twenty-nine], tho' watched, prayed and striven against, that is still the sin that most easily besets me. It has hindered my prayers and prevented my improvement, and therefore has humbled me very much.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ratchford, pp. x, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Gosse, Father and Son (1907) (London: Heinemann, 1928), pp. 22-23. Gosse is quoting from his mother's secret diary. The information between brackets is supplied by him.

"Was my Mother intended by nature to be a novelist?", Gosse wonders.<sup>13</sup>

In Brontë's case only a Miss Shore was lacking. This proved rather fortunate for Gérin, when she detected a severe flaw in the received version of Brontë's crisis: the absence of any evidence suggesting that she held sombre religious views or suffered from religious doubts prior to her residence at Roe Head. Pouncing on the fact that Brontë's aunt was a Methodist, Gérin argued that from "every reference it plainly appears that Miss Branwell's influence was repressive, her religion joyless and narrow, her outlook morbid . . . By precept and example [she] succeeded . . . in implanting in the malleable minds of her little nieces and nephew a haunting sense of sin and dread of judgement that remained long after their childhood."<sup>14</sup> Charlotte's initial response was to drive "all thought of it underground. There it coiled, a black Cocytus."<sup>15</sup> At Roe Head, however, her already "overheated imagination" reached boiling-point, causing her qualms about her Angrian fantasy world to surface with a vengeance, thus bringing out in stark relief "the spiritual severance from her source of life," her imagination.<sup>16</sup>

For nearly a decade this was accepted as the definitive interpretation of Brontë's adolescent crisis. Increasingly, however, it became apparent that Miss Branwell was not "a monster of Calvinistic rigidity," but belonged to the Wesleyan or Arminian branch of Methodism.<sup>17</sup> This is a more

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Gérin, pp. 33-34.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 110, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Joan Quarm, "Purified by Woe -- On Faith and Suffering," BST, XIX, 1 & 2 (1986), 19. Dissenting views were also expressed by F.B. Pinion, A Brontë Companion, pp. 16-17; Margot Peters, Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 48; Valentine Cunningham, Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 116; Elisabeth Jay, The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the

likely kind of faith for a woman who "took snuff out of a very pretty gold snuff-box, which she sometimes presented to you with a little laugh, as if she enjoyed the slight shock and astonishment visible in your countenance."<sup>18</sup> Gérin's argument is indeed largely held together by a string of conjectures and palpable distortions of evidence. Thus "lectures on Galvanism" become "lectures on Calvinism," and the description of Miss Branwell's fire and brimstone Methodism is merely a summary of ancient issues of the Methodist Magazine (1798-1812).<sup>19</sup> Gérin's feeble justification for identifying the aunt's views with those expounded in the magazine is that the aunt owned a "complete set."<sup>20</sup> According to Brontë, there were only "some mad Methodist Magazines" at the parsonage.<sup>21</sup>

Recent critics tend to follow F.B. Pinion's advice to bear in mind the evidence of Mary Taylor<sup>22</sup>, who told Gaskell that she had heard Brontë "condemn Socinianism, Calvinism, and many other 'isms' inconsistent with Church of Englandism."<sup>23</sup> Their efforts to explain Brontë's crisis at Roe Head focus on her moral inhibitions. Thus Alexander, summarizing current critical opinion, suggests that Brontë's sense of guilt can be traced to "her moral discomfort over the rakish nature" of her "stories of love and sexual passion," and to her feeling "that in writing at all she was tending to neglect the duties proper to a woman for a frivolous and unrewarding occupation."<sup>24</sup>

Nineteenth-Century Novel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 52. Gérin chose to ignore Eanne Oram's earlier objections to her portrayal of Miss Branwell in her biographies of Anne and Branwell Brontë ("Brief for Miss Branwell," BST, XIV, 74 [1964], 28-38).

<sup>18</sup> Ellen Nussey, "Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë," BST, II, 10 (1899), 75.

<sup>19</sup> Gérin's incorrect transcription has been pointed out by Tom Winnifrith, "Charlotte Brontë and Calvinism," Notes and Queries, 17 n.s. (January 1970), 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Gérin, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Shirley, p. 440.

<sup>22</sup> Pinion, A Brontë Companion, p. 17, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Gaskell, p. 580.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander, p. 228.

This, however, does not explain why, after years of silence, Brontë is uncharacteristically "dancing like David before the Ark in girded ecstasy" in her letters to Nussey.<sup>25</sup>

The theories of Ratchford, Gérin, Alexander, and others are further weakened by the failure of these scholars to test the one piece of evidence which, according to them, links the perfervid day-dreams recorded in the Roe Head Journal to the sense of guilt displayed in the letters to Nussey. This key-passage, in which Brontë tells Nussey that she would probably "despise" her if she knew about "the fiery imagination that at times eats me up," has always been assumed to be a thinly disguised confession of her inability to repress her dreams of Angria.<sup>26</sup> The term imagination, however, occurs only occasionally in Brontë's early writings, and nearly always in descriptions of characters who indulge in self-deluding fantasies or who are subject to uncontrolled passions. It never refers to her own visions of Angria. In the juvenilia, and in the Roe Head Journal, she carefully chooses such terms as "thought" and "reverie" to mark her evocations of Angria as harmless, if not profitable experiences. To dream of Angria is to release the "stream of Thought, checked all day,"<sup>27</sup> or to answer the "knock at the gates of thought."<sup>28</sup> One of her characters she urges to

Look into thought & say what dost thou see  
Dive, be not fearful how dark the waves flow.  
Sink through the surge & bring pearls up to me  
Deeper eye deeper, the fairest lie low.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> E.F. Benson, Charlotte Brontë (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1932), p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Brontë to Nussey (10 May 1836), WSC, I, p. 139. This passage, quoted more fully on p. 62 above, is central to the arguments of, among others, Ratchford, pp. 106-107; Gérin, p. 99; Peters, Unquiet Soul, p. 48; Margaret Blom, Charlotte Brontë (London: George Prior, 1977), p. 22; Alexander, p. 144; Pauline Nestor, Charlotte Brontë (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 8; and Monahan, ed., Ashworth, pp. 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."

<sup>28</sup> "My Compliments to the weather."

<sup>29</sup> "I'm just going to write."

Alexander not only agrees that "these 'pearls' represent Charlotte's Angrian dream-world," but also concedes that pearls "are symbols of purity in the juvenilia."<sup>30</sup>

Several times in the Journal, too, Brontë records how she is starved of intellectual excitement at school and would be "agonized" if she "had not the dream to repose on -- its existences, its forms, its scenes do fill a little of the craving vacancy."<sup>31</sup> Again and again she expresses her gratefulness for her creative gift:

I think few would believe that from sources purely imaginary such happiness could be derived . . . What a treasure is thought! What a privilege is reverie -- I am thankful that I have the power of solacing myself with the dream of creations whose reality I shall never behold -- May I never lose that power [--] may I never feel it growing weaker -- If I should how little pleasure will life afford me -- its lapses of shade are so wide so <sup>32</sup> gloomy -- Its gleams of sunshine so limited & dim --!

Unless Brontë veered wildly between guilt and gratitude, the "fiery imagination" which haunted her at Roe Head cannot have been identical with the creative imagination which enabled her to conjure up visions of Angria. Indeed, any attempt to explain Brontë's Roe Head crisis which starts by premissing that her religious or moral convictions were in conflict with her creative imagination will only produce more irreconcilable facts and conclusions.

When Brontë arrived at Roe Head in July 1835, her "aspirations after fame" had shipwrecked and her "intimations of future greatness" as a pictorial artist had proved mere illusions.<sup>33</sup> However, she had by no means lost her profound longing to cultivate her talents, to meet artists, poets, and scholars, and "to visit all the large towns in Europe, see all

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, p. 292, n. 7.

<sup>31</sup> "I'm just going to write."

<sup>32</sup> "My Compliments to the weather."

<sup>33</sup> Visits in Verreopolis, vol. 2 (18 December 1830), Writings, p. 319.

the sights, and know all the celebrities."<sup>34</sup> Before long, therefore, she began to see the boarding-school as an extension of Blake's "dark Satanic Mills," in which she was condemned to mindless drudgery, doing "nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning till night."<sup>35</sup> Although she performed her duties "strictly and well"<sup>36</sup>, the thought would often come over her:

am I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage . . . . [--] must I from day to day sit chained to this chair prisoned within these four bare walls, while these glorious summer suns are burning in heaven & the year is revolving in its richest glow & declaring at the close of every summer day the time I am losing will never come again?<sup>37</sup>

Soon her hatred of the place turned into resentment towards her employer and pupils.

The "epitome" of Brontë's life, according to Mary Taylor, was that no one outside her family appreciated her deep interest in the lives and works of artists and poets.<sup>38</sup> As a pupil at Roe Head in 1831 and 1832, she was "always talking about clever people; Johnson, Sheridan, &c.," to which the other girls responded with "trivial remarks about 'cleverality'"<sup>39</sup> At Mary's home she had "as little chance of a patient hearing . . . . We had a rage for practicality, and laughed all poetry to scorn."<sup>40</sup> Four years later, Brontë had not forgotten the indifference and ridicule her cherished interests had met with. This time she was less tolerant and meek.

Among the people whose lack of imagination irritated Brontë was Miss Wooler:

<sup>34</sup> Taylor to Gaskell, Gaskell, p. 589.

<sup>35</sup> Brontë to Nussey (June 1837), WSC, I, p. 159.

<sup>36</sup> "Well here I am at Roe-Head."

<sup>37</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."

<sup>38</sup> Gaskell, p. 575.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 575-576.

I remember well wishing my lot had been cast in the troubled times of the late war, and seeing in its exciting incidents a kind of stimulating charm which it made my pulses beat fast only to think of: I remember even, I think, being a little impatient that you would not fully sympathise with my feelings on those subjects, that you heard my aspirations and speculations very tranquilly . . .  
 . . .<sup>41</sup>

Brontë's pupils, however, bore the brunt of her "impatience." Their frivolous attitude towards the liberal education which they were privileged to receive, and the foolish ways in which they squandered the abundant leisure which they enjoyed, actually appeared to mock her own craving for knowledge and the freedom to pursue it. On many a night she would be "exhausted to the last degree"<sup>42</sup> after her "promising pupils"<sup>43</sup> had once more been "trigonometrically oecumenical" about their French lessons or had bored her "with their vulgar familiar\* trash . . . . . [--] if those Girls knew how I loathe their company."<sup>44</sup> Taking pen and paper, she would vent her rage at the "horrid wilfulness," "the idleness the apathy and the hyperbolical & most asinine stupidity of those fat-headed oafs."<sup>45</sup>

Brontë's anger at the "Dolt[s]"<sup>46</sup> and "asses"<sup>47</sup> was not confined to her journal, nor was it only her "fingers" that would tremble as if she had had "twenty four hours tooth-ache."<sup>48</sup> Occasionally there would be an explosion, as she recalled in 1843 in a letter from Brussels:

yes, I teach and sometimes get red in the face with impatience at [my pupils'] stupidity. But don't think I ever scold or fly into a passion. If I spoke as warmly

<sup>41</sup> Brontë to Margaret Wooley (31 March 1848), WSC, II, p. 202. WSC incorrectly prints "pulse": Barbara Whitehead, "The Wooley Letters," BST, XIX, 4 (1987), 168.

<sup>42</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."

<sup>43</sup> Brontë to Nussey (1836), WSC, I, p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> "I'm just going to write."

<sup>48</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."



as I sometimes used to do at Roe Head, they would think me mad.<sup>49</sup>

Inevitably her irritableness and continual disparagement of her pupils made her feel profoundly guilty.

In the meantime, knowing herself doomed to mediocrity if she remained a teacher, Brontë had turned to writing poetry as a possible means of distinguishing herself. When she arrived at Roe Head, she had already spent several years covering "quires of paper" in pursuit of "that single, absorbing, exquisite gratification."<sup>50</sup> During the next twelve months she jotted down many more poems, and by October 1836 her ambition to excel had by no means faded: "Hohenlinden! Childe Harold! Flodden Field! the burial of Moore [--] why cannot the blood rouse the heart the heart wake the head the head prompt the head [hand] to do things like these?"<sup>51</sup> In December 1836 she even ventured to send a long poem to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, probably in the hope that he would recommend her to submit it to a literary magazine.

Brontë's sense of guilt, however, was only deepened by Southey's stringent letter of March 1837, for he put it to her that, in part at least, she wrote poetry to indulge her vanity. "Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity," he exhorted her, particularly because the

day dreams [of literary success] in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and, in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else.<sup>52</sup>

49 Charlotte to Branwell (1 May 1843), WSC, I, p. 297.

50 Brontë to Southey (16 March 1837), WSC, I, p. 157.

51 "I'm just going to write."

52 Southey to Brontë (March 1837), WSC, I, pp. 156, 155. Southey's caution against "day dreams" has hitherto been taken as a pointed warning against Brontë's romantic fantasies or even her dreams of Angria. This makes no sense in a long paragraph dealing with poetic ambitions. Brontë, moreover, is unlikely to have dwelt on her imaginary world in her first

Brontë knew that she need not blame herself for any dereliction of duty, and replied that she had earned her father's approbation by endeavouring "not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them."<sup>53</sup> Yet she promised to write no longer "for the love of fame; for the selfish excitement of emulation."<sup>54</sup> Southey's main charge had struck home. Or at least, it made Brontë, whose conscience had already been condemning her for her uncharitable feelings towards people who did not share her enthusiasm for art and poetry, put the worst interpretation on her "miserable and wretched touchiness of character."<sup>55</sup> Accusing herself of arrogance and intellectual pride, she came to rely even more heavily on Ellen Nussey.

In her letters to Nussey, Brontë draws a sharp distinction between herself and her friend. "I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires," she complains.<sup>56</sup> "I have a constant tendency to scorn people who are far better than I am."<sup>57</sup> Although she prays "fervently to be enabled to resign [herself] to every decree of God's will"<sup>58</sup>, she tends to grow "blasphemous, atheistical," when dwelling on the apparent iniquity of a God who has given her talents but thwarts all her efforts to cultivate them.<sup>59</sup> Nussey, on the other hand, is "pure, . . . unassuming, and . . . benevolent in thought and deed."<sup>60</sup> Always commending matters "to a higher decision than ours" and "resolved to submit with

letter to a stranger, whose character she could only guess at. Only F.B. Pinion has briefly pointed out that "Southey may have had nothing more in mind . . . than the dreams of unfulfilled ambition" (A Brontë Companion, pp. 88-89).

<sup>53</sup> Brontë to Southey (16 March 1837), WSC, I, p. 158.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>55</sup> Brontë to Nussey (1836), WSC, I, p. 146.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. (6 December 1836), WSC, I, p. 147.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. (20 February 1837), WSC, I, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 143.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 141.

resignation to that decision, whatever it might be"<sup>61</sup>, her character had indeed been elevated by "Religion."<sup>62</sup>

Brontë, however, while writing down general confessions of guilt on the spur of the moment, never enters into detail or responds to Nussey's attempts to draw her into a discussion of the consolation and strength to be derived from true faith. Nussey's more practical suggestions, too, meet with a cold reception: as "regards committing a verse of the Psalms to Memory -- I do not see the direct advantage to be derived from that."<sup>63</sup> Instead, Brontë continually asserts her love for her "darling"<sup>64</sup>, while expressing her anxiety lest, after having "lavished the warmest affections of a very hot, tenacious heart" upon her, Nussey should "grow cold."<sup>65</sup> Repeatedly, too, she recurs to her ideal of "a cottage and a competency" of their own<sup>66</sup>: "I often plan the pleasant life which we might lead together, strengthening each other in that power of self-denial . . . which the past saints of God often attained to."<sup>67</sup> Without questioning the sincerity of Brontë's contrition, therefore, one may conclude that she was looking to Nussey for friendship and emotional support rather than spiritual guidance. Unconsciously she represented her mental crisis, which Nussey would never be able to understand, in terms of a conventional religious crisis, couched in appropriate language, because she felt this to be the surest means of arousing her friend's sympathy.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Brontë to Nussey (29 December 1836), WSC, I, pp. 149-150.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 140.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. (4 January 1838), WSC, I, p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. (20 February 1837), WSC, I, p. 153.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 143.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. (1836), WSC, I, p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. (6 December 1836), WSC, I, p. 147.

<sup>68</sup> Brontë refers to Calvinism twice in her letters, but only because it was the simplest way of giving Nussey, who moved in Calvinist circles, at least an idea of the fear of intellectual pride which was haunting her. In the first

Nussey, however, lived too far away and was told too little about the causes of Brontë's self-accusations, to be able to help in a meaningful way. To aggravate her despair, moreover, Brontë increasingly suffered from the hopelessness and undefined feelings of desolation to which she had been subject from childhood. As early as the autumn of 1835, she began to see her surroundings swathed in doom and gloom, conceiving a particular horror for the school-room. There she would sit, "in that mirthless lifeless room/ Cramped, chilled & deadened by its gloom," watching the "grisly night/ Closing the day's sepulchral light."<sup>69</sup> By Easter 1837, when the school moved to Dewsbury Moor, a stifling feeling of hypochondria had grown upon her. She endured this "most dreadful doom, far worse than that of a man with healthy nerves buried for the same length of time in a subterranean dungeon," for a year.<sup>70</sup> She told Mary Taylor that it was a physical, not a mental illness.<sup>71</sup>

During these years as a teacher, Brontë engaged in two kinds of imaginative activity -- one which fuelled her violent longings, and one which tended to assuage them. On the one hand, she continued her habit of "sitting alone . . . , engaged in ambitious reveries of l'avenir, and amusing [herself] with wild and extravagant imaginations."<sup>72</sup> Drawing tantalizing mental pictures of the exciting life which had probably escaped her for ever, she almost deliberately fanned her rebellion against the fact that "a thousand wishes" milling

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reference, she employs a conditional clause: "if the Doctrine of Calvin be true" (WSC, I, p. 143). In the second reference, Nussey erased a pronoun or proper name. Tom Winnifrith suggests that the manuscript used to read "your ghastly Calvinistic doctrines," that is, the doctrines mentioned by Nussey in an earlier letter or in conversation ("Charlotte Brontë and Calvinism," p. 18).

<sup>69</sup> "We wove a web in childhood" (19 December 1835), Poems, p. 167.

<sup>70</sup> Brontë to Margaret Wooler (1846), WSC, II, p. 116.

<sup>71</sup> Gaskell, p. 580.

<sup>72</sup> Visits in Verreopolis, vol. 2, Writings, p. 319.

around in her mind "must die with me for they will never be fulfilled."<sup>73</sup> Closely bound up with her irritableness and continual disparagement of her pupils, this indulgence of her "fiery imagination" deepened her sense of guilt. On the other hand, Brontë also continued to visit her "divine, silent, unseen land of thought," Angria.<sup>74</sup> This enabled her to forget for a while the glorious visions with which her "fiery imagination" was torturing her; it silenced for a while her conscience, which was condemning her for her arrogance; and it alleviated her hypochondria.

Circumstances at school, however, were unfavourable to the pursuit of her comforting dreams. She could only think or write about Angria during the occasional "half hour's leisure" on dull Saturday afternoons or while the pupils were having their meals.<sup>75</sup> Frequently she would be interrupted. One day, when she had withdrawn to the dining-room and an "apparition" was before her, "Miss Wooler came in with a plate of butter in her hand."<sup>76</sup> Another day, having sneaked off to the common bedroom, she was disturbed by the pupils, who unexpectedly came in "to get their curl-papers."<sup>77</sup> At other times, she had to make the most of the few spare minutes while supervising the pupils doing their lessons. Then she would be closely watched:

I'm just going to write . . . -- encompassed by the bulls (query calves of Bashen\*) all wondering why I write with my eyes shut -- staring, gaping long their astonishment -- A C--k on one side of me [--] E L--r on the other and Miss W--r in the back-ground . . . .<sup>78</sup>

73 "I'm just going to write."

74 Ibid.

75 "My Compliments to the weather."

76 "Well here I am at Roe-Head."

77 "I'm just going to write."

78 Ibid. Psalm twenty-two, to which Brontë alludes here, vividly illustrates her perception of her desolate condition:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me  
and art so far from saving me, from heeding my groans?

. . . . .

Often she would be disturbed:

I had really utterly forgot where I was and all the gloom & cheerlessness of my situation . . . 'Miss Brontë what are you thinking about?' said a voice that dissipated all the charm & Miss Lister thrust her little rough black head into my face, 'Sic transit' &c.<sup>79</sup>

After such interruptions, her visions were "irrevocably gone," and a fortnight might elapse before she could find time again to write.<sup>80</sup>

Under these hostile circumstances, Brontë could not pursue her dreams of Angria as circumspectly as she did at home. There, "in that little room with the low narrow bed & bare white-washed walls," she would sit "on the low bed-stead, [her] eyes fixed on the window," and allow her imagination to float gently away while "a long tale was perhaps then evolving itself in [her] mind."<sup>81</sup> At school, in contrast, keen to make full use of her spare time, fearful of interruptions, and impatient to cast off at least temporarily her burden of gloomy thoughts, she tried to induce as quickly as possible a state of almost suspended consciousness. Having to rouse a

Be not far from me,  
for trouble is near, and I have no helper.  
A herd of bulls surrounds me,  
great bulls of Bashan beset me.  
Ravening and roaring lions  
open their mouths wide against me.  
My strength drains away like water  
and all my bones are loose.

[A] band of ruffians rings me round,  
and they have hacked off my hands and my feet.  
I tell my tale of misery,  
while they look on and gloat.

(The New English Bible [Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970], vol. 1, pp. 744-745.)

<sup>79</sup> Prose conclusion to "We wove a web in childhood" (19 December 1835), Poems, p. 170.

<sup>80</sup> "My Compliments to the weather."

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

faculty which lay "dormant" away from "Haworth and home"<sup>82</sup>, and which in its "torpidity" she sometimes thought "dead"<sup>83</sup>, added to the strain which she put upon her imagination.

Throwing all caution to the winds, she responded to any "stormy blast" that would whirl her away "like heath in the wilderness for five seconds of ecstasy."<sup>84</sup> At other times, she induced almost violently a trance, during which she saw

Succeeding fast & faster still  
 Scenes that no words can give  
 And gathering strength from every thrill  
 They stir, the[y] breathe, they live  
 They live!<sup>85</sup>

Some of the resulting visions she recording with mingled astonishment and fear:

Never shall I Charlotte Brontë forget what a voice of wild & wailing music now came thrillingly to my mind's almost to my body's ear, nor how distinctly I sitting in the school-room at Roe-head saw the Duke of Zamorna leaning against that obelisk with the mute marble Victory above him the fern waving at his feet his black horse turned loose grazing among the heather . . . .<sup>86</sup>

On another occasion she experienced an even more "disturbed but fascinating spell":

What I imagined grew morbidly vivid. I remember I quite seemed to see with my bodily eyes a lady standing in the hall of a gentleman's house . . . . [--] as she waited I most distinctly heard the front door open & saw the soft moonlight disclosed upon a lawn outside, & beyond the lawn at a distance I saw a town with lights twinkling through the gloaming.<sup>87</sup>

82 "Well here I am at Roe-Head."

83 "I'm just going to write."

84 "Well here I am at Roe-Head."

85 "Long since as I remember well" (c. 19 January 1836), Poems, p. 177.

86 "We wove a web in childhood," Poems, p. 170.

87 "All this day I have been in a dream."

Brontë appropriately compares such trances to the hallucinatory state of mind induced by "opium."<sup>88</sup>

Inevitably, Brontë's ruthless exploitation of her imagination took its toll. On the night of 11 August 1836, for example, she suffered a kind of fit:

the tall man washing his bloody hands in a bason & the dark beauty standing by with a light remained pictured on my mind's eye with irksome & alarming distinctness. I grew frightened at the vivid glow of the candle at the reality of the lady's erect & symmetrical figure . . . . I felt confounded & annoyed I scarcely knew by what. at last I became aware of a feeling like a heavy weight laid across me. I knew I was wide awake & that it was dark, & that moreover the ladies [, i.e., pupils,] were now come into the room . . . . they perceived me lying on the bed & I heard them talking about me. I wanted to speak -- to rise -- it was impossible -- I felt that this was a frightful predicament -- that it would not do. the weight pressed me as if some huge animal had flung itself across me. a horrid apprehension quickened every pulse I had. I must get up I thought & I did so with a start.<sup>89</sup>

When Brontë wrote down this experience in October 1836, she concluded that she had "had enough of morbidly vivid realizations. every advantage has its corresponding disadvantage."<sup>90</sup> Angria, however, was her only refuge, "the ark which for me floats alone on the billows of this world's desolate and boundless deluge."<sup>91</sup> Before long, therefore, she relapsed, and over the next twelve months exhausted her imaginative resources.

By the autumn of 1837, Brontë's health had broken down; her mind was exhausted after the prolonged struggle to suppress her culpable feelings of intellectual pride and her violent longings for a fuller life; and her overtaxed imagination was worn out. In November 1837, she suddenly left

88 "All this day I have been in a dream."

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 "Well here I am at Roe-Head."



Dewsbury Moor after a quarrel with Miss Wooler about her sister Anne's health. Returning on 30 January 1838, her own health soon failed, and on 23 May she went home again on doctor's advice. In August she returned once more, taking her final leave on 22 December 1838.<sup>92</sup> By this time she had recuperated her health and come to terms with her guilt and unfulfilled longings. Because neither her health nor her mental struggles are discussed in the writings of 1836 to 1838, one can but assume that both body and mind benefited from the long periods spent in the peace and quiet of Haworth. By late 1838, her imagination, too, had recovered its natural vigour. The pattern of this recovery can be traced in the narratives which she wrote between 1836 and late 1838.

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<sup>92</sup> It used to be thought that Brontë ceased teaching at Miss Wooler's school on 23 May 1838. In 1983, however, Edward Chitham pointed out that Brontë's letters to Nussey of 9 June 1838 and 20 January 1839 suggest that she returned to Dewsbury Moor and did not leave until late 1838 (Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith, Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems, pp. 27-28). In 1984 Jennifer Cox added that Brontë could not have been left in charge of the Carters' baby before June 1838, and must therefore have returned to Dewsbury Moor later that year ("Emily at Law Hill, 1838: Corroborative Evidence," BST, XVIII, 94 [1984], 270).

It is, in fact, possible to pin-point the exact date of Brontë's departure, for in a letter of 30 July 1855 to Elizabeth Gaskell, Mr Brontë wrote that his daughter "officiated as teacher from 29th July 1835, till Decr. 22nd, 1838" ("The Reverend Patrick Brontë and Mrs E.C. Gaskell," BST, VIII, 43 [1933], 93). In 1855 Mr Brontë wrote several letters to Gaskell to supply information for her biography (Ibid., 83-100). Although his dating is occasionally erratic, he is reasonably careful in the letter of 30 July 1855. The accuracy of other dates suggests that he was referring to some of the many "memorandum books" which he kept during his life (see for example B.E. Stanley, "Patrick Brontë's Notebook," BST, XIV, 72 [1962], 17-19).

## Chapter Five

### IN A DISTANT RETREAT (1836-1838)

During the school holidays of 1836, 1837, and 1838, Brontë wrote seven narratives of some 15,000 to 20,000 words each<sup>1</sup> and a shorter one of 4,500 words.<sup>2</sup> They are known as novelettes<sup>3</sup>, although Brontë herself consistently refers to them as "books."<sup>4</sup> Each narrative consists of short sections,

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<sup>1</sup> Except for Passing Events, Brontë did not give titles to these seven narratives:  
Passing Events (21-29 April 1836), Novelettes, pp. 35-72.  
The Return of Zamorna (c. 24 December 1836-January 1837), WSW, II, pp. 281-314.  
Julia (early June-29 June 1837), Novelettes, pp. 87-121.  
Four Years Ago (early July-21 July 1837), manuscript untraced, transcript by C.W. Hatfield in BPM.  
Mina Laury (December 1837-17 January 1838), Novelettes, pp. 127-169.  
Stancliffe's Hotel (early June-28 June 1838), unpublished manuscript, BPM: B(114).  
The Duke of Zamorna (early July-21 July 1838), WSW, II, pp. 348-401.

<sup>2</sup> It is all up! (c. 24-28 June 1838), Novelettes, pp. 72-82. Printed as the last part of Passing Events, this manuscript has not been previously recognized as a separate narrative. The dating of It is all up! is discussed in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> These narratives were first named novelettes by Gérin (Novelettes, p. 19), because she assumed that the manuscript which Brontë called "the demi-semi novelette of an anonymous Scribe" in her letter to Hartley Coleridge consisted of several of the narratives written before 1840 (Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 125). Brontë, however, sent Coleridge Messrs Percy and West (late 1840), her first attempt to write a novel.

<sup>4</sup> For example: "The last scene in my last book" (Novelettes, p. 127); "When I concluded my last book" (Novelettes, p. 277); "I have now written a great many books" (WSW, II, p. 403). Brontë called her narratives books, not because they were designed as literary efforts, but because her narrator, Wellesley, is a professional chronicler of Angrian affairs.

divided by blank spaces, which correspond to Brontë's writing sessions. All narratives are sequences of loosely-connected episodes, conceived against the background of the Angrian civil war, Zamorna's defeat and exile, and his ultimate reinstatement as king. These events were plotted by Branwell and described in detail in the ten volumes of his History of Angria (June 1835-December 1837).

The early novelettes show that Brontë's habit at Roe Head of intensifying the vividness of her visions of Angria by precipitate descents into a state of trance seriously impaired her imagination. When she sat down to think of Angria in the days before she went to Roe Head, her "ideas" would soon form a "defined picture."<sup>5</sup> By April 1836, however, she was finding it increasingly difficult to organize these fleeting pictures into coherent and meaningful scenes. Passing Events, for example, opens with a hectic appeal to Richton, the writer:

let him paint to the life, the members gathering round that table of heavy & dark honduras whose large circle groans under the piled documents of state, let him describe the mood of ire or thought or pride or scorn, that contracts the brow of each haughty councillor -- let him detail with graphic skill the imperious bearing contrasted with the civil garb of one, & the martial dress & grave deliberative aspect of another. let him with magic power show the whole room haply adorned with mirrors . . . .<sup>6</sup>

After three pages of repetitive incantation and an effort to force her imagination to settle down by recalling a long ballad, Brontë falters:

Reader, as yet I have written nothing, I would fain fall into some regular strain of composition, but I cannot, my mind is like a prism full of colours but not of forms. A thousand tints are there, brilliant & varied, & if they would resolve into the [shape] of some flower or bird or gem, I could picture [it] before you. I feel I

<sup>5</sup> "All this day I have been in a dream."

<sup>6</sup> Passing Events, Novelettes, p. 35. Gérin's transcription incorrectly reads "deliberate" instead of "deliberative" (l. 8). There is a facsimile of this leaf in WSW, II, opposite title-page.

could. A Panorama is round me whose scenes shift before I can at all fix their features.<sup>7</sup>

After two more abortive attempts, she finally manages to pin down a brief scene.

Passing Events, It is all up!, Julia, and to a lesser extent Four Years Ago and Stancliffe's Hotel, are strings of loosely-related scenes and attempts at scenes, confirming that Brontë's enfeebled imagination was unable to concentrate for more than brief spans of time. Mina Laury, although a more consecutive narrative, she acknowledged to be a "Failure" because of its "Feebleness, Dullness & Iteration."<sup>8</sup> The Return of Zamorna and The Duke of Zamorna are reasonably coherent, but many of the scenes are only pale reflections of her former visions: "There! one white wing like a snow-flake and another! They light on the beach, dim, silent. These are but phantoms of the vivid creations I remember."<sup>9</sup> Her occasional attempts to conjure up truly exciting visions nearly always fail:

I began this work with the intention of writing something high and pathetic . . . I strove to lull myself into a sort of dream which should recall all the fair, the wild, the wondrous of the past . . . Let it suffice to say that I found this pitch far too high for me, I could not keep it up. I was forced to descend a peg.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Brontë's main preoccupation throughout these eight novelettes is to ensure her continued involvement in Angria by curbing her imaginative intensity, as a closer examination of her narrator's personality, his handling of his material, and the roles of Zamorna and the principal female characters will show.

Brontë's narrator is still Charles Wellesley, though

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39. Gérin's transcription reads "shade" and omits "[it]"

<sup>8</sup> Mina Laury, Novelettes, p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> The Return of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 285.

<sup>10</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, pp. 373, 375.

he now calls himself Charles Townshend. Townshend's existence in the margin of Zamorna's world of art and high politics is shared by several intimate acquaintances, whose roles in Angrian events are as negligible as his own. Their function in his narratives, however, is significant, for they not only underline his considerably reduced social status, but also mirror various aspects of his contradictory personality. Some of his friends are projections of those aspects of his personality to which he is unwilling to admit, while others serve to draw attention to aspects which he wishes to be particularly noticed.

One of Townshend's closest friends is Lofty Macara, a hypochondriac and opium addict, whose "courses of secret but delirious debauchery" are well-known to him.<sup>11</sup> Macara's devious mind, too, is an open book to him: "I know him, aye as well as I know myself."<sup>12</sup> The recurrent theme of their meetings is Macara's opium habit. One beautiful summer evening in June 1838, for example, Townshend and Louisa Vernon, another friend, come across Macara while he is sitting in an unlighted room and "wearing a rapt expression -- as if every faculty were spell-bound in some absorbing train of thought."<sup>13</sup> While Townshend, who evidently knows what is coming, falls "forthwith to the discussion of the sandwiches & chicken," Macara drinks some water to cool his throbbing head:

'I must not try this experiment often --' As he spoke his hand shook so convulsively that he could hardly replace the glass on the table -- Smiling grimly at this evidence of abused nerves he continued -- 'Really Townshend . . . I begin to find that this system of mine[,] rational as I thought it[,] is fraught with the most irresistible temptation --'

"[R]eally reader," Townshend comments, "it is difficult to deal with a man like Macara -- who has candour at will to screen even his weakest points from attack -- however infamous

<sup>11</sup> Passing Events, Novelettes, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Julia, Novelettes, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.

may be the position in which he is surprised." "Townshend,"  
Macara continues

I dare say you do not know what it is to look at an unclouded sun, at pleasant fields & young woods crowding green & bright to the edge of a river -- & from these fair objects to be unable to derive any feeling but such as is winged with sadness. However[,] I am familiar\* with this state of mind . . . . I Townshend felt that -- still and bright as the day was closing -- fair as it promised to rise on the morrow -- this summer loveliness was nothing to me -- no so I walked up to the house -- I entered this room . . . . [--] the Dusk approached & in that mood of mind I watched it slowly veiling every object -- clothing every tree of the shrubbery -- with such disguises as a haunted, a distorted, a blackened imagination could suggest. Memory whispered to me that in former years I could have sat at such an hour in such a scene -- & from the rising moon the darkening landscape on which I looked -- the quiet little chamber where I sat -- have gathered images all replete with bliss for the present -- with softened happiness for the future -- Was it so now? No Mr Townshend -- I was in a state of mind which I will not mock you by endeavouring to describe -- but the gloom the despair became unendurable -- dread forebodings rushed upon me -- whose power I could not withstand -- I felt myself on the brink of some hideous disaster & a vague influence ever & anon pushed me over -- till clinging wildly to life & reason -- I almost lost consciousness in the faintness of mortal terror. Now Mr Townshend -- so suffering -- how far did I err -- when I had recourse to the sovereign specific which a simple narcotic drug offered me? I opened this little box & sir I did not hesitate -- no I tasted -- the change was wrought quickly -- in five minutes -- I who had been the most miserable wretch -- under that heaven -- sat a rational happy man -- soothed to peace of mind, to rest of body -- capable of creating sweet thoughts, of tasting bliss, of dropping these fetters of anguish which had restrained me & floating away -- with light frame & soaring soul into the fairest regions imagination can disclose --

Now Mr Townshend -- I injured no fellow-creature by this -- I did not even brutalize myself. probably my life may be shortened by indulgence of this kind -- but what of that [--] the Eternal Sleep will come sometime & as well sooner as later.

"I've no objection," Townshend returns "coolly." "What nonsense to make such a piece of work about low-spirits," the light-hearted Louisa adds. Townshend, finding Macara to be "in much too sentimental a mood to serve [his] turn," departs somewhat hastily.

A cursory reading of this passage suggests that Brontë is recording one of her own experiences at Roe Head in order to explain, if not to justify, her tendency to stretch her visionary imagination to its limits. Macara's hypochondria does indeed reflect, not only Brontë's similar affliction, but her overall depression. Yet Macara's description of his predicament is no straightforward apology, but an argument directed at "Mr Townshend." Known as "the most skilful compound of malignency & dissimulation in Africa," Macara is attempting to persuade Townshend to follow his example and recklessly abandon himself to the pursuit of the pleasures of the imagination at any cost.<sup>14</sup> Townshend responds by munching away at a sandwich and other marks of studied indifference, while suggesting that he sees through Macara's "system of tactics." Yet his aloofness in this and other scenes barely disguises the fascination his friend has for him. Townshend, in effect, also suffers from fits of hypochondria, although he manages to hide them behind a feverish display of high spirits. He, too, has an excitable imagination, although he is determined not to let it burst its bonds. Macara, indeed, is Townshend's evil genius, continually tempting him to throw all caution to the winds. As such, the relations between the two friends serve to dramatize Brontë's inner struggle between recklessness and fragile self-restraint.

Many of Townshend's other friends, like Louisa Vernon, are careless, easy-going creatures, lightly burdened with imagination, whose one aim in life is to enjoy themselves. Townshend's preference for their society serves to underline his ability to cope with his recurrent low spirits without relying unduly on his imagination. In addition, he spends much of his time in the company of Surena Ellrington (his landlord, who has "the most insignificant physiognomy mind can conceive"<sup>15</sup>), Greenwood Peascod (Mary Percy's raffish valet), Tom Dugham (who runs a farm at the foot of Boulshill), and

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<sup>14</sup> Julia, Novelettes, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> Passing Events, Novelettes, p. 51.

others far below him in social status. Thus he can often be found in the travellers' room of Stancliffe's Hotel, surrounded by specimens of "[y]our Angrian commercial traveller" and revelling in the fact that the likes of Culpepper and Hoskins are not only his social inferiors, but are also among "the greatest scamps in existence . . . -- anything more systematically unprincipled, more recklessly profligate than these men . . . it is not easy to conceive."<sup>16</sup> Not without self-satisfaction, he frequently dwells on the lack of money and self-respect which makes him seek out such companions: "Not an atom of pride do I possess to check me! I'd as soon be a shoe-black in a merry jovial servants hall as heir-apparent to Wellingtonsland."<sup>17</sup> His purpose in giving such prominence to the low company he keeps and the genteel poverty in which he lives, is to draw a sharp contrast between himself and the Angrian elite, whose expensively furnished salons and sumptuous life-style have been an index of their luxurious imaginations ever since the earliest juvenilia. Anyone who is so obviously resigned to a lowly status in Angria as himself, Townshend suggests, can hardly be suspected of deliberately overstraining his imagination.

To leave no doubt about his inexcitable imagination, Townshend's narratives are punctuated by reminders of his insouciance: "Time & chance shall decide me . . . -- I've just rounded off my nineteenth year & entered on my twentieth. I'm a neat figure -- a competent scholar -- a popular author -- a gentleman & a man of the world. Who then shall restrain me?"<sup>18</sup> More provoking are his continual efforts to appear a dandy who is not merely footloose and fancy-free, but an egocentric fop, whose thoughts never stray far from his captivating exterior, and whose most cherished, and indeed only, worldly possessions are

<sup>16</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.

<sup>17</sup> It is all up!, Novelettes, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.



4 shirts -- 6 fronts -- 4 pair cotton -- 2 pair silk stockings. 1 pair morocco pumps -- 1 dress satin waist-coat -- 1 dress coat -- 1 pair dress pantaloons -- 1 pair nankeens -- 1 brush & comb -- 1 bottle macassar oil -- 1 tooth-brush -- box [?] tooth-powder -- 1 pot cream of roses. 1 case of razors N-B for show not use -- two cakes of almond soap. 1 bottle eau de cologne -- 1 bottle eau de mille fleurs. 1 pair curling-irons -- C'est tout --<sup>19</sup>

Most conspicuous is Townshend's forced indifference towards the Angrian civil war and the suffering of the people caught up in its catastrophic events:

I laugh at the anxiety written on the brows of monied men who in the grand suspense know not whether tomorrow may not behold them bankrupts. What goods I have are portable . . . . I'm burdened neither by domestic ties, religious scruples nor political predelictions[\*]. I never could understand what home-pleasures & family affections meant . . . . [Northangerland] will never prescribe me, & if he does, where are the policemen, the bailiffs, the blood-hounds that could catch me? the jail that can hold me? the halter that can hang me? -- were the street[s] of Verdopolis slippery with blood, they'd afford firm enough footing for Charles Townshend, were each member of society a police spy, a law sleuth-dog upon the other Charles Townshend would out-do them all in treachery, in double-dealing, in blood-thirsty hypocrisy.<sup>20</sup>

Townshend's defiant cynicism is as violent as his abuse of Zamorna in 1833 and 1834. In those days, he was expressing his dissatisfaction with his peripheral role in his brother's world. This time, he is as grimly determined to prove that he is content with his peripheral role.

The various strands of Townshend's personality meet in his role as a professional chronicler of Angrian society. In the earlier writings, Townshend had been at no pains to disguise his contempt for Captain Tree, the obnoxious writer of pot-boilers. In the novelettes, he himself claims to be a hack. Returning home one evening, for example, he is pressed by his landlord to pay his rent. The few guineas he has, however, are destined for his "Laundress, who really, poor

<sup>19</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.

<sup>20</sup> It is all up!, Novelettes, pp. 80-81.

soul, deserved payment as she had got up nearly a waggon-load of my linen during the last fortnight."<sup>21</sup> Surena, therefore, compels him to stay in his room and write a book, making him strip off the emblems of his careless vanity, his clothes, to prevent him from absconding. Rather enjoying this humiliation, he sits down to his task,

and shirtless, vestless, coatless, with a blanket over my shoulders in lieu of the legitimate gear, proceeded to write at the beck of Surena Ellrington, the linen-draper, to procure money to pay my lodgings. This is no degradation to me. I have been in worse pickles than this many a time.<sup>22</sup>

By means of such scenes and other pejorative references to his role as author, Townshend establishes that he is not driven to writing by an overheated imagination.

Whereas Townshend's self-dramatization is often crude in its straining after effects, his approach to the act of story-telling itself is circumspect and muted. The transition from one narrative mode to the other tends to be awkward, but is not inconsistent with Brontë's objective. By reminding herself of the character of her alter ego at intervals she could keep a firm grip on her imagination while she was entering the world of Angria, and relax her grip gradually as she gained confidence in her ability to control her imagination. The scene following Townshend's quarrel with Surena over the rent, for example, begins:

Oh reader what a strange aspect of uncertainty hangs over everything. Do you not now feel in doubt as to what picture the sketchy and airy Townshend will first present to your fancy. I have you by the hand and am your guide, and we are in a long gallery, the paintings of which are all veiled. Let us suppose this gallery in an old baronial mansion. Let us imagine it on a quiet leisurely afternoon . . . . We are alone. Sit down on that antique

<sup>21</sup> The Return of Zamorna, WSW, II, p.283.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

chair in the centre and I will silently pass round and draw the curtains one by one.<sup>23</sup>

Thus he gradually approaches a description of Mary Percy's sad life at Alnwick.

The preceding example illustrates Townshend's typical movement from his position as writer to an action in which he participates and then to an Angrian scene which he recalls or observes. Yet his pictorial approach is uncharacteristically static. Most of the sections of his novelettes open with descriptions of landscapes, houses, and weather conditions, as in this example, in which he gently accelerates his narrative pace:

There now lie before me a quire of blank sheets which it is my intention to cover with manuscript, and not a word have I prepared for the occasion, not a scene, not an incident -- yet somehow my feelings, far from being uneasy, are similar to those I have often experienced, when with a carpet bag containing two shirts, four pocket-handkerchiefs, a pair of stockings & a suit, I have mounted the Edwardston Mail or the Western Iris, or the Freetown Mercury -- & without aim or end allowed myself to be rattled away in the dawn of a June morning . . . . Supposing myself to be going North -- awa', up the Valley -- about noon . . . I drop off just where that shady lane winds away from the high-road between a double row of hawthorn . . . -- and I am left standing solitary with a cow that has wandered from its pasture feeding [quietly] beside me . . . Follow me still, reader . . . . We are now among the straight stems of a young plantation . . . . What a pleasant landscape! . . . -- in the centre of this park-field, where it swells into a knoll of mossy sward -- stands a house large & grey & grand -- haply not more than fifty years old, with sash-windows . . . . We are at the Kitchen-door . . . . they're baking -- but there is no bustle here, it's all confined to the back kitchen where you see half a dozen young women -- servants as busy as bees . . . .<sup>24</sup>

Such opening passages, like this one, are often thinly veiled descriptions of Haworth Parsonage, the surrounding landscape, and, occasionally, domestic scenes in the parsonage. Nearly

<sup>23</sup> The Return of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 284.

<sup>24</sup> Julia, Novelettes, pp. 87-88. Gérin's transcription reads "feeding quickly" (l. 15).

all describe the actual weather conditions on the day Brontë was writing and are set in the early morning or early evening, which are the actual times of day when she wrote. Like Lucy Snowe, she "needed the fresh silence of morning, or the recluse peace of evening, to win from the Creative Impulse one evidence of his presence, one proof of his force."<sup>25</sup> This minute recreation of the circumstances in which she was writing suggests that her gradual approaches to her scenes served not only to check the pace of her imagination, but also to induce the calm state of mind which she used to enjoy in the little bedroom, her eyes fixed on the landscape outside the window, and her thoughts quietly floating away towards Angria.

Brontë's efforts to return to her earlier method of composition probably brought back memories of characters and events which had occupied her thoughts before she went to Roe Head. Recollecting these "visions of the far departed past" in tranquility prompted the idea of briefly elaborating some of them.<sup>26</sup> By writing down such memories, she would avoid the intensity of imagination demanded by new scenes, and need not strain her inventiveness in circumventing the emotionally exhausting catastrophies which Branwell was continually plotting. As a result, the novelettes are strewn with reminiscences. In Four Years Ago, for example, Townshend discovers an old society newspaper cutting which, according to Alexander, enables him to rationalize the actions of Zamorna and others during the recent political upheavals.<sup>27</sup> In fact, he is only enjoying himself by embellishing an ill-assorted collection of old scenes. In The Duke of Zamorna, a pocketbook full of old letters serves as an excuse for the reappearance of a confusing number of early scenes and characters. Alexander suggests that Brontë is "wandering through old melodramatic scenes," in search of a subject for a coherent narrative.<sup>28</sup> Brontë's

<sup>25</sup> Villette, p. 515.

<sup>26</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 348.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

confident tone, however, suggests no such loss of purpose. Instead, she appears to enjoy being able to reaffirm her commitment to Angria. Only towards the end, when she has exhausted the letters and attempts a higher "pitch," does she falter and is "forced to descend a peg."<sup>29</sup>

Approximately one quarter of the pages in the novelettes is devoted to Townshend's various self-presentations, the peripheral world in which he moves, and his diffident approach to his subject-matter. Zamorna, the women in Zamorna's life, and a cast of subsidiary characters also occupy a quarter each. In these three quarters, Brontë deliberately avoids describing the political and military turmoil in Angria, feeling more secure in concentrating on the private lives of her characters:

It may be the eve of battle, the sun perhaps is setting calm & glorious, the possible Death of war near at hand . . . . -- but stop, my recollections . . . have led me too far astray. let the Earl & the Major [, i.e., Branwell,] say I dilate on these things . . . I am but a crow, so I must be well content in the rookeries that shade Africa's ancestral Halls. I have but my own shanks to go on, therefore I can travel no farther than the groaning park-gates of the magnates. While Thornton far off . . . sits by the bivouac fire . . . & hears the sounds of the encamping army . . . , I stand by Julia in her chamber, I watch her as she sits alone on a low stool before her glowing hearth . . . .<sup>30</sup>

Brontë's reluctance to be drawn into the exciting events plotted by Branwell disproves Blom's suggestion, arising from her theory that Brontë felt guilty about her imagination, that "the civil war became the objective correlative" of her "ambivalent and mutually destructive internal impulses."<sup>31</sup> Alexander's suggestion that Brontë was "tired of war" as early as December 1836 is also unlikely, for only a few weeks

<sup>29</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 375.

<sup>30</sup> Passing Events, Novelettes, pp. 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Blom, "Apprenticeship in 'The World Below': Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia," 294.

earlier she had expressed her ambition to write poems like Campbell's "Hohenlinden."<sup>32</sup> At this time, too, she was "a little impatient" with Miss Wooler for not sympathizing with her keen interest in "the 'pomp and circumstance of war.'"<sup>33</sup> At home, however, resolved not to risk overtaxing her imagination, she opted for "the recollection of domestic scenes," which proved "singularly soothing."<sup>34</sup>

Bravey's Rotunda and the salons of Verdopolis, once the setting for Zamorna's greatest triumphs as a poet and patron of the arts, have also receded to the background. Instead, the king of Angria is nearly always shown at one of his modest country retreats. There, amidst the bustle of a small household, he spends much of his time in dressing, eating, and other equally unheroic occupations. Since Townshend shares Brontë's "great partiality for morning pictures," Zamorna can occasionally be seen coming downstairs in his dressing-gown to glance through the newspapers and eat a hearty breakfast.<sup>35</sup> On other mornings, after performing "the ablutions of a mahomatan," he is shaved by his valet and then sits down to dictate a few dispatches while nibbling at a biscuit.<sup>36</sup> Before long he wants his dinner, and enjoys both the "Gigot dressed à la Venison" and the currie.<sup>37</sup>

Within this domestic context, the women in Zamorna's life, who had been ruthlessly excluded from the inner Angrian world in 1833 and 1834, succeed in drawing closer to their idol. Thus Mina Laury manages to keep him to herself for brief periods by creating a relaxed, homely atmosphere:

for instance, last summer evening that he came here, the sun & flowers & quietness brightened his noble features

<sup>32</sup> Alexander, p. 156. "I'm just going to write."

<sup>33</sup> Brontë to Wooler (31 March 1848), WSC, II, p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> Julia, Novelettes, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Mina Laury, Novelettes, p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Julia, Novelettes, p. 107.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

with such happiness. I could tell his heart was at rest for as he lay in the shade . . . , I heard him hum the airs he long, long ago played on his guitar at Mornington. I was rewarded then to feel that the house I kept was pleasant enough to make him forget Angria and recur to home.<sup>38</sup>

Even Mary Percy, who used to be the principal victim of Zamorna's tendency to spurn those who idolize him, is able to enjoy his company. In the opening pages of Passing Events, she is still wasting away, but before long she seeks him out, determined to "twine about [him] like Ivy."<sup>39</sup> In the opening pages of The Return of Zamorna, she is again living in "such solitude, such deadliness of Life," but the climax of the narrative is once more her reunion with her husband.<sup>40</sup> In the concluding scene of Stancliffe's Hotel, Zamorna is in a "pet" and demonstratively takes up a book; "it was poetry[.] a volume of Byron." Soon Mary ventures "to close the obnoxious volume & take it from his hand." After this symbolic gesture, and having soothed his ruffled feelings, she leans "her happy head on a breast she thought she might trust."<sup>41</sup>

The domestication of Zamorna, her "mental King," is consistent with Brontë's previous conception of his function in her writings. In his capacity as a Byronic hero he had never been intrinsically interesting to her. The incarnation of her fascinating but inaccessible imaginary world, he was a narrative device which enabled her to channel her longings and frustrations into the responses of Charles Wellesley and various female characters to him. When she realized that she must tone down her imagination and that Angria should no longer be the battlefield of her desires, she dramatized her new approach to her inner world by focussing, not on Zamorna's fascinations, but on his more quiet charms perceived in a domestic context.

38 Passing Events, Novelettes, p. 45.

39 Ibid., p. 72.

40 The Return of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 288.

41 Stancliffe's Hotel.

In July 1838, in the last of the novelettes written during the Roe Head and Dewsbury Moor years, Charles Townshend describes his situation thus:

In a distant retreat very far indeed from the turmoil of cities provincial or metropolitan, I am now forgetting all the worries of the past spring and winter. A plane tree waving its large leaves in the wind is the most life-like object my eyes may now rest on. Yet when I rise and look out of the narrow window -- a long way off on a dim hill-side I see herds feeding. Near at hand however, in my cottage -- its garden and beneath its shadowing tree -- this morning sun rises over solitude . . . There is a bench under that plane-tree, and all yesterday afternoon I lay stretched upon it in the languor of July heats -- just in front of the clean calm house where I lodge -- musing divinely.<sup>42</sup>

This is Charlotte Brontë at Haworth Parsonage for the holidays, enjoying in the carefree atmosphere of home "soft but dim glimpses" of Angria, and reflecting on the causes which led her to over-excite her imagination at school.<sup>43</sup> Subsequently, as in the old days, she turned to writing, still hesitant and proceeding circumspectly to allow her imagination to recuperate.

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<sup>42</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 348.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Six

### FAREWELL TO ANGRIA AND AFTER (1838-1841)

Between 22 December 1838, when she returned from Dewsbury Moor, and late April 1839, Brontë wrote two more novelettes, known as Henry Hastings<sup>1</sup> and But it is not in Society.<sup>2</sup> The brief extant fragment of But it is not in Society describes a young governess, Miss West, whose pride and ingrained reserve forbid her from revealing her vivid imagination and intense emotions to the aristocrats and nouveaux riches among whom she is forced to earn her living. Elizabeth Hastings, the principal character in Henry Hastings, is also a governess and suffers from nearly identical inhibitions. Elizabeth's character is described at some length. However, she is primarily seen through the eyes of William Percy. Moreover, she is continually being contrasted to Jane Moore, who makes only one brief appearance in Henry Hastings. Unlike the two governesses, William Percy and Jane Moore appear in Brontë's previous writings. To determine the significance of the two governesses, therefore, the characters

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Hastings (late December 1838-26 March 1839), Novelettes, pp. 177-270. The manuscript consists of two parts. Alexander and Gérin suggest that the first part was written on 24 February 1839, the date at the bottom of the last leaf of this part (Alexander, pp. 183, 285 n. 14; Gérin, Novelettes, p. 173). This is impossible because it contains some 20,000 words, covering 45½ pages of print (Novelettes, pp. 177-222). The narrative was probably begun in December 1838 because Brontë, who developed a habit in the novelettes of mentioning the actual day of the week and the date on which she was writing, refers to "December-rains" in the fifth section (Novelettes, p. 182).

<sup>2</sup> But it is not in Society (April 1839), BPM: B133(6) and (7). The eight lines of poetry (B133[6]) are printed in Poems, p. 257. The dating of this manuscript is discussed in Appendix B.

of William Percy and Jane Moore prior to December 1838 must be briefly reviewed first.

It was Branwell who, in October 1833, created Edward and William Percy, and for many years continued to be fascinated both by their father's unnatural hatred for them and by Edward's tyrannical treatment of his younger brother. Charlotte appears to have been much less interested in the two brothers, although they do figure in her writings before 1836. By occasional glances at Edward's success as a manufacturer, she drew attention to the sound industrial base of her world of artists and poets.<sup>3</sup> Also, Edward's malicious efforts to prevent William from ever becoming more than a humble clerk in his mill underlined Zamorna's determination to exclude his younger brother, Charles Wellesley, from the inner circles of Verdopolis.

After 1835, William Percy, by now an officer in the Angrian army, gains some prominence as one of Townshend's cronies. A footloose man about town, who manifests his utter indifference to his peripheral role in the world of Angria by continually dwelling on his cold-blooded egotism both in the field and in society, he would be a mere copy of Townshend, were it not that, instead of claiming to be well in control of his imagination, he claims to have none at all. Often, indeed, when Townshend happens to be in danger of over-exciting his imagination, he is either reminded of Percy or meets him in person. On one occasion, for example, Percy rudely interrupts one of Townshend's sombre, poetical moods:

It was the 23 of April, I shall remember it . . . . The heavens were gathering their sombre blue, in the quarter where the full & newly-risen moon hung over the Warner hills, that blue was softened by a suffusion of mellow gold, the Zenith was dark & little stars were kindling out of its gloom. 'Is any one man amongst the scores that surround me thinking about that sky?' said I, speaking unconsciously aloud -- 'No, why the d---l should they, Mr Townshend?' answered a voice close at my elbow . . .

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the description of Percy's mills, only partly quoted, in the passage from Duke of Z & E Percy, p. 59 above.

'Are you of a poetical temperament Major Percy' asked I.  
'You be d---d' was the civil answer.<sup>4</sup>

On another occasion Townshend has just developed a sentimental passion for Jane Moore, when he comes across Percy. Recently returned from the African war, Percy soon dispels Townshend's romantic mood, not least by complacently quoting some newspaper reports on his exploits in Africa:

'the efforts made by that Gallant Officer to extirpate the savages are beyond all praise -- scarcely a day passes but five or six are hung under the walls of Dongola.' Then again -- 'A signal instance of vengeance was exhibited at Katgoom -- last week by order of Sir William Percy. A soldier had been missing some days from his regiment [and was found to have been murdered]. Sir William instantly ordered out two of the fiercest & keenest Hounds in his leashes -- they tracked up the murderers in a few hours. When seized the blood-stained wretches were sunk up to the neck in the deep mire of a cane-brake -- Sir William had them shot through the head where they stood & their bodies [?left] in the filth which offered them such a suitable sepulchre' --<sup>5</sup>

Between early 1836 and July 1838, in effect, Percy is Lofty Macara's counterpart: whereas Macara is continually tempting Townshend into abandoning his tight grip on his imagination, Percy acts as a constant reminder to Townshend of the personality which he has chosen to adopt to control his imagination.

Jane Moore, unlike Percy, was entirely Charlotte's own creation. One afternoon in the autumn of 1837, sitting in the school room, she decided to picture to herself a lesser Angrian character, because the "inaccessibly sacred beings -- whose fates are interwoven with the highest of the high" -- she "scarce dare think of" except in total solitude.<sup>6</sup> The beautiful young lady who appears in her vision -- "so vivid so obvious at this moment" -- is "rather tall, well & roundly

<sup>4</sup> Passing Events, Novelettes, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.

<sup>6</sup> "My Compliments to the weather." Subsequent quotations in this and the next two paragraphs are also from this unpublished manuscript.

formed," and has a "bright, perfect face, with eyes & bloom & divine expression whose realization thrills the heart to its core." The girl's "frank cheerful look" bears witness to her "good nature" and "kind-heartedness." At this point a blank space in the manuscript indicates that Brontë's writing was interrupted.

When Brontë returned to her manuscript, she gave her portrait an unexpected twist by discontinuing her habit of associating perfect female beauty with a deep and sensitive imagination. The "nameless & casual visitant," only now identified as Jane Moore, turns out to be the youngest daughter of a prosperous merchant, who, true to her father's example, "has ambition enough about her to scorn any offer [of marriage] that does not comprise . . . an Angrian Coronet\*" as well as "wealth & Estates." Jane, it is clear, "has none of the deep refined romance of the West . . . , she is as matter of fact as any manufacturer of Edwardston, & likes as well to receive her penny's-worth for her penny." She "has no idea even of playing a tune, or singing a melancholy stanza to herself by twilight."

Giving yet another twist to her conception of Jane, Brontë describes in some detail Jane's profound melancholy as she recalls Harriet, her dead sister, whose "powers of drawing & reading French & Italian books all tended to invest her with the character of a superior order." Before long, Jane shakes off this mood, dismissing it as low spirits. Finally she is seen singing a war-song at a ball, "with glowing cheek & large blue eye eloquently telling what feelings the gales of Angria breathe into her daughters." "Jane Moore," Brontë comments, "that feeling will not last [--] it will die away into oblivion as the echos\* of those chords die away into silence . . . , & you will look round & greet with a careless laugh the first word of flattery uttered by that Dandy at your elbow." Nevertheless, Brontë concludes, Jane is not "all selfish vanity; all empty show." Her "Spirit can take a high tone."

The picture of Jane Moore which emerges is somewhat confusing, because it is modified several times while Brontë

is feeling her way into a character altogether alien from her own. As a first attempt to envisage objectively a girl lightly burdened with imagination and yet neither shallow nor unfeeling, however, the portrait of Jane is a significant departure from Brontë's usual heroines, who all resemble Harriet.

Jane next appears in Stancliffe's Hotel, when Townshend sees her coming out of a mercer's shop and, fancying that she smiles at him, returns "the compliment by a most seductive grin -- she blushed -- encouraged by this sign of sympathy." From Percy, Townshend learns that Zamorna noticed Jane once, but "never thought of her afterwards." Not having "the large dark eyes of the West -- . . . not the enthusiastic & poetic looks," she is "not one of his sort." In pointed contrast to Zamorna's indifference, both friends pretend to have fallen passionately in love with her, and between them reduce the fairly complex character that Brontë had in mind at school to a simple instance of a beautiful girl who, despite her lack of imagination, is spirited and likeable.<sup>7</sup>

At a county ball in July 1838, Percy and Jane meet once more. Percy's only occupation at the ball, as he later tells Townshend in a letter, is to watch Jane closely as she flirts and dances all night with a variety of gentlemen. Struck by her unremitting cheerfulness and her kindness to all and sundry, he is uncertain "whether she has beneath her fluttering folly a grain of sense, or whether it's all empty froth to the far-end -- if her apparent good-temper, affability, and equanimity is genuine natural &c."<sup>8</sup> Inclined to believe that "the depths of that mind" are "concealed by the curtain of an indifferent demeanour," he feels that her "organ of secretiveness" must be far too large:

A thousand thoughts must be ever passing in her mind which for worlds she would not utter. Nerves must often

<sup>7</sup> Stancliffe's Hotel.

<sup>8</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 379.

be acutely touched whose quiver of agony she must most zealously conceal -- laughing all away as if she had not heard the jest or seen the look. Feelings warm and quick must be crushed -- must be frozen as if they had never existed. Others must be assumed which she is incapable of fully expressing. She must be professing to see life through an unexaggerating but cheerful medium, when perhaps since earliest childhood she has gazed on its reflection in the magic mirror of imagination -- seen the bright hues and divine forms that wizard imparts . . .<sup>9</sup>

"Has the Girl known this?" Remembering his previous knowledge of Jane's character, Percy dismisses the idea:

Pooh! What a fool I am? She! -- butterfly -- gossamer's web -- floating feather of a stray bird of Paradise -- she swallow her heart -- gulp down her feelings -- disown her identity -- banish her real self and come as another and different existence before the world -- I am dreaming -- there never was a woman who could do this, and there never will be.<sup>10</sup>

"If there were," he adds, "I would be the last man to admire such a woman, or to trust myself to her distorted morbid affections."<sup>11</sup>

Another letter, written five days later, explains Percy's speculations, which seem wholly out of character. Recalling his early youth, he writes:

When Edward and I were in penury, kept chained together by want, and abhorring each other for the very compulsion of our union, I used to endure worse torments than those of Hell. Edward overwhelmed me by his strength and bulk. He used his power coarsely for he had a coarse mind, and scenes have taken place between us which remembrance to this day, when it rushes upon my mind, pierces every nerve with a thrill of bitter pain no words can express.<sup>12</sup>

But:

I am unfettered now. I see my steep path clearly, and I

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 379-380.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

have got strength to climb. It is no labour to me -- it is a delight to mount, up, up, clinging to every projecting stone -- grasping at every tough root and wild stem of heath.<sup>13</sup>

Grimly determined to cope with a reality which experience has taught him to be hostile to feeling and imagination, he never reveals his vivid inner life. Even a girl whom he loves remains strictly an object of the imagination:

How often have I looked at her with wonder and absorbing sympathy. Imagination in her had to struggle through no dull intervening obstacle to show its light divine. That face offered a clear medium . . . [Still,] whether her fair image be still lingering in a world that was not worthy of her -- or whether she lies asleep amidst holy bounds which even sacrilege would hardly profane, it imports little to me to know. It is enough for me to have seen her once, and after that to carry the vision of her pale inspired face to my deathbed.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently Brontë's conception of Percy has changed radically since Stancliffe's Hotel, for it is he, not Jane Moore, who has a large "organ of secretiveness." Characteristically, he ends on a defiant note: "Townshend you'll never dare to twit me about what I have written above -- but if you do I've an answer ready. How do you know whether the sentimentality is in jest or earnest? Aint it very probable that I may be bamming you by doing a bit in the soft line?"<sup>15</sup>

There is abundant circumstantial evidence to suggest that Brontë herself, too, had a strong innate compulsion to conceal her feelings and the "wizard" within, her imagination, from other people. Mr Brontë, for example, could tell Gaskell little about his daughter's inner life "since she was from a child prone to say very little about herself and averse from making any display of what she knew."<sup>16</sup> Even when she was

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 389-390.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 390-391.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>16</sup> Mr Brontë to Gaskell (24 July 1855), "The Reverend Patrick Brontë and Mrs E.C. Gaskell," 91.

really desperate, as at Roe Head, she refused to take her friends into her confidence: "I will preserve unbroken that reserve which alone enables me to maintain a decent character for judgment; but for that I should long ago have been set down by all who know me as a Frenchified fool."<sup>17</sup> Her feelings of anger and resentment, the result of her "miserable and wretched touchiness of character," too, she bottled up: "I know these feelings are absurd and therefore I try to hide them but they only sting the deeper for concealment. I'm an idiot!"<sup>18</sup> Never did she confide "one dream of the imagination," that is, of her ambition to become a poet, to outsiders: "I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of preoccupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits."<sup>19</sup> The real Charlotte only surfaced when Brontë was dreaming or writing about Angria. That, too, was a secret world.

Prior to the ball scene in The Duke of Zamorna, there is little to suggest in Brontë's writings that her deep-rooted secretiveness worried her, unless the appearance of the extrovert Jane Moore in the autumn of 1837 was a first symptom of unease. Percy's speculations about Jane, however, suggest that by the summer of 1838, while her nagging sense of intellectual arrogance was fading and her imagination was recovering its resilience, Brontë was becoming increasingly worried lest an unwholesome division was evolving between her "real self" and her "existence before the world." If found out, moreover, some people might well regard her as a hypocritical "knave," while others, who were capable of appreciating her allegiance to her "wizard," might no longer trust her "distorted morbid affections."<sup>20</sup> Emotional and spiritual solitude, she feared, lay ahead. In December 1838,

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<sup>17</sup> Brontë to Nussey (1836), WSC, I, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Brontë to Southey (16 March 1836), WSC, I, pp. 157-158.

<sup>20</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, pp. 379, 380.



having left Dewsbury Moor for good, she was at leisure to consider the division between her inward and outward selves in depth. Over the next three months, she wrote Henry Hastings.

Jane Moore's presence in the first volume of Henry Hastings serves to bring into sharp focus the personality of her governess, Elizabeth Hastings.<sup>21</sup> In a series of implicit and explicit comparisons, it is shown that Elizabeth is Jane's opposite in almost every conceivable way. Elizabeth is poor, "very plain," always soberly dressed, a "sharp shrewd customer," and by no means "exquisitely sweet-tempered."<sup>22</sup> Also, she is an accomplished amateur painter, and has a fervid imagination, which she does not always use wisely. On one occasion, when alone, she even induces a "trance":

the expression of her face as she roamed to & fro, was fixed & dreamy. Whether at this moment her thoughts were sad or bright, I cannot tell -- but they were evidently very interesting, for she had forgot heaven above & earth beneath & all things that are thereon, in the charm that they wrapped about her -- No doubt it was to excite in her mind these feverish Dreams that she had left the curtains of the great window undrawn -- . . . (200).

In the presence of other people, however, only her eyes betray her "very ardent, very imaginative temperament" (256). Then "her features were masked with an expression foreign to them -- her movements were restrained & guarded -- she wanted openness -- originality -- frankness" (208). Once, for example,

<sup>21</sup> Gérin's title, Captain Henry Hastings, and Alexander's title, Henry Hastings, are misleading, for Henry appears on only 15 out of 94 pages. Henry was created by Branwell in 1834. Tracing his increasingly dissolute career over the next five years, Branwell developed Henry into a partial self-portrait. In Henry Hastings, the relationship between Henry and Elizabeth forms a sub-plot, reflecting Charlotte's concern for Branwell, whose morals were rapidly deteriorating, and her determination to stick to him: "It was very odd but his sister did not think a pin the worse of him for all his Dishonour" (Novelettes, p. 242).

<sup>22</sup> Henry Hastings, Novelettes, pp. 210, 206, 209. Further references to Henry Hastings in this chapter will appear in parentheses within the text.

when a painting in the foyer of the opera moved her to tears, "she hastily lifted her handkerchief to wipe [them] away -- & then, roused to recollection, called into her face an indifferent expression &, turning from the picture, looked like a person without an idea alien from those she was with" (208). Even when her brother is about to be captured, she struggles "to keep wrapt about her the veil of reserve & propriety" (200). Elizabeth, in fact, is the very freak of nature whose "distorted morbid affections" Percy had called untrustworthy.

William Percy, from whose diary and conversations with Townshend and Jane Moore the preceding attributes of Elizabeth's character have been gleaned, is ambivalent in his response to her. On the one hand, he is continually watching her, and is quick to notice whenever her mask threatens to slip in order that he may glimpse her true character. On the other hand, he tends to refer to her carelessly as "that little blighted mortal" and "the plain -- pinched protégè\* of Miss Moore's" (206, 207). He is able to describe her sensitive imagination in almost poetic terms, and yet, as in this implicit comparison with Jane Moore, ends by deprecating it:

[Jane] has none of that strong refinement of the senses which makes some temperaments thrill with undefined emotion at changes or chances in the skies or the earth, in a softness in the clouds, a trembling of moonlight in water -- an old & vast tree -- the tone of the passing wind at night -- or any other little accident of nature which contains in it more botheration than sense -- Well, & what of that? Genius & enthusiasm may go & be hanged, I did not care a d--n for all the Genius & enthusiasm on earth -- when Jane rose from her nest by the fire . . . (209).

Percy, in effect, is no longer the anti-imaginative character of earlier novelettes. As in the concluding section of The Duke of Zamorna, his strained cynicism is only a mask, adopted to disguise his sensibility and imagination. Indeed, but for their different modes of concealing their inner selves, Percy and Elizabeth are two of a kind.

During his visit to Jane Moore, Percy notices the remarkable "beauty of an ornamental vase on the mantle-piece -- the sides of which were exquisitely painted with a landscape

of Grecian ruins & olives -- & a dim mountain back-ground" (210). The artist being Elizabeth, his praise is significant, for to admire each other's paintings or poems is a potent symbol of spiritual and emotional sympathy between men and women in Brontë's writings from Douro and Marian Hume onwards. Slightly later, when Percy comforts Elizabeth just before her brother's arrest, she thanks him with a smile "that shewed all caution & disguise were [?gone --] impulse & imagination were now in full & unguarded [?possession]" (221). Early on in the next volume, Percy spies Jane Moore and Zamorna together in a recess. Feeling "a stunner of disgust," he breaks with the "laughing brainless jilt" (229, 230). Soon after, his true nature is disclosed:

he is a man of marble -- but still marble under a strange spell -- capable of warming to life like the Sculpture of Pygmalion . . . -- an expression flitting over ordinary features -- a transient ray in an eye neither large nor brilliant -- will fix his attention & throw him into romantic musing -- . . . have[ing] once received the seeds of this sort of partiality -- inclination -- fondness -- call it what you will, his heart offered a tenacious soil likely to hold fast -- to nurture long, to cultivate secretly, but surely, the unfolding germ of what might in time grow to a rooted-passion (241).

By this time, he has fallen in love with Elizabeth.

Two pages later, Elizabeth reappears. Having become directress of a young ladies' academy, she is now independent, but still unhappy: "the exclusive proud being thought she had not met with a single individual equal to herself in mind, & therefore not one whom she could love" (243). Before long, the "enthusiast" is dreaming of Percy "with an intensity of romantic feeling that very few people in this world can form the remotest conception of" (244).

The progressively intimate relationship between Percy and Elizabeth, like all relationships between men and women in the juvenilia, is empty of physicality. Elizabeth has found someone "equal to herself in mind," and Percy the "nameless being" with "a mind above the grade of an animal" that he has been dreaming of (250). Both, indeed, conceive of their emotional bond primarily as a union of two sensitive and

imaginative minds. As such, it reflects the solution which Brontë was considering at this point in her narrative: in order to overcome their stifling habitual reserve, her two protagonists should open their hearts and minds to a kindred spirit.

Eventually Brontë realized that, instead of trying to come to grips with the unnatural division between their inward and outward selves, Percy and Elizabeth might only be creating a self-contained space outside reality. Appropriately, therefore, they next meet in a churchyard. When their eyes happen to fall on the tomb of Rosamund Wellesley, Percy tells Elizabeth that Rosamund was an imaginative girl, like herself, who, having fallen in love with Zamorna, was settled by him in one of his remote country houses. After a year, she began to pine and died. This took place in 1834, at a time when Zamorna was still Brontë's elusive "mental King." Rosamund's fate thus illustrates the spiritual death threatening those whose eagerness to share their feelings and imaginations with a congenial spirit induces them to agree to withdraw from reality. Upon concluding his reminiscence, Percy proposes that Elizabeth become his mistress. Heeding the warning implicit in Rosamund's fate, she declines and leaves.

About a fortnight after completing Henry Hastings, Brontë began But it is not in Society. The principal character, Miss West, is once more a plain, soberly dressed governess, with a "smile intelligent but retiring," and a "fevered & fickle fancy," which is "veiled by the shade of habitual & studied reserve."<sup>23</sup> There is also "one individual" to whom "those sudden, flashing fits of excitement which she could not always control -- had betrayed her real disposition." Many a half-checked dream tells her that in his company "wakened thought" need not be stifled. Hence she is worried, knowing "that there must appear in his eyes something sinister in the constant mask which hid & smoothed her natural features." The

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<sup>23</sup> Unpublished manuscript, But it is not in Society.

"individual" is probably William Percy, but the fragment offers no clues to his earlier or later relations with the "frozen automaton." But it is not in Society, therefore, is primarily significant because it suggests that the division between her inward and outward selves was still uppermost in Brontë's mind immediately before she decided to leave Angria for a period.

No critic has ever questioned Ratchford's conclusion that the untitled and undated manuscript which she calls Farewell to Angria<sup>24</sup>, was written soon after Brontë completed her last novelette, Caroline Vernon, in December 1839.<sup>25</sup> If this date were correct, the Farewell would indeed neatly round off the cycle of Angrian narratives. Caroline Vernon, however, which was begun in late July, opens thus:

When I concluded my last book I made a solemn resolve that I would write no more till I had somewhat to write about, & at the time I had a sort of notion that perhaps many years might elapse before aught should transpire novel & smart enough to induce me to resume my relinquished pen -- but lo you --! Scarce three moons have waxed & waned ere 'the creature's at his dirty work again' [--] and yet it is no novelty . . . that has dipped my quill in ink & spread the blank sheet before me . . . Howsumdever, . . . a book-wright need never be at a loss, one can't expect earthquakes & insurrections every-day . . . it's well they don't, for a constant renewal of such stimulus would soon wear out the public stomach & bring on indigestion.<sup>26</sup>

The speaker being Charles Townshend, the "book-wright," who never admits to being low-spirited, this passage necessarily differs in tone from the Farewell, in which Brontë is speaking in her own voice. Yet Townshend's admission that he had

<sup>24</sup> Fannie Ratchford and William Clyde DeVane, eds., Legends of Angria, pp. 315-316.

<sup>25</sup> Caroline Vernon (c. late July-14 December 1839), Novelettes, pp. 277-367. The date of completion can be deduced from Brontë's reference in the concluding section to "Friday the 7th of Decbr" as "precisely seven days" ago (p. 354).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 277-278.

exhausted his Angrian subject-matter, and his deprecation of the "constant renewal" of imaginative excitement, distinctly echo Brontë's reflections in the Farewell. Most probably, therefore, Townshend's "solemn resolve" is identical with Brontë's Farewell. This is also suggested by the fact that Brontë never omitted to write down one jot or tittle concerning her imaginary world, and carefully preserved every scrap of paper relating to it. Since Townshend's resolve was made "[s]carce three moons" earlier, the Farewell may be assigned to late April 1839, following the completion of But it is not in Society.

No-one either has ever questioned Ratchford's title, Farewell to Angria.<sup>27</sup> According to Gérin, it is Brontë's "formal renunciation of the subjects and style of her youthful writings."<sup>28</sup> Alexander agrees that Angria is "finally [being] dismissed."<sup>29</sup> Brontë, however, explicitly states in the Farewell that she wishes to withdraw from Angria only "for a while."<sup>30</sup> Townshend's "notion that perhaps many years might elapse," although a characteristic exaggeration, suggests that Brontë intended not to dream or write about Angria for a long while. It also confirms, however, that she never meant it to be a permanent withdrawal.

Further examination of the Farewell suggests that its contents, too, have been taken too much for granted. According to Ratchford and her followers, the Farewell demonstrates that by "the end of 1839, [Brontë's] conscience, occasionally silenced, but never convinced, so far gained the victory as to force her to a formal farewell of Angria."<sup>31</sup> Other scholars argue that it marks Brontë's emancipation from

<sup>27</sup> Neither the word "farewell" nor any other valedictory term is used in the manuscript.

<sup>28</sup> Gérin, ed., Novelettes, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander, p. 199.

<sup>30</sup> Farewell to Angria (April 1839), WSW, II, p. 404. Wise and Symington's transcription incorrectly reads "awhile."

<sup>31</sup> Ratchford, p. 148.

romance: the increasingly discriminating author renounces "the effusive romantic writings of her youth"<sup>32</sup> and "is ready to paint 'from the life.'"<sup>33</sup> Both arguments tend to fall flat because in the first paragraph of the Farewell, although unintentionally, Brontë manifests her strong sense of achievement:

I have shown my landscapes in every variety of shade and light which morning, noon and evening -- the rising, the meridian and the setting sun can bestow upon them . . . So it is with persons . . . [T]hey have [been] seen now in profile, now in full-face, now in outline, and again in finished painting -- . . . ; lit with love, flushed with passion, shaded with grief, kindled with ecstasy; in meditation and mirth, in sorrow and scorn and raptures; with the round outline of childhood, the beauty and fullness of youth, the strength of manhood, and the furrow of thoughtful decline.<sup>34</sup>

A new imaginary world of a comparable width and depth "would take much study to comprehend and much talent to expound."<sup>35</sup>

Still: "I have now written a great many books -- and for a long time I have dwelt on the same characters and scenes and subjects . . . [W]e must change, for the eye is tired of the picture so oft recurring and now so familiar."<sup>36</sup> During the summer of 1838, Brontë had written two novelettes, containing some 50,000 words. Since December 1838, she had written Henry Hastings, containing some 60,000 words, and But it is not in Society. It is by no means surprising, therefore, that by late April 1839 she was surfeited with Angria. The concluding three sentences of the Farewell, however, suggest that her sense of surfeit was only a symptom of a deeper dissatisfaction with

<sup>32</sup> Melodie Monahan, ed., Ashworth: An Unfinished Novel by Charlotte Brontë, Diss. University of Rochester, 1976, p. vii.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Farewell to Angria, WSW, II, pp. 403-404. Wise and Symington's transcription incorrectly reads "full face," "rapture," "fulness," and "furrows."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 403-404. Wise and Symington's transcription omits "I" (l. 2).

her imaginary world:

I long to quit for a while that burning clime where we have sojourned too long -- its skies flame -- the glow of sunset is always upon it -- the mind would cease from excitement and turn now to a cooler region where the dawn breaks grey and sober, and the coming day for a time at least is subdued by clouds.<sup>37</sup>

This passage should be read in the context of Brontë's preoccupation over the previous ten months with characters who, while their excitable minds are absorbed by visions of a superior reality, in which feeling and imagination can have free play, are yet writhing under their ingrained secretiveness, which prevents them from relating to congenial spirits in the real world. In a new attempt to break through her emotional and intellectual isolation, she now proposed to look no longer in "the magic mirror of imagination," at least "for a while." She was going to force herself to seek fulfilment in ordinary reality.

To take her mind off Angria, Brontë devoted the next few weeks to painting an appropriate subject, The Remains of the Temple of Venus at Rome, finishing her work on 24 May.<sup>38</sup> A week later, having unexpectedly been offered a situation as governess, she left home for Stonegappe. Before long, she found herself once more in the same position as Elizabeth Hastings and Miss West:

imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me, thrown at once in the midst of a large family -- proud as peacocks and wealthy as Jews . . . -- in this state of things having the charge given me of a set of pampered, spoilt, and turbulent children . . . [,] I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion.<sup>39</sup>

Under similar conditions at Roe Head and later in Brussels, she solaced herself with dreams of Angria:

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>38</sup> "Recent Donations," BST, VII, 38 (1928), 155.

<sup>39</sup> Brontë to Nussey (30 June 1839), WSC, I, p. 180.



It is a curious metaphysical fact that always in the evening when I am in the great dormitory alone, having no other company than a number of beds with white curtains, I always recur as fanatically as ever to the old ideas, the old faces, and the old scenes in the world below.<sup>40</sup>

Presumably she did the same at Stonegappe, thus partly breaking her "solemn resolve."

Upon her return home in late July, Brontë felt unable to persevere in her decision not to write about Angria. Yet Caroline Vernon, the story of a young girl's infatuation with Zamorna, is not a complete relapse, for Brontë appears to be deliberately avoiding any deep emotional involvement in her characters. Zamorna, whose stature as a poet and soldier has been steadily declining in the preceding novelettes, is now a gentleman-farmer and henpecked husband. As Alexander points out, Brontë is barely interested in her former hero, who "is almost ridiculous as he hovers about his prey 'like a large Tom-Cat.'"<sup>41</sup> Caroline, a "raw, flighty & romantic girl," who thinks "Lord Byron & Bonaparte & the Duke of Wellington & Lord Edward Fitzgerald are the four best men that ever lived,"<sup>42</sup> promises to be a more complex character, particularly because there are echoes of Brontë's previous concern with secretiveness, which suggest that her Stonegappe experiences had caused her to perceive such defensive reserve in a more positive light:

<sup>40</sup> Charlotte to Branwell (1 May 1843), WSC, I, p. 297. Charlotte's allusion to "the world below" is often cited as proof that she felt guilty about her imaginary world. As always using Biblical imagery quite indiscriminately, however, she simply distinguishes between her inner world, present to her imagination, and the outer world, present to her more conscious layers of thought. Cf. "I've sat down for the purpose of calling up spirits from the vasty deep and holding half an hour's converse with them" ("My Compliments to the weather"). "Look into thought and say what dost thou see/ Dive, be not fearful how dark the waves flow" ("I'm just going to write"). "All this day I have been in a dream half-miserable & half ecstatic . . . , ecstatic because it shewed almost in the vivid light of reality the ongoings of the infernal world" ("All this day I have been in a dream").

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, p. 196.

<sup>42</sup> Caroline Vernon, Novelettes, pp. 311, 309.

there was something in her mind or heart or imagination which, after all, filled her with wholesome contempt for the goings on of the bright refined world around her -- People who have been brought up in retirement don't soon get hackneyed to society -- they often retain a notion that they are better than those about -- that they are not of their sort, & that it would be a letting down to them to give the slightest glimpse of their real nature & genuine feelings . . . .<sup>43</sup>

Brontë's subsequent efforts to trace Caroline's progress from innocence to experience, however, lack the searching quality which even her sketch of Jane Moore in the Roe Head Journal possesses.

Brontë, moreover, often adopts a curiously careless tone, which is altogether different from her narrator's earlier strained indifference: "How Miss Vernon passed the night which succeeded this interview, the reader may amuse himself by conjecturing -- I cannot tell him."<sup>44</sup> At most other times, again in marked contrast to the earlier novelettes, her tone is refreshingly light-hearted, if not jocular. Indeed, she appears to have been writing mainly to amuse herself.

Having completed Caroline Vernon on 14 December 1839, Brontë spent the next few weeks "blackleading the stoves -- making the beds and sweeping the floors," because Tabby, the servant, had fallen ill.<sup>45</sup> By late January, when Branwell, was about to set out for Broughton-in Furness, she was still "as busy as possible preparing for his departure, and shirt-making and collar-stitching fully occupy our time."<sup>46</sup> In early February, Ellen Nussey arrived and stayed three weeks. In March and April, in addition to running the household, Brontë

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-320.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>45</sup> Brontë to Nussey (21 December 1839), WSC, I, p. 194.

<sup>46</sup> Brontë to Nussey (January 1840), WSC, I, p. 195. Wise and Symington date this letter 28 December 1839. As Chitham points out, however, this is improbable, because Brontë refers to Nussey's arrival on "Friday week"; this was a day in late January or early February, since Nussey was in Haworth on St Valentine's Day (Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems, p. 31).

was working a bag, painting, and entertaining visitors.<sup>47</sup> In June, she stayed a week with Mary Taylor, who returned the visit that same month.<sup>48</sup> By 20 August, moreover, she had worked her way through several dozen "French books."<sup>49</sup> She did not write during the first eight months of 1840.

Although Brontë's time was fully and usefully occupied, the necessity of earning a living was weighing heavily on her mind. As early as Christmas 1839, she was fast running out of money, and even had to cancel her "subscription to the Jews."<sup>50</sup> Once more she set out to find a job. By May, she had "no prospect of a situation any more than of going to the moon."<sup>51</sup> By late August, she had "answered advertisements without number," but in vain.<sup>52</sup> In October, she received a favourable reply from a Mrs Brooke: "but she wants music and singing. I can't give her music and singing, so of course the negotiation is null and void."<sup>53</sup>

Branwell, meanwhile, faced with the prospect of an inglorious career as an ill-paid tutor, had once more been writing poetry in the hope of making a name for himself and, not least, of earning some money. On 20 April 1840, he sent a poem and translations of two odes from Horace to Hartley Coleridge, wishing to know if it would "be possible to obtain remuneration for translations for such as these."<sup>54</sup> In reply, Coleridge invited him to Ambleside. By 27 June, Branwell had completed translations of two books of Horace's *Odes*, one of which he submitted to Coleridge, promising to divide the profits "by written agreement" between himself and "him through whom alone I could hope to obtain a hearing with . . .

<sup>47</sup> See WSC, I, pp. 201, 203, 205.

<sup>48</sup> See WSC, I, p. 208.

<sup>49</sup> Brontë to Nussey (20 August 1840), WSC, I, p. 215.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. (21 December 1839), WSC, I, p. 194.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. (15 May 1840), WSC, I, p. 207.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (20 August 1840), WSC, I, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. (12 November 1840), WSC, I, p. 218.

<sup>54</sup> Branwell to Coleridge (20 April 1840), WSC, I, p. 205.

a London bookseller."<sup>55</sup> Coleridge did not reply until early December 1840. Overlooking the attempted bribery, he praised Branwell's work highly, and considered that most of it "might appear with very little alteration."<sup>56</sup> Whether he actually recommended Branwell to any publishers is not known.

By the autumn of 1840, Charlotte was almost at her wits' end. Harassed by money troubles, she had wasted the last ten months in fruitless efforts to secure a situation. At the same time, she had dreaded receiving a suitable offer: "no one but myself can tell how hard a governess's work is to me -- for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are to the employment."<sup>57</sup> Branwell's industry during the summer and his high hopes that his literary efforts would bear fruit suggested a possible means of escape. Being more practical than Branwell, however, Charlotte did not turn to writing poetry, but resigned herself to the fact, as Branwell was to discover,

that in the present state of the publishing and reading world a Novel is the most saleable article, so that where ten pounds would be offered for a work the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man's intellect -- two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune.<sup>58</sup>

Some time in the autumn of 1840, Charlotte set to work on her novel. When Coleridge's encouraging letter to Branwell arrived in December, she decided to submit her manuscript to him, too, when it was finished.

Brontë drafted and revised three or four chapters of

<sup>55</sup> Branwell to Coleridge (27 June 1840), WSC, I, p. 211.

<sup>56</sup> Coleridge to Branwell (December 1840), in Fran Carlock Stephens, "Hartley Coleridge and the Brontës," Times Literary Supplement, 14 May 1970, p. 544. Stephens prints the draft of Coleridge's letter, which he wrote on the night of 30 November 1840.

<sup>57</sup> Brontë to Nussey (3 March 1841), WSC, I, p. 226.

<sup>58</sup> Branwell to Joseph Leyland (10 September 1845), WSC, II, p. 61.

her proposed novel, Messrs Percy and West.<sup>59</sup> Only five brief fragments of the draft have been preserved. The first two fragments describe Alexander Percy's character, his early life, and his arrival in Yorkshire. The third fragment introduces his daughter. The fourth fragment describes a drawing-room scene, featuring Miss Percy, Amelia Thornton (her friend), Marian Fairburne (the latter's cousin), and Arthur West ("he is going to be our hero"<sup>60</sup>). In the fifth fragment, West is mourning for a dead girl, possibly Marian. Although the characters of Miss Percy, Amelia, Marian, and West resemble those of Elizabeth Hastings, Jane Moore, Marian Hume, and William Percy respectively, Brontë's lack-lustre prose and the superficiality of the character sketches suggest that her heart was not in her enterprise. She admitted as much to Coleridge: "I had better lock up this precious manuscript -- wait till I get sense to produce something which shall at least aim at an object of some kind."<sup>61</sup>

Brontë only warms to her story when West, a man of "Genius & poetry of character," promises to write a sonnet for Marian and next helps her to change her drawing of a bridge "from a feeble, flimsy -- though rather pretty & delicate

<sup>59</sup> Two manuscripts have been preserved, both of which are set in Yorkshire and introduce similar characters. Both are printed in Melodie Monahan, ed., Ashworth: An Unfinished Novel By Charlotte Brontë, Studies in Philology, 80 (Autumn 1983), pp. 34-76, 121 (genetic text) and pp. 77-122 (clear text). Monahan and Alexander, incorrectly assuming that these manuscripts were written soon after each other and represent an earlier and a later version of the chapters sent to Coleridge, refer to both as Ashworth. To avoid further confusion, the earlier manuscript will here be referred to as Messrs Percy and West (autumn 1840-early 1841). It comprises: "Alexander Percy esqre" (p. 34, n. 3), "After a very troubled life Mr Percy" (p. 61, n. 28), "Miss Percy was a pupil" (pp. 52-53, n. 17), "Miss Percy and Miss Thornton" (pp. 69-76), and "hand over the heart" (p. 121). The later manuscript will here be referred to as Ashworth (c. autumn 1845). It is printed on pp. 34-69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Brontë to Coleridge (10 December 1840), Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 129.

thing -- to an artistical looking sketch."<sup>62</sup> Amelia, meanwhile, "was reading -- and the volume she held in her hand looked singularly like a novel."<sup>63</sup> The contrast reveals Brontë's problem. Poems and drawings were works of art. Her Angrian writings were treasured because they were a private record of her inner life. Novels, however, she regarded as mere popular entertainment, and concocting one herself failed to fire her imagination. Nevertheless, she made a fair copy of her opening chapters and sent it to Coleridge in the spring of 1841.

On 2 March 1841, Brontë went to Rawdon, once more a governess. By early July, she and her sisters were seriously considering starting a boarding-school at the Parsonage. In early September, they were contemplating taking over Miss Wooler's school, even though it was "in a consumptive state of health."<sup>64</sup> In late September, it was decided that Charlotte and Emily should first go to Brussels for six months. Charlotte was especially keen: "I so longed to increase my attainments [--] to become something better than I am."<sup>65</sup> In early November, she not only gave her employers at Rawdon notice that she would leave on 15 December, but also decided that she would stay in Brussels for at least twelve months. Then a letter arrived in early December from that "sad Procrastinator," Hartley Coleridge.<sup>66</sup> She replied on 10 December 1841.<sup>67</sup>

Brontë's letter has puzzled many scholars because they feel that the aspiring novelist, who had been writing fiction from the age of twelve, should have been shattered by Coleridge's unfavourable opinion of her first major effort.

62 Messrs Percy and West, Monahan, ed., Ashworth, pp. 73, 74.

63 Ibid., p. 70.

64 Brontë to Nussey (12 November 1840), WSC, I, p. 218.

65 Ibid. (2 November 1841), WSC, I, p. 245.

66 Coleridge to Branwell (December 1840), Stephens, "Hartley Coleridge and the Brontës," p. 544.

67 The postmark on Brontë's letter only reads "De. 10." The attribution of the letter to 1841 is discussed in Appendix C.

Brontë evidently was not shattered. In the opening sentence of her draft letter, she frankly admits: "I am not so attached to this production but that I can give it up without much distress."<sup>68</sup> In the sent letter, she disguises her apparent unconcern by adopting a tone of tragi-comic despair: "It seems then that Messrs Percy and West are not gentlemen like to make an impression upon the heart of any Editor in Christendom? Well, I commit them to oblivion with several tears and much affliction but I hope I can get over it."<sup>69</sup> Next, replying to Coleridge's objection to the broad canvas of her opening chapters, she writes in the draft letter:

You say the affair is begun on the scale of a three volume novel[.] I assure you Sir you calculate moderately -- for I had materials in my head I daresay for half a dozen -- No doubt if I had gone on I should have made quite a Richardsonian Concern of it[.] Mr West should have been my Sir Charles Grandison -- Percy my Mr B--- and the ladies should have represented -- Pamela Clarissa Harriet Byron &c -- Of course it is with considerable regret I relinquish any scheme so charming as the one I have sketched --<sup>70</sup>

The corresponding passage in the sent letter, although again more moderate in tone, is substantially the same. In both the draft and sent letters, Brontë concludes by dismissing her work as the "demi-semi novelette" of a "scribe."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Brontë to Coleridge, Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> ibid., p. 128.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-124.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 125, 130. C.W. Hatfield's transcription of the draft letter reads "demi-serious" ("Charlotte Brontë and Hartley Coleridge, 1840," BST, X, 50 [1940], 18). The change from "demi-serious" in the draft letter to "demi-semi" in the sent letter is consistent with Brontë's efforts to moderate her tone when she rewrote the draft. Still, access to the manuscript being difficult, one must assume Monahan's transcription to be the correct one, even though she suggests that the postmark on the letter reads "Bradford York" (p. 130, n. 2). Undoubtedly, Stephen's transcription, "Yorks.", is the correct one ("Hartley Coleridge and the Brontës," p. 544). Novelettes, incidentally, the name given to the later Angrian writings by Gérin, is evidently a misnomer.

To explain away Brontë's depreciation of her work, attention is usually drawn to the tone of her letter, which has been variously described as bantering, good-humoured, and racy. Some scholars suggest that this light-hearted tone was adopted to "hide her chagrin at [Coleridge's] poor opinion of her work."<sup>72</sup> Others feel that it indicates her "good will, even in the face of disappointment."<sup>73</sup> In 1844, however, Brontë recalled that her writing had been "not wholly without result, for Southey and Coleridge -- two of our best authors, to whom I sent certain manuscripts -- were good enough to express their approval."<sup>74</sup> Coleridge, therefore, although he conscientiously pointed out the defects in her work, had by no means failed to give her encouragement. Indeed, Brontë was not disappointed by his letter, but embarrassed, for it had arrived only a few weeks before her true ambition was going to be realized: to go abroad, "to increase my attainments [--] to become something better than I am." To cover her retreat, therefore, she deliberately misinterpreted Coleridge's comments as a well-meant effort to dissuade her from pursuing a career as a novelist. In the draft letter, she accepted this advice with thinly disguised relief. In the sent letter, she adopted a more suitably disappointed tone: Coleridge was "a most pitiless Atropos," who had convinced her that she had better bind herself "apprentice to a chemist and druggist if I am a young gentleman or to a Milliner and Dressmaker if I am a young lady."<sup>75</sup> In both versions, moreover, to divert his attention even further from the original seriousness of her intentions, she kept up a barrage of witty, teasing, and high-spirited remarks, and concluded by dwelling on inessential matters, such as her political views and the pseudonym which she had used!

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<sup>72</sup> Gérin, ed., Novelettes, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 123.

<sup>74</sup> Brontë to Constantin Heger (24 July 1844), WSC, II, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Brontë to Coleridge, Monahan, ed., Ashworth, pp. 128, 129.



A fortnight after posting her letter to Coleridge, Brontë went home to prepare for the Brussels adventure. On 8 February 1842, she left Haworth for the Hegers' pensionnat. "In passing through London," Mary Taylor recalled, "she seemed to think our business was and ought to be, to see all the pictures and statues we could. She knew the artists, and knew where other productions of theirs were to be found."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Taylor to Gaskell, Gaskell, p. 586.

## Chapter Seven

### THE PROFESSOR (1844-1846)

"Ma chère Jane," a French devoir written in Brussels, suggests that the failure of the Messrs Percy and West project had only confirmed Brontë's poor opinion of novels. Writing a letter to her imaginary friend Jane, she admits that "after 2 -- 3 -- 4 hours of study," she likes to "leave her room -- leave her books," and go for a walk in the countryside.<sup>1</sup> Jane, however, she claims, is wholly indifferent to "intellectual pleasures":

After breakfast -- your half-stifled but not altogether dead Conscience utters a feeble cry -- 'Jane' she says -- 'devote one hour to some serious reading or occupation' -- You try -- you cannot persevere, you lack strength -- frivolous thoughts arise -- hover round your spirit -- you let them enter -- and the noble resolution to do well vanishes -- You waste the morning in reading novels -- in the afternoon you go out walking and visiting -- in the evening you dress up and go into society -- Thus you live -- you who will one day marry -- and who a little while later will die --

Then "a little monkey" asks Brontë, the "severe mentor," in a "mocking tone": "don't you like pleasure? -- are you yourself never lazy?" Provoked by "the little demon," she exclaims:

'Yes I like it -- naughty fairy -- I like it All -- walks -- visits -- evening parties'  
'Have you never read any novels' he says in an insinuating tone with regard to novels  
'I have read -- or rather -- I have devoured thousands of them'  
<The monkey laughs, [knowing that I have often] denounced them -- mischievous monkey --><sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished manuscript, beginning "Ma chère Jane, Il y a longtemps que j'ai cessé de vous écrire" (1843), BPM: B(122).

<sup>2</sup> The last sentence, in pointed brackets, has been

Indeed, this was a huge exaggeration: as she later told W.S. Williams, she had "read comparatively few novels."<sup>3</sup> She may not have denounced them, but they certainly ranked low among "intellectual pleasures." Writing a novel herself was again far from her mind.

In January 1844, after two years of teaching, study, and challenging discussions with Constantin Heger, Brontë returned home. Her dreams of a career as a painter or poet having long since proved "illusions," she now wished for "active exertion -- a stake in life . . . [--] to be working and braving the rough realities of the world, as other people do."<sup>4</sup> Her father's ill-health, however, prevented her from leaving Haworth, which, after Brussels, "seem[ed] such a lonely, quiet spot, buried away from the world."<sup>5</sup> Before long, a stifling sense of mental inertia began to steal over her, with which she proved unable to cope. In July, she complained to Heger that she dreaded nothing so much as "idleness, the want of occupation, inactivity, the lethargy of the faculties."<sup>6</sup> Mournfully she added: "I should not know this lethargy if I could write."<sup>7</sup> Her deteriorating eye-sight, however, prevented such relief: "Were I to write much I should become blind. This weakness of sight is a terrible hindrance to me."<sup>8</sup>

Between August and October, still eager "to embark on an active career," Brontë made an ill-fated attempt to set up a boarding-school at the Parsonage.<sup>9</sup> During the autumn and winter, she jotted down several poems, revealing the depth of her mental torpor:

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cancelled in the manuscript. The words in square brackets replace five words which are illegible.

<sup>3</sup> Brontë to W.S. Williams (28 October 1847), WSC, II, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Brontë to Nussey (23 January 1844), WSC, II, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Brontë to Heger (24 July 1844), WSC, II, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

For me the universe is dumb,  
 Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind;  
 Life I must bound, existence sum  
 In the strait limits of one mind;

That mind my own. Oh! narrow cell;  
 Dark -- imageless -- a living tomb!<sup>10</sup>

During these months, she was still hoping against hope for a letter from Heger, who loomed large in her disturbed mind as the very personification of the "intellectual pleasures" which she had enjoyed in his company for two years. In January 1845, her agony at his silence culminated in one last hysterical appeal for a letter: "If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be altogether without hope."<sup>11</sup> By February, she felt very low, and concluded sadly: "I begin to perceive that I have too little life in me, nowadays, to be fit company for any except very quiet people."<sup>12</sup> By this time, too, her savings were running out, and in her despondent moods, as Mary Taylor recalled, "she seemed to think that most human beings were destined by the pressure of worldly interests to lose one faculty and feeling after another 'till they went dead altogether."<sup>13</sup> Although toying with the idea of looking for a job, she still found that she could not leave her ailing father. To Mary Taylor, she confided in late February that

she had quite decided to stay at home. She owned she did not like it . . . [S]he thought that there must be some possibility for some people of having a life of more variety and more communion with human kind, but she saw none for her . . . Such a dark shadow came over her face when I said, 'Think of what you'll be five years hence!' that I stopped, and said 'Don't cry, Charlotte!' She did not cry, but went on walking up and down the room, and said in a little while, 'But I intend to stay, Polly.'<sup>14</sup>

In March, the enterprising Mary left England to settle in New

<sup>10</sup> "Frances" (c. late 1844), Poems, p. 304.

<sup>11</sup> Brontë to Heger (8 January 1845), WSC, II, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Brontë to Nussey (20 February 1845), WSC, II, pp. 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor to Gaskell, Gaskell, p. 589.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

Zealand and, inspired by her example, Brontë decided to rouse herself by looking for a job after all. Throughout July and early August, there was even a serious possibility of her going to Paris as a teacher.<sup>15</sup> When this project fell through, she took up writing again.

Brontë's sluggishness of mind in the late summer of 1845 precludes the possibility that she was already planning to implement a new "set of principles on the subject of incident &c.," or indeed planning to write a novel at all.<sup>16</sup> Her principal object was to rekindle her imagination:

Long disuse of a pen that was once frequently handled makes me feel as if my hand had lost some of its cunning -- neither can I think with that regularity -- which in former times seemed habitual to me -- I might also complain of an enfeebled imagination for I cannot now as formerly call up at will a vivid picture of whatever I wish to see -- The desire to regain these powers which seem nearly lost prompts me to try again the task of composition --<sup>17</sup>

Her second object, as in the later novelettes, was to define the relation between her, now languishing, inner life and the real world.

Ashworth, as Brontë's untitled manuscript is known, consists of four sections, each introducing a new set of characters. The first section describes the late Alexander Ashworth, an arrogant self-made man, and his son. Alexander junior, unlike his father, has a vigorous imagination, which, in early manhood, propelled him into a dissolute career, ending in bankruptcy and the death of his wife.

The second section introduces Alexander junior's sons, Edward and William. Their father having conceived an unnatural hatred for them, they were sent to Harrow by their

<sup>15</sup> The evidence for the Paris project is discussed in Jos Bemelmans, "A Charlotte Brontë Manuscript," Notes and Queries, 30 n.s. (August 1983), 294-295.

<sup>16</sup> "Preface" to The Professor (c. early 1851), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 34. Further references to Ashworth in this chapter will appear in parentheses within the text.

grandmother. Upon her death, "they shook hands with Poverty -- Grinding hardship Want Famine and almost Nakedness were the gifts she gave into their bosom" (52). Edward, being "selfish -- insolent and hardened," is bound to make his way in life (50). William, a dreamer, is bound to fail:

William differed from Edward in being rather fond of books -- not however of his regular studies for in them he was careless & indifferent -- but he sought eagerly after miscellaneous Literature -- & when he had got hold of a book he liked -- he would lie on his back for hours together in the shade lost in its perusal -- This however was a favourite position with him when he had no book -- and nothing to do but look up at the clouds & sky -- through the twinkling leaves of a tree . . . (51).

His "forte lay rather in endurance than action" (51).

The third section introduces Mary Ashworth and two of her schoolfriends. Mary, like her brother William, has a vivid imagination, as witnessed by her "peculiar talent for music" (54). She also shares his withdrawn nature, although she does stand up for others. Amelia de Capell is a shallow, "spoilt child of wealth" (56). Ellen Hall, a hard-worked half-boarder, is sensitive and imaginative, and resigned to her lot as one of "the Slaves of Industry" (59).

The fourth section introduces Amelia's father, a grasping, parvenu mill-owner, and her two brothers. John is a dull but industrious law-student. Thornton is a "Scamp whom the old Gentleman was on the point of disowning and disinheriting every day of his life" (65). This section also introduces General West, a narrow-minded but well-to-do country gentleman, and his son, Arthur, a sensitive but dissolute youth, who seems destined to follow in the footsteps of his friend, Alexander Ashworth.

Ashworth, as this inventory suggests, is not a tightly-knit narrative, but closely resembles the novelettes in that Brontë is groping her way amongst a variety of characters and scenes in order to define her ideas. In each section, a sharp contrast is drawn between dull characters, who are eminently capable of making their way in the world, and characters who, although gifted with imagination and feeling, seem doomed to failure, either because they are too

passive and withdrawn, or because they expend their energies in the reckless pursuit of pleasure. The pattern of thought which emerges suggests that the problem preoccupying Brontë was the inevitability of such failure. Was it inevitable that an imaginative, sensitive, well-educated person should either be passive, like herself, or self-indulgent, like Branwell? Was it inevitable that they should fail to assert themselves and win "a stake in life"? She decided that it was not.

So far, Brontë had created only a set of failures. For one thing, she was determined not to indulge in wishful thinking, as she had done in the case of Elizabeth Hastings, who succeeded all too easily in setting up a school. Also, she felt inhibited by a newly-emerged self-consciousness about her writing, which compelled her to steer clear of conventional fiction:

[Young Ashworth's] accomplishments were varied & some of them I should think dazzling or better than dazzling. deeply impressive -- with these advantages is crime often connected -- were I writing a novel I would not have it so[.] I would -- select my Sir Hargrave Pollexfen & my Sir Charles Grandison -- & give inferior talent & bad luck to the former while the latter should be clad with gifts & graces utterly irresistible -- However I am now speaking of real events and as a faithful chronicler I must say the tale as 'twas said to me -- (37)

Curbing her creative impulse, the "faithful chronicler" could only draw a sequence of lifeless character sketches. Half-way through her narrative, she realized her mistake: "I must now come more closely to the point and endeavour to illustrate character by the occasional introduction of scenes and Dialogue" (54). Before long, she abandoned Ashworth in order to explore some of its characters in more depth. This time, moreover, she was going to focus on a protagonist who, while gifted with a vivid imagination and deep feelings, was grimly determined to come to grips with the real world.

About this time, in the early autumn of 1845, Charlotte discovered some of Emily's poems. She compiled a volume of her own and her sisters' poems, and between October and December offered it to various publishers. Publishing her

poems had long been one of her great ambitions. In late December, after two years of enforced idleness, she was so keen to carry through her project, that she persuaded her sisters to join her in financing the publication of the Bells' poems themselves. They spent £47 0s. 9d.<sup>18</sup> -- nearly three years wages<sup>19</sup> -- on this quixotic enterprise. Only two copies were sold, at four shillings each.

Characteristically, Brontë never contemplated investing her small capital in a novel, which she knew to be a far more marketable commodity than poetry. However, she was not without commonsense. The correspondence with a succession of unwilling publishers, some of whom may have reminded her of the thriving market for novels, made her realize that, since she had to remain at home to look after her father, she might as well try again to earn some money by writing a novel. Therefore, she not only persuaded Emily and Anne, who were also unemployed, to abandon the world of Gondal for a while in order to write publishable works of fiction, but also decided to make the character shaping in her imagination the subject of a novel, rather than of yet another private narrative.<sup>20</sup>

The first six chapters of The Professor are set in X-. Being the work of a writer who well knew that she must "illustrate character by the occasional introduction of scenes and Dialogue," these chapters, in contrast to the Brussels chapters, are curiously packed with facts and characters.

<sup>18</sup> This is the sum total of amounts for printing and advertising mentioned in letters to Aylott and Jones (WSC, II, pp. 83, 93, 94, 102).

<sup>19</sup> At Rawdon, in 1841, Brontë received a salary of "£16 per annum, though it is nominally £20, but the expense of washing will be deducted therefrom" (WSC, I, p. 226). In May 1848, she also mentions £20 as the average salary of an experienced governess (WSC, II, p. 214).

<sup>20</sup> Emily and Anne's diary papers of 31 July 1845 suggest that they were planning to spend the next three years developing their Gondal chronicles (WSC, II, pp. 49-53). Emily's resistance to the publication of her poems suggests that she in particular would never have written a novel if Charlotte had not managed to persuade her otherwise.



William's prefatory letter to a long-lost friend, summarizing the family history, is particularly awkward. Indeed, from its first publication, it has been felt, in Rebecca Rodolff's words, that "the Angria story of rival brothers that opens the novel is a curtain raiser rather than an integral part of the whole."<sup>21</sup> Rodolff, like previous critics, considers this defect to be one of the inevitable weaknesses of "an apprentice work."<sup>22</sup> Having looked over her manuscript in December 1847, Brontë conceded that the opening chapters were "very feeble, the whole narrative deficient in incident and in general attractiveness."<sup>23</sup> At this time, however, she also drafted a preface, which partly disclosed the true reason for their feebleness:

I had the pleasure of knowing Mr Crimsworth very well . . . . I suppose the succeeding narrative was the work of his leisure hours after he retired from business -- in its original form it extended to nearly twice its present length -- but upon his entrusting it to me for correction and retrenchment (which he did after finding that the various publishers to whom he offered it regarded the M.S. as a gnat and strained at it accordingly) I took the liberty of cutting out the whole of the first <six> [seven] chapters with one stroke of the scissars -- A brief summary of the import of these chapters will content the reader --<sup>24</sup>

The various publishers who regarded Crimworth's autobiography as a gnat, were the six publishers to whom Brontë submitted her own manuscript between July 1846 and June 1847:

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Rodolff, "From the Ending of The Professor to the Conception of Jane Eyre," Philological Quarterly, 61, no. 1 (1982), 71.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Brontë to W.S. Williams (14 December 1847), WSC, II, p. 161.

<sup>24</sup> "Preface" (late 1847), The Professor, p. 295. To one publisher, Henry Colburn, Brontë proposed to send "the MS. of a work of fiction in 3 vols. It consists of three tales, each occupying a volume" (WSC, IV, p. 315). This suggests that the three tales were of more or less equal length. Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, however, are about one-third longer than The Professor, thus confirming that Brontë actually wrote and later discarded six or seven chapters of her manuscript.

they all told me it was deficient in 'startling incident' and 'thrilling excitement,' that it would never suit the circulating libraries, and as it was on those libraries the success of works of fiction mainly depended, they could not undertake to publish what would be overlooked there.<sup>25</sup>

Before Brontë submitted her manuscript to Smith, Elder in July 1847, therefore, she cut out the first six or seven chapters, in which she had pursued her brand of realism most rigorously, and replaced them by Crimsworth's letter.<sup>26</sup> To divert the attention even further from the X- section, she changed the title from The Master, which might suggest a novel about a mill-owner, to The Professor.<sup>27</sup>

In the discarded chapters Brontë probably described in detail the story outlined in Crimsworth's letter and in the draft preface. From amongst the characters of Ashworth, she had selected William Ashworth and told herself that this time he

should work his way through life as [she] had seen real living men work theirs -- that he should never get a shilling he had not earned -- . . . that whatever small competency he might gain should be won by the sweat of his brow -- . . . As Adam's Son he should share Adam's doom -- Labour throughout life and a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment.<sup>28</sup>

To set the scene, as in Messrs Percy and West and Ashworth, she started with the father, describing his career as a

<sup>25</sup> Brontë to George Henry Lewes (6 November 1847), WSC, II, p. 153. In her preface of 1851, Brontë openly ridiculed "Publishers, in general" for their "passionate preference for the wild wonderful and thrilling -- the strange, startling and harrowing" (The Professor, p. 4).

<sup>26</sup> Since George Smith never commented on any changes in the manuscript, it may be assumed that the manuscript which he saw in 1847 was the same as the one which he published in 1857, that is, the shortened version.

<sup>27</sup> The manuscript originally bore the title The Master, but Brontë pasted a slip of paper over it with the later title. This she did before sending her manuscript to Smith, Elder, since in her letter to them of 2 August 1847, she refers to it as The Professor (WSC, II, p. 139).

<sup>28</sup> "Preface" (1851), The Professor, pp. 3-4.

tradesman, the deaths of his one or two wives, his bankruptcy, and his death.<sup>29</sup> Next, she turned to the orphaned sons. Having lived with their uncle Crimsworth, a mill-owner, for several years, Edward is apprenticed to a tradesman, and William is reluctantly adopted by his maternal uncles. Eventually, they repudiate him,

for reaching years of discretion he failed to fulfil their expectations -- denied his vocation to the priests\* office -- and having by this recusancy disgusted his patrons -- was by them abandoned to his own devices -- These led him to choose Commerce as his calling and to put his neck under the yoke of his step-brother now a thriving manufacturer in the North.<sup>30</sup>

Then, having pursued the Crimsworths' struggles with adversity through some one hundred pages and "many a crude effort destroyed almost as soon as composed," Brontë halted.<sup>31</sup> Conscientiously, she had created a character who, although sensitive and imaginative, was determined to carve out a career for himself in an environment dominated by "Steam, Trade, Machinery" (15). Now she wondered if William could realistically be expected to preserve his feelings and imagination intact under such grim conditions. Remembering her experiences as a teacher and governess, she concluded that he was bound to fail. She decided, therefore, to wind up the X-episode by making William realize his mistake, and to transplant him to an environment in which he could achieve a proper balance between his determination to win a stake in life and his need to cultivate his inner life.

<sup>29</sup> In the preface of 1847, the father has been married twice, and Edward and William are stepbrothers.

<sup>30</sup> "Preface" (1847), The Professor, p. 296. The Clarendon editors' transcription incorrectly reads "commerce" and "On reaching." The second error can be traced to Brontë. At the bottom of the first leaf, she wrote "was by them destined," and probably meant to continue with "for the church." Instead, anticipating the contents of the sentence that was to follow, she turned to the second leaf with the participle "disowned" in her mind.

<sup>31</sup> "Preface" (1851), The Professor, p. 3.

William's letter to his friend Charles, written after the completion of the novel, is designed to prepare for his all too easy relinquishment of his career in X-. It opens with an unprovoked challenge to Charles: "when I recurred to some sentiment of affection, some vague love of an excellent or beautiful object, whether in animate or inanimate nature -- your sardonic coldness did not move me -- I felt myself superior to that check then as I do now" (5-6). Intended to underline the inevitability of William's rebellion against Edward, this observation is wholly out of character, since throughout the novel he is obsessed by the idea that he must conceal his inner life from characters hostile to feeling and imagination. Next, in summarizing the discarded chapters, William claims that he only decided to become a tradesman to spite his aristocratic uncles, well aware that his "turn of mind" and "taste" did not qualify him for such a career (7). This, too, rings false, not only because it is inconsistent with his manifest sense of purpose, but also because Brontë's resolute tone in the 1851 preface, in which she recalled her aims, suggests that she is unlikely to have planned to continue her account of William's struggle up the Hill of Difficulty with an elaborate description of his initial failure.

Chapters two to six, written immediately after the discarded chapters, represent Brontë's efforts to disentangle William from the extreme situation into which she had led him. Before he has even entered upon his duties as a counting-house clerk, he is already dissatisfied with his chosen career. Still, he decides to make an effort:

I said to myself, 'William -- you are a rebel against circumstances . . . -- you have chosen trade and you shall be a tradesman; look!' I continued mentally, 'Look at the sooty smoke in that hollow and know that there is your post! There you cannot dream, you cannot speculate and theorize -- there you shall out and work!' (15)

Within three months, "the rust and cramp of [his] best faculties" becomes nearly insupportable (30). Moreover, there is Edward, a petty tyrant, who incarnates the hostility of the mill-town environment towards self-expression. Constantly worrying lest Edward discover his Achilles' heel and try to

break his will to cope with the real world, William keeps "the padlock of silence on [his] mental wealth" (31). Thus he feels as secure against his brother's "prowling and prying . . . malignity" as if he "had had on a casque with the visor down" (31, 21). Still, his determination to cope with the bleak reality of Bigben Close rapidly fades. Blaming Edward, he claims that, but for him, "I should have set up the image of Duty, the fetish of Perseverance in my small bed-room at Mrs. King's lodgings, and they two should have been my household gods, from which my Darling, my Cherished-in-secret, Imagination, the tender and the mighty, should never, either by softness or strength, have severed me" (30).

At this point, when the unnatural restraint of his "best faculties" is making him increasingly restless and low-spirited, William meets Yorke Hunsden at a party. Hunsden immediately offends William, who is just admiring his mother's portrait and tracing the resemblance between her features and his own, by pronouncing his mother's face to be wanting in "character and force; there's too much of the sen-si-tive . . . in that mouth" (25-26). He pretends to prefer Edward's wife, whom William has earlier described as a coquette, lacking the "Promethean spark . . . , the clear, cheering gleam of intellect" (13). William would have dismissed Hunsden as yet another self-satisfied mill-owner, with whom he has little in common, had he not noticed that, "at times, an indescribable shade passed like an eclipse over his countenance," which seemed "like the sign of a sudden and strong inward doubt of himself, his words and actions" (28-29). Soon afterwards, when William visits Hunsden in his bachelor rooms, he is struck by the incongruous collection of continental novels and plays, and "works on Political Economy" and radical liberal politics (34). This contradiction in Hunsden's intellectual tastes is reflected in his physical appearance, as William only now realizes:

I was surprised now, on examination, to perceive how small and even feminine were his lineaments; his tall figure, long and dark locks, his voice and general bearing had impressed me with the notion of something powerful and massive; not at all -- my own features were

cast in a harsher and squarer mould than his . . . [H]is features [underwent] strange metamorphoses . . . , giving him now the mien of a morose bull and anon that of an arch and mischievous girl (35).

In a later passage, William suggests that Hunsden's face "resembled more the result of a cross between Oliver Cromwell and a French grisette, than anything else in Heaven above or in the Earth beneath" (200).

As Margaret Smith points out, the "exotic" comparisons and Hunsden's "Byronic (and Angrian) 'long locks' accentuate the essential romanticism of the character."<sup>32</sup> However, she not only sees a resemblance between Hunsden and Zamorna, but also suggests that Hunsden's romanticism, because of its Angrian origins, possibly acted "more powerfully on Charlotte's imagination than was consistent with the nature and dimensions of the character or book."<sup>33</sup> This is misleading, not only because Hunsden's affinity to Zamorna is tenuous, but also because the deep layers of feeling and imagination suggested by his physical appearance are central to the contradiction which William perceives in his nature. Hunsden, in effect, is as sensitive and imaginative as William himself. In his younger days, moreover, determined to revive the family business and become a respected member of the community, he perpetrated the very act of repressing his inner self which William has been contemplating. Like William, he failed, and ended by nursing his "Cherished-in-secret, Imagination," in his lodgings, his only haven from the grotesque and hostile materialism of the mill-town in which he was nevertheless resolved to make his mark. The constant guard which he has to keep on his feelings and imagination, and his inability to share them with a kindred spirit have made him a restless and embittered man, whose only outlet for his true self is his passion for continental literature, and whose only outlet for

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret M. Brammer [Smith], "The Manuscript of The Professor," Review of English Studies, 11 n.s. (May 1960), pp. 160, 164.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

his resentment against the mill-town environment hemming in this inward self is his dabbling in radical politics. As such, Hunsden is a projection of William as he will become if he remains in X-.

Since Hunsden is as wary lest he expose his true self as William, William fails to solve the riddle of Hunsden's character. It is only towards the end of the novel, when he shows William and Frances a miniature of an Italian girl whom he once loved, that Hunsden hints at the cause of his "fitful gloom." Frances immediately understands his meaning:

I am sure Lucia once wore chains and broke them . . . . social chains of some sort -- the face is that of one who has made an effort, and a successful and triumphant effort, to wrest some vigorous and valued faculty from insupportable constraint -- and when Lucia's faculty got free, I am certain it spread wide pinions and carried her higher than . . . 'les convenances' permitted you to follow . . . Lucia has trodden the stage . . . . You never seriously thought of marrying her -- you admired her originality, her fearlessness -- her energy of body and mind, you delighted in her talent whatever that was, whether song, dance or dramatic representation . . . -- but I am sure she filled a sphere from whence you would never have thought of taking a wife (261-262).

Young Hunsden's determination to conquer the world of X- prevented him from marrying a girl who preferred cultivating her dangerous creative talents to the pursuit of worldly success.

Years later, when he meets William, Hunsden is writhing under his self-imposed secretiveness, but knows that it has become too much ingrained to be thrown off. Suspecting that William is about to make the same unfortunate mistake, he deliberately goads him into rebellion against Edward and even engineers their decisive quarrel. William, although only dimly aware of the caution implicit in Hunsden's spiritual and emotional isolation, leaves X- in search of more suitable employment as well as "Congeniality, Repose, Union" (41).

In Brussels, William feels immediately attracted to Zoraïde Reuter, fascinated by her ability to make her way in the world:

Look at this little real woman! is she like the women of novelists and romancers? To read of female character as depicted in Poetry and Fiction, one would think it was made up of sentiment, either for good or bad -- here is a specimen, and a most sensible and respectable specimen too, whose staple ingredient is abstract reason. No Talleyrand was ever more passionless than Zoraïde Reuter! (90).

Such cool intelligence William feels to be a reasonable substitute for feeling and imagination: "I respect her talent; the idea of marrying a doll or a fool was always abhorrent to me; . . . to know that I must pass the rest of my dreary life with a creature incapable of understanding what I said, of appreciating what I thought or of sympathising with what I felt!" (108). For one brief moment, Zoraïde is even allowed to open "the casket" containing his "mental wealth," and lay "her hand on the jewel within" (105). Yet William soon longs for deeper emotional and spiritual fulfilment. One night he overhears Zoraïde and Pelet discuss their long-standing engagement. Next day, by a happy coincidence, he is introduced to Frances Henri.

Frances immediately proves that she has imagination in a *devoir* on King Alfred and the oat cakes. Wary of encouraging the girl to set too great store by this faculty, William suggests that she has "taste and fancy" (137). These not being "the highest gifts of the human mind," he confidently advises her to cultivate them, and not to "fear in any crisis of suffering, under any pressure of injustice to derive free and full consolation from the consciousness of their strength" (137). After some weeks, when he feels certain that Frances is unlikely to over-indulge her "Fancy," he tells her that she actually has "Judgment and Imagination" (146). When she proves in another *devoir* -- "an emigrant's letter to his friends at home" -- that she can appreciate "resolve, patience, endeavour," he realizes that he has found the perfect soul-mate (149).

Through Zoraïde's machinations, Frances is forced to leave the school, and William loses sight of her. Weeks later, he happens to observe her in a churchyard, "pacing slowly to and fro" near her grandmother's grave (167). Seeing her thus



lost in dreams, his confidence in her ability to control her imagination is temporarily shaken. Then he perceives the familiar "flame . . . of natural feeling," and is satisfied that "the more dangerous flame [of imagination] burned safely under the eye of reason; I had seen when the fire shot up a moment high and vivid, when the accelerated heat troubled life's current in its channels, I had seen Reason reduce the rebel and humble its blaze to embers" (169). The "personification of discretion and forethought, of diligence and perseverance, of self-denial and self-control," Frances has proved that misery and grief do not affect her will to cope with reality (169).

One doubt remains. William suspects that Frances, although resolved to make a success of her new job in the most prestigious English school in Brussels, is beginning to channel her inward life into a self-contained realm of the imagination, as he himself had done at X-. His suspicion proves well-founded. One evening, after several weeks of separation, he enters her lodgings and finds her sitting alone near the fire, reciting poetry. While her eyes are "returning from abstraction, just awaking from dreams," he surmises that she has been telling herself: "I must cultivate fortitude and and cling to poetry; one is to be my support and the other my solace through life" (216). "Other women have such thoughts," he comments; "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." (216). To avert such a fate, he proposes marriage. Frances accepts, and to his delight refuses to give up working: "I like a contemplative life, but I like an active life better; I must act in some way and act with you" (226).

Just before the wedding, Hunsden arrives. Having ascertained that William has succeeded in finding a kindred spirit, who shares his awareness of the delicate balance to be maintained between the cultivation of one's inner self and the pursuit of a stake in life, he blesses the marriage and departs. Frances fully lives up to her husband's expectations:

The faculties of her nature . . . remained fresh and fair; [and] other faculties shot up strong . . . . Firmness, activity and enterprise covered with grave foliage poetic feeling and fervour; but these flowers were still there, preserved pure and dewy under the umbrage of later growth and hardier nature: perhaps I only in the world knew the secret of their existence, but to me they were ever ready to yield an exquisite fragrance . . . (250).

Moreover, after ten years of "bustle, action, unslacked endeavour," they have earned sufficient money to retire from business and settle near X- as well-respected gentry (249).

All's well that ends well, were it not for the Crimsworths' little son. Victor is "pale and spare," and a curiously withdrawn child, with a passion for reading: William admits that he never "saw a child smile less than he does, nor one who knits such a formidable brow when sitting over a book that interests him" (263). His only interest in the outside world is his mastiff cub. Still, although withdrawn, the temper of this "glutton of books," has "a kind of electrical ardour and power, which emits, now and then, ominous sparks -- . . . I call it the leaven of the offending Adam" (263, 266). Victor, in fact, bears a close resemblance, not only to William Ashworth, but to Ernest, Zamorna's son, whose character Brontë had sketched nearly twelve years earlier. Ernest "is too delicate for a boy. the contours of his form want that round healthy fullness."<sup>34</sup> Also,

he appears already to dwell in a calm world of thought of his own. Reading & books are the very delight & end of his existence! I hardly ever see him except it be seated on the floor of some solitary & silent room, his father's large dog Roswal beside him, one little hand fondly resting on the hound's head, & the other on the pages of some immense volume almost equal in size to himself, his dark down-cast eyes shining from under their white lids, as they followed the lines with a fixed & poring intentness which is as I said before perfectly unnatural . . . It must not be supposed from what I have said that Ernest is all placid goodness, all without the leaven of

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<sup>34</sup> A Brace of Characters (30 October 1834), WSW, II, p. 52. (facsimile only).

the old Adam. No[, ] Zamorna is his father & the Gordons the dark -- malignant, scowling Gordons are his blood-relatives.<sup>35</sup>

At the very end of her "study of real Life," therefore, Brontë felt compelled to disrupt the Crimsworths' happy little family by putting a cuckoo in their nest who comes straight from Angria (159).

William feels that Victor's exclusive interest in reading indicates "a susceptibility to pleasurable sensations almost too keen, for it amounts to enthusiasm" (263). Also, while insisting that Victor, "though still, . . . is not unhappy -- though serious, not morose," William feels that the "something" in his son's character "should be if not whipped out of him, at least soundly disciplined" (263, 266). He is equally overheated in his feelings towards Hunsden, whom he and Frances suspect of deliberately encouraging Victor's "foibles" (267).<sup>36</sup> Making a symbolic but impotent gesture, he shoots Victor's rabid dog, appropriately named Yorke after the donor. This estranges him even further from his son. Finally, fearing that Victor's stubborn refusal to try to come to grips with the real world will lead to fits "of mute fury which will sicken his body and madden his soul," he decides to send his son to Eton (267). At this point, the novel comes full circle, for it was at Eton that William himself began the arduous process of learning to balance the needs of his inner self and the demands of the real world.

Victor, who so blatantly chooses to ignore his parents' example, is evidently intended as a counter-image to William and Frances. Being introduced at the very end of the novel, however, his brief appearance is apparently redundant, if not unnecessarily confusing. Yet, if Victor is considered

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 53 (facsimile only). In 1836, Ernest dies and another son is born, called Victor.

<sup>36</sup> "One thing alone has power to call [Ernest's] attention away, the approach of Lord Northangerland [, his father's enemy], then up he springs as if Galvanized" (A Brace of Characters, WSW, II, p. 53).

as a manifestation of Brontë's ultimate dissatisfaction with her handling of the process by which the father has learnt to cope with reality, the appearance of such a rebellious child does make sense. A brief look at the novel's visual qualities, which are the hallmark of Brontë's creative imagination, suggests that she had indeed reason to be dissatisfied.

As a narrator, William continually highlights the intensely visual nature of his memory and imagination. On several occasions, characters are compared to paintings, such as the housemaid, who reminds him "of the female figures in certain Dutch paintings" (58). Other characters are presented as drawings taken from his portfolio, as in the lengthy description of his pupils (98-101). Memories are presented as "pictures [which] line the four-walled cell where are stored for me the Records of the Past" (55). Often such memories have a visionary quality: "Thoughts, Feelings, Memories that slept, are seen by me ascending from the clods -- haloed most of them" (55). The novel, moreover, abounds in descriptive details, giving the impression of a vividly recollected reality.

And yet, The Professor strikes most readers as an unvisual novel. In May Sinclair's words: "you wander through a world where there is no sound, no colour, no vibration; a world muffled and veiled in the stillness and the greyness of the hour before dawn."<sup>37</sup> This singular indistinctness is usually attributed to Brontë's over-zealous efforts to overcome her "taste . . . for the ornamented and redundant in composition."<sup>38</sup> This somewhat obscure phrase means no more, however, than that she tried to avoid the Richardsonian proliferation of characters and events against which Coleridge had cautioned her in 1841. Moreover, as Sinclair suggests, the "strange greyness," creating a "great gulf" between The

<sup>37</sup> May Sinclair, The Three Brontës (London: Hutchinson, 1912), p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> "Preface" (1851), The Professor, p. 3.

Professor and Jane Eyre, "lies deeper than technique."<sup>39</sup>

While writing The Professor, Brontë, as always, had meant to commit her imagination fully to the exploration of her protagonist's character. This time, however, she found herself severely hampered by her initial conception of the sort of life which he was to lead. Replacing William Ashworth, the dreamer, by William Crimsworth, she had set out to describe the progress of a young man who was grimly determined to make his way in the world. Half-way through the writing process, she realized that William was bound to fail if he could not also create room for his vivid inner life. At this point, however, having presented himself to the reader as a resolute and well-balanced person, it would have been inconsistent if the second half of William's autobiography were to focus on his efforts to resist the lure of his imagination. Also, since William reveals his inward self only hesitantly to one other character, it would have been inconsistent if he exposed his feelings and imagination fearlessly to the reader. It would certainly have been inconsistent for a retired pedagogue and forerunner of Samuel Smiles to do so.

Since Brontë could not lay bare William's inner struggle, she projected its most significant aspects on Hunsden and Frances. The various stages of William's spiritual growth can thus be deduced from his impressions of their characters and the changes in his relations with them. Yet the narrative altogether failed to grip Brontë's imagination because, in contrast to the Angrian writings, she had been unable to fuse her conception of William's character, the outer reality in which he moves, and the equally concrete reality of his inner life, into one single creative vision. At the end of the novel, therefore, Victor, the latter-day Angrian, makes his appearance to remind her that she would have to rewrite William's story in a way more congenial to her visual imagination if William's experiences were to be made her own.

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<sup>39</sup> Sinclair, The Three Brontës, p. 104.

As the early writings suggest, creative writing to Brontë meant a continual search for appropriate narrative forms into which she could channel her stream of thoughts. Thus, within days of her failure to solve the problem of Elizabeth Hastings' habitual reserve in Henry Hastings, she tried again in But it is not in Society. Now, while The Professor was going the round of the publishers, she felt challenged to devise a means of tapping the visual resources of her imagination in order to describe in convincing, and indeed more comprehensive, terms the process by which a sensitive and imaginative person, struggling for a stake in life, succeeds in working out a compromise between the cultivation of his inward self and the demands of the real world. At the same time, she had by no means given up hope of supplementing her income by writing novels, especially now that her father might lose his living because of his impending blindness. In early September 1846, alone and miserable in her Manchester lodgings, she started working on Jane Eyre.

In the next chapter, the basic visual structure of Jane Eyre will be outlined. In chapters nine and ten, Jane's progress will be traced in some detail.

## Chapter Eight

### JANE EYRE (1846-1847)

George Henry Lewes, one of the first critics to draw attention to the visual power of the imagination operating in Jane Eyre, suggested that this power was channelled into two complementary modes of representation. Firstly, there is "objective representation," that is, "the reality stamped upon . . . the characters and incidents" as well as "the various aspects of Nature, and of the houses, rooms, and furniture. The pictures stand out distinctly before you: they are pictures, and not mere bits of 'fine writing.'"<sup>1</sup> Secondly, there is "subjective representation . . . connecting external appearances with internal effects," that is, the evocation of the psychological process by which material phenomena are absorbed into Jane's mental experience.<sup>2</sup> Lewes, whose theory of the novel derived from his study of eighteenth-century empiricist psychology, thus saw in Jane Eyre an illustration of the novelist's two principal duties. He should convey reality, "not in the vague schematic way of ordinary imagination, but in the sharp definition of actual perception," in order to help his readers penetrate the layers of habit and familiarity which normally obscure their vision.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he should underline the crucial role of perception in man's cognition of external reality by showing, through his

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<sup>1</sup> George Henry Lewes, "Recent Novels: English and French," Fraser's Magazine (December 1847), Heritage, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> George Henry Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," Fortnightly Review (1872), in Alice R. Kaminsky, ed., Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 97.

characters, "that the mind is not apart from its perceptions, but that it is the perceptions -- that a perception is a state of the percipient, and that mind is the collective unity of these various states."<sup>4</sup>

Lewes' analytical approach was soon forgotten when, after Brontë's death, the close connection between her life and novels became known. To subsequent nineteenth-century critics, such as Leslie Stephen, Brontë herself was the heroine of Jane Eyre. The minor characters, the scenery, and the incidents were, "for the most part, equally direct transcript from reality."<sup>5</sup> The novel's visual force could be attributed, therefore, to Brontë's extraordinary "powers of observation."<sup>6</sup>

Early twentieth-century critics felt that the visual energy in Jane Eyre was too heavily concentrated upon Brontë's overpowering personality to be explained in terms of psychological realism or straightforward observation. Possibly

<sup>4</sup> George Henry Lewes, "Spinoza's Life and Works," Westminster Review, 39 (May 1843), 399. Lewes' appreciation of Jane Eyre presupposes a great capacity for seeing, which he shared with the general reader of his day, and which may well, in part, explain the huge popular success of the novel. Thus James Lorimer wrote: "In two or three words we have the scene so vividly before us, that we seem to experience with our bodily senses the phenomena described" (North British Review [August 1849], Heritage, p. 116). Such visual competence cannot be attributed to the modern reader, whose vision, as Ian Gregor suggests, "is always incomplete, always partly in the shadow" (Reading the Victorian Novel: Detail into Form [London: Vision Press, 1980], p. 251). Hence one cannot but endorse M.E. Nelson's conclusion that it is questionable "whether there will be a satisfactory study of vision in 18th-century poetry until that century's reader, with his genius for seeing, is acknowledged and assessed," and apply this to Jane Eyre and the Victorian novel in general (Review of P.M. Spacks' The Poetry of Vision, Modern Language Notes, 5 [December 1967], 153). More discouraging is Hugh Witemeyer's conclusion that it is "probably impossible for us fully to recapture the Victorian sense of the literary text as a visual field" (George Eliot and the Visual Arts [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Stephen, Cornhill Magazine (December 1877), Heritage, p. 415.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 416.



influenced by their renewed interest in Wuthering Heights, they argued that Charlotte, like Emily, shaped reality into a mirror image of her own mind. Thus Virginia Woolf wrote of the "exhilaration" created by Charlotte's visual imagination as it

rushes us through the entire volume, without giving us time to think, without letting us lift our eyes from the page. So intense is our absorption that if some one moves in the room the movement seems to take place not there but up in Yorkshire. The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her . . . Remarkable faces, figures of strong outline and gnarled feature have flashed upon us in passing; but it is through her eyes that we have seen them. Once she is gone, we seek for them in vain. Think of Rochester and we have to think of Jane Eyre. Think of the moor, and again there is Jane Eyre. Think of the drawing-room, even, those 'white carpets . . .' and the 'general blending of snow and fire' -- what is all that except Jane Eyre?

Brontë, Woolf concluded, was one of "the self-centred and self-limited writers," whose "impressions are close packed and strongly stamped between their narrow walls. Nothing issues from their minds which has not been marked with their own impress."<sup>8</sup>

In 1968, in an effort to harmonize the perceptual vision noted by Lewes and the imaginative vision highlighted by Woolf, Jennifer Gribble argued that in Jane Eyre, Brontë is "attempting . . . to balance the claims of an objective, shared world of phenomena of which she must give faithful account, and a belief in the transforming, organic power of the imagination."<sup>9</sup> Confidently applying Samuel Coleridge's "very relevant" concept of a dual operation of the imagination, Gribble nevertheless found it difficult to demonstrate Brontë's awareness that "she must represent as objectively as

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, "'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights,'" The Common Reader, First Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1925, rpt. 1984), pp. 156-157.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Gribble, "Jane Eyre's Imagination," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23 (December 1968), 282.

possible the facts on which Jane's imagination works."<sup>10</sup> Gribble's justification -- Brontë's "tendency to an uncritical identification with her heroine, and in particular her fascinated interest in Jane's imaginative powers"<sup>11</sup> -- failed to convince, among others, Cynthia Linder.

According to Linder -- who also invokes that "most lucid commentator," Coleridge -- Brontë, rather than presenting external reality, controls "the pattern of the novel, [without] obtruding her point of view in it," by selecting "the appropriate material for the depiction of the inner life of the character, which simultaneously portrays her outward actions. To do this she has made use of 'objective correlatives' . . . , i.e. books and paintings, and . . . natural scenery."<sup>12</sup> Linder's argument, in its turn, fails to capture the dynamic quality of Jane's visual responsiveness to her environment noted by Lewes and Gribble.

As in the case of the scholars who analyze Brontë's juvenilia in terms of romance versus realism, the difficulties which successive critics have encountered in their efforts to relate Brontë's controlling imagination to Jane's perceptual and imaginative responses to her outer world, arise from their application of a preconceived critical frame of reference. Instead, one should trace the visual structure of Jane Eyre to Brontë's own imagination, and, more particularly, show how it has evolved from the visual configuration of her previous writings. Following this procedure, four complementary visual fields can be distinguished in the novel, which both underpin the themes preoccupying Brontë and bring out the thematic continuity of Jane Eyre and the earlier writings.

As Charles Wellesley's apprehension in Strange Events (1830) lest he and the whole of Verdopolis should prove mere projections of a Brobdingnagian author's imagination

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 280-281, 283.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia A. Linder, Romantic Imagery in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 31, 66.

suggests, Brontë had long been aware that any direct interference in her imaginary world would affect its validity as an objective representation of reality. In the early juvenilia, therefore, she had preserved her sense of intimacy by observing her modern Athens from within through the eyes of a minor character, Charles Wellesley. In the later juvenilia, in addition to the central Angrian world, she had created a world of inns and country villas, inhabited by lesser characters. This peripheral world contained visual manifestations of the overstraining of the imagination and excessive secretiveness with which she was trying to come to grips at this time. These manifestations she had perceived through the eyes of Charles Townshend, as in the scene in which he watches Macara recovering from a dose of opium. Thus, by both creating objective representations of the dangers inherent in her over-reliance on her imagination and sharing in her narrator's perceptual responses, she evolved a more controlled approach to the central Angrian world. The primary visual field of Jane Eyre also consists of a world of ordinary reality, and in designing it, Brontë relied on the same interaction between controlled representation and close perception as in the peripheral Angrian world.

In the peripheral Angrian world, Brontë had simply presented Townshend with meaningful images and scenes, from which he deduced the relevance to his own situation. In Jane Eyre, her technique is more complex. Virginia Woolf's perceptive observations on the visual nature of thought in her essay on the cinema help one to understand the difference. Woolf, disappointed at the failure of contemporary film-makers to exploit the visual resources of their medium, recalls how

at a performance of Dr. Caligari the other day a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity. For a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous diseased imagination of the lunatic's brain . . .  
Is there, we ask, some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without

the help of words? It has speed and slowness; dartlike directness and vaporous circumlocution. But it has, also, especially in moments of emotion, the picture-making power, the need to lift its burden to another bearer; to let an image run side by side along with it. The likeness of the thought is for some reason more beautiful, more comprehensible, more available, than the thought itself.<sup>13</sup>

In Jane Eyre, Brontë responds to the mind's need to shape thoughts into concrete, more comprehensible forms by creating a stream of visual impressions, each of which corresponds to the thought in Jane's mind at the moment of perception. Moreover, whereas in the peripheral Angrian world, Brontë had presented Townshend with complete pictures, evoking equally straightforward responses, she develops each image in Jane Eyre by adding detail to detail in order to make the constituent elements of the impression closely match the corresponding aspects of Jane's unfolding thought. Thus the visual details evolving into the image of the shrubbery in the opening paragraph of the novel are designed to parallel Jane's formulation of her alienation from external nature. By gathering visual details into images and joining these images to form scenes and larger visual patterns, Brontë enables Jane to shape her stream of thought into an extended and structured visual correlative. By this means Brontë effectively controls and supervises Jane's growth to intellectual maturity.

Virginia Woolf, however, while suggesting that films should be adapted to the visual needs of the viewers' minds, conceived of "the picture-making power" as a wider and essentially spontaneous mental operation, involving not only the transmutation of images into visual correlatives of thoughts, but also the gathering of these images. Brontë, too, was aware that the device of an omnipresent observing protagonist-narrator, while reasonably effective in concealing her organizing presence in the loosely constructed peripheral Angrian world, had to be modified in order to prevent her equally tight control over the interplay between

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema" (1926), The Captain's Death Bed (London: Hogarth Press, 1981), p. 169.

representation, perception, and thought in Jane Eyre from spoiling the verisimilitude of her narrative. Her solution was to separate her protagonist-narrator into a protagonist and a narrator within the formal framework of an autobiography, taking care this time to draw a much sharper distinction between the two selves than in The Professor, in which the younger Crimsworth's perceptions and thoughts had to be filtered through the secretive mind of the retired pedagogue penning his memoirs. The younger Jane proves to be highly sensitive to the visual surface of her physical and human environment. In particular, her mind fastens upon those visual impressions which, from amongst a continuous stream of impressions, reflect most accurately her understanding of her environment. These visual correlatives of the younger Jane's mental perceptions become, in George Eliot's words, "the primitive instruments of thought."<sup>14</sup> It is these selected, because most expressive, impressions, moreover, which are stamped upon the elder Jane's memory. In writing her autobiography, therefore, it is these impressions which she records. Thus Brontë joins the journalistic immediacy of Townshend's perceptions, written down almost as soon as mentally registered, to the reflective, mnemonic approach of Crimsworth.

In contrast to the first and most prominent visual field of Jane Eyre, the second field centres upon a superior reality. Early on, this is the world of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, which the child firmly believes to be "solid parts of the earth's surface" (20). To the adolescent, it is "the real world . . . of sensations and excitements" beyond Lowood and Thornfield (100). Jane's mental experience of this superior reality is characterized by a deep longing to see. The child hopes "one day, by taking a long voyage, [to] see with [her] own eyes" the exotic places visited by Gulliver

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<sup>14</sup> George Eliot, "Story-telling," in Thomas Pinney, ed., Essays of George Eliot (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 445.

(20). The adolescent creates "fiery mosaic[s]" in her imagination, while longing "for a power of vision which might overpass [the skyline]; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life [she] had heard of" (145, 132). Unlike Townshend, who wanders backwards and forwards between the peripheral and central Angrian worlds, Jane is wholly dependent on her imagination for her visions of a superior reality. These visions, moreover, she does not shape into a coherent and dynamic inner world, comparable to Brontë's world of Angria, in order to relieve her longing. They remain static mental images, which only aggravate her restlessness. Indeed, the second visual field contains, not Jane's creative imagination, but her "fiery imagination," that is, the type of imagination which at Roe Head haunted Brontë with tantalizing pictures of the exciting life which had escaped her for ever. As such, the function of this field is to convey, not the quality of Jane's imagination, but the strength of her yearning for a sphere of existence in which she can satisfy her intellectual and creative needs.

The third visual field of Jane Eyre focuses upon Jane's creative imagination, and her drawing and painting in particular. Her profound interest and apparent proficiency in these arts suggest that she is essentially an artist, and that her dissatisfaction with ordinary reality is fired by her creative nature. Unlike Brontë herself, however, whose drawings of Angrian characters and landscapes complemented her self-contained imaginary world, Jane draws and paints aspects of her actual environment. Jane's creative activity thus highlights her gradual recognition that in order to come to grips with her yearning for a more fulfilling life, she must learn to understand ordinary reality. More particularly, it shows how she progressively employs her creative powers to assist her mind in translating perceptions of reality into expressive images, which thus acquire a distinctly pictorial quality.

The fourth visual field contains Jane's experience in the red-room, which is echoed in various forms in subsequent scenes, and her two nightmarish dreams just before

her wedding-day. On these occasions, Jane's mind is also assisted by her imagination. Her impressions of her outer world, however, are not merely translated into meaningful images which deepen her understanding of her identity within that world. They are forged into visions, vividly representing the fragile condition of what to her is the very essence of identity -- the creative self.

Jane Eyre is not a study of the workings of Jane's creative imagination, but an exploration of the conditions under which that faculty can be cultivated within a confining environment. The novel, therefore, records Jane's mental experiences of her environment in terms of her "secret language," that is, the interaction between her thoughts and perceptions. Jane's creative imagination, while determining her every action, plays only a secondary role -- it enhances the susceptibility of her mind to visual phenomena and, at pivotal moments, enables her to perceive her innermost self. As such, her protagonist's cognitive process accurately reflects the continual fusion of thought and vision within Brontë's own mind while writing Jane Eyre.

Yet a "secret language which we feel and see, but never speak," was not sufficient. Brontë, for one thing, had always kept a written record of her intellectual history, of which Jane Eyre was the latest chapter. Also, this time, she had to communicate her thoughts to her readers. More particularly, she had to convey them to readers who, while they revelled in romance, were indifferent to the faculty which was the be-all and end-all of her protagonist's identity: "who cares for imagination? Who does not think it a rather dangerous, senseless attribute -- akin to weakness . . . ? Probably all think it so, but those who possess . . . it."<sup>15</sup> Her inner, visual language, therefore, had to be translated into a persuasive, public, verbal language. Words, however, are most important within the novel itself, for the success of

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<sup>15</sup> Shirley, p. 56.

Jane's struggle for self-fulfilment depends in great measure on her ability to communicate her perception of reality to the people with whom she shares this reality.

To Brontë, who, as Gaskell suggests, had a "strong practical regard for the simple holy truth of expression," verbal communication meant, not to exploit a host of rhetorical and stylistic devices, but to shape her words into "the truthful mirror of her thoughts." By "never [writing] down a sentence until she clearly understood what she wanted to say, had deliberately chosen the words, and arranged them in their right order," she created a straightforward, honest language which, she felt, could not fail to leave its impress upon her readers' minds.<sup>16</sup> This belief in the effectiveness of unadorned, truthful language as well as the verbal competence which it requires evidently belong not only to Brontë alone, but also to the elder Jane, the narrator. At the same time, it points to the degree of verbal skill which young Jane must achieve in order to complete her education in a narrative world inhabited by characters who talk "like the heroes and heroines of police reports," that is, characters who insist that she adopt their verbal representations of reality and of her place in it.<sup>17</sup>

The preceding remarks by no means exhaust the complexity of the visual structure of Jane Eyre. Yet, by focusing on the interaction between thought and vision, and by drawing attention to the significance of verbal communication<sup>18</sup>, they establish the formal framework within

<sup>16</sup> Gaskell, p. 307.

<sup>17</sup> George Eliot to Charles Bray (11 June 1848), Gordon S. Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954-1978), vol. 1, p. 268.

<sup>18</sup> Recent critics tend to agree that, while the language of Jane Eyre has been studied more than exhaustively, its crucial function as an instrument of communication between the characters and between Brontë and her readers has been overlooked. Three of these critics offer especially informative readings: Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Jane Eyre in Search of Her



which Brontë once more tried to formulate her answer to the question, first raised in The Professor: how can a person capable of deep feeling and gifted with a sensitive imagination secure a stake in life without negating these qualities, which make up her very identity? In the next two chapters, the four stages of Brontë's answer, corresponding to the four principal periods in Jane's early life, will be examined in some detail.

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Story," Papers on Language and Literature, 16 (Fall 1980), 387-402; Janet H. Freeman, "Speech and Silence in Jane Eyre," Studies in English Literature, 24 (Autumn 1984), 683-700; and Mark M. Hennelly Jr., "Jane Eyre's Reading Lesson," English Literary History, 51 (Winter 1984), 693-717.

## Chapter Nine

### AT GATESHEAD HALL AND LOWOOD SCHOOL

Early on in childhood, having read about elves, Jane sought for them "among foxglove leaves and bells, under mushrooms and beneath the ground-ivy mantling old wall-nooks," until she "had at length made up [her] mind to the sad truth that they were all gone out of England" (20). Since then, as her acquaintance with Goldsmith's History of Rome suggests, her intellectual horizon had broadened. Yet this poignant memory of her early disappointment captures the fundamental cause of her unhappiness at Gateshead Hall: it is not her ill-treatment by the Reeds, but her inability to satisfy her expanding mind and imagination in the environment in which she is growing up. Gateshead Hall is Jane's "Parry's Palace."

Had Jane spent her formative years among people who shared her tastes and interests, like Brontë at Haworth Parsonage, she would have been merely restless, while dreaming of the exciting life which she might one day lead. The inevitable confrontation with reality would have been delayed until early adolescence. The Reeds, however, albeit unintentionally, cause Jane's progressive dissatisfaction with her uninspiring environment to come to a head at a much younger age.

The Reeds are a not untypical upper middle-class Victorian family. The coldly correct mother divides her time between running the estate and entertaining visitors, while the three spoilt children spend their days in pursuit of empty pleasures. Thus Georgiana wastes hours in front of the mirror "interweaving her curls with artificial flowers," while John roams about the grounds, bent on mischief (31). Had Jane been "a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child," her presence at the Hall would have been readily

accepted (14). The Reeds, however, cannot sympathize with a dreamy, imaginative child, with a passion for reading. In the aunt's eyes, Jane stubbornly refuses "to acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition" (3). To John, she is "Madam Mope" (6). All, including the servants, agree that she is "an underhand little thing" (10). Jane, on her part, mentally comparing the Reeds' dull existence with the varied scenes of life described in books, regards her aunt and cousins with growing contempt and withdraws even further into an exciting inner world which they cannot share.

The result of this failure to understand and accept each other's characters is a vicious circle of mutual hostility and resentment. John Reed channels his growing frustration into physical violence. In the aunt's case, it takes the form of verbal violence, in which she is supported by her servants. In part, her language accurately reflects her misinterpretation of Jane's reliance on her imagination: "I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night" (13). In part, too, it invokes the conventional Victorian indignation against poor relations, who had to be looked after lest one forfeited one's claim to gentility. "[Y]ou are a dependant, mama says," John tells Jane; "you have no money; . . . you ought to beg" (7). "[I]f she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor-house," Bessie adds, also echoing the aunt's words (10). This reproach of her dependence, which has become "a vague sing-song" in her ears, "very painful and crushing," hurts Jane most, for to her childish mind it classes her with the ragged uneducated women whom she has seen in Gateshead village, and thus implicitly denies her right to a fulfilling life (10). Although "always brow-beaten, always accused," Jane remains silent (12). Yet she closely watches the Reeds, almost spellbound by their virulent antipathy against her. Inevitably, "her continual, unnatural watchings" betray her contempt and inward rage, thus fuelling the Reeds' antagonism: she is "a tiresome, ill-conditioned child, who always looked as if she were watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand" (290, 25-26).

Many years later, Jane concedes that the Reeds, given the ordinariness of their minds and the shallowness of their imaginations, were bound to fail to respond sensitively to an alien creature whose vigorous mental faculties were cramped by the very environment in which they themselves felt at home:

I see it clearly . . . I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony . . . with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage . . . They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment (13-14).

However, whereas the elder Jane, viewing the situation dispassionately, can distinguish between the child's fundamental dissatisfaction with her barren environment and the Reeds' role as catalysts, the child itself cannot. During the months preceding the fateful Guy Fawkes Day on which she is stung into open rebellion, the Reeds have evolved in her overwrought mind into evil personifications of her restrictive environment.<sup>1</sup>

Jane Eyre opens with three bleak pictures, like sketches in Indian ink, of the "leafless shrubbery" on a dreary November morning; in the early afternoon, when sombre clouds and a penetrating rain make it an even more forbidding place; and "in the raw twilight" (3). Seen through the child's eyes, this inhospitable landscape -- in which she once hoped to meet with elves, but has now been "wandering" aimlessly --

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<sup>1</sup> Brontë's conception of Jane's extreme sensitivity to the Reeds' obtuseness derives from her experiences as a teacher at Roe Head. Writhing under the indifference of Miss Wooler and the pupils to her interests and aspirations, she soon came to see them as active agents of her confining environment. An early fragment suggests that initially Jane was to have spent her childhood at a boarding-school: "There was once a large house called Gateshead . . . in the North of England . . . -- Gateshead had been originally a Gentleman's house -- it was now a ladies' school" ("The exact date of my narrative" [c. September 1846], The Professor, p. 338).

images the intellectual and imaginative desolation of Gateshead Hall (3). Embedded in these impressions of the shrubbery is the name of Mrs Reed, establishing her as the genius loci, who, through one of her minions, the nurse, scolds Jane for not enjoying the walk like her cousins. Thus Jane's vision of the shrubbery also conveys her sense of exposure to the ill will of the people with whom she shares her uncongenial environment.

In the next scene, Jane is watching these people:

Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fire-side, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group . . . (3).

Although the contrast between the family group and the solitary child watching it underlines Jane's isolation, Jane herself -- as the narrator's choice of verb, "dispensed from," suggests -- has no desire to join it. Rather, she looks at it with thinly disguised contempt, for the Reeds' physical and mental passivity, with no books in sight, summarizes for her the utter dulness of their lives. The aunt, in her turn, manifests her hostility by accusing Jane of refusing to acquire "a more attractive and sprightly manner" (3). Stung by this unfair interpretation of her low spirits, Jane makes a feeble attempt to question the aunt's judgement, but is soon silenced.

Escaping into the small breakfast-room, Jane selects a book and mounts into the window-seat. This, as the contrast between its "red moreen curtain" and the funereal blackness permeating the preceding pictures suggests, is a place of the imagination (4). Here, indeed, Jane used to read and re-read Gulliver's Travels, confident that she too would one day be able to visit Lilliput and Brobdingnag. But those hours of blissful reverie have gone. Although Jane is "shrined in double retirement," the "clear panes of glass" on her left do not separate her from the "scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub" outside, to which her eyes keep straying (4). The

"[f]olds of scarlet drapery," too, offer no adequate protection against the bleak outer world, whose agents, the Reeds, may disturb her any moment (4). Reality, indeed, has already invaded her imagination. The shrubbery recurs in the chilling picture of "'forlorn regions of dreary space, . . . where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters . . . , centre the multiplied rigors of extreme cold'" (4-5). Images of death and despair, culled from amongst Bewick's vignettes, have replaced the visions of Lilliput and Brobdingnag. Jane, in effect, has reached the critical point when her susceptibility to her hostile and stifling environment has gathered such strength, that her imagination can no longer sustain the visions of a superior reality which so far have kept alive her faculties.

Before long, the physical bastion of Jane's imagination, the window-seat, is invaded by reality in the person of John Reed.<sup>2</sup> While he crudely displays his hostility towards the incomprehensible and therefore obnoxious alien creature by spending "some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at [her] as far as he could without damaging the roots," Jane looks with contempt at the outward signs of his want of intellect and imagination, his "dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks" (7, 6). Provoked by this look, John, instinctively directing his anger at Jane's fragile defense against his tyranny, deprives her of her book, while at the same time betraying his inability to appreciate the intimate connection between the material object, its intrinsic value, and Jane's innermost self: "You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant . . . . I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine" (7-8). Hit by the book and cutting her head, Jane is driven to putting into words parallels which she had drawn in silence, but "never thought thus to have declared aloud" (8). Characteristically applying the world of

<sup>2</sup> Again Brontë draws on her experiences at Roe Head, where, having withdrawn to the dining-room or bedroom to conjure up visions of Angria, she would frequently be disturbed by her pupils and Miss Wooler.

her reading as the absolute standard by which to judge her environment, she compares John to the Roman emperors. Enraged by this further manifestation of her alien cast of mind as well as by her daring to speak out at all, John attacks her. Jane is imprisoned in the red-room.

Jane immediately absorbs the almost perceptible presence of death in the red-room. Then her "fascinated glance" is drawn to the great looking-glass and "involuntarily explored the depth it revealed" (12). In that "visionary hollow," she sees the room:

A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; the two large windows . . . were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; . . . the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs were of darkly polished old mahogany. Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample, cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white . . . (12, 11).

She also sees herself:

the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit . . . (12).

The various shades of red of the furnishings echo the "scarlet drapery" which separated the window-seat from the outer world, suggesting that, seen by Jane in the mirror, the red-room, too, becomes a place of the imagination. The oppressiveness of the reds suggests that, unlike the window-seat, it offers her neither protection nor comfort. The white furnishings, obtruding themselves upon her eye and recalling the polar landscape which she has just been reading about, confirm that she is looking at an image of her inner world, formerly the stronghold of her imagination, but now occupied by the uncongenial reality which it was designed to exclude. The spirit-like creature at the centre of the vision reflects her perception that, since her imagination is no longer able to

disengage itself from the inferior reality of Gateshead Hall, her very identity is in danger of being extinguished.<sup>3</sup>

While this vision is before her eyes, Jane experiences "a rapid rush of retrospective thought . . . . All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well" (12). She still cannot see why she should be thus treated. Yet these memories crowding in upon her bring into sharp focus her perception that it is the Reeds, and they alone, who are to blame for the growing impotence of her imagination to sustain her inner self. When, next, her imagination actually foretells her imminent spiritual death by transforming the gleam of a lantern into "a herald of some coming vision from another world," and thus appears to be

<sup>3</sup> The picture of a bedroom with red and white furnishings appears to have been closely associated in Brontë's imagination with the extinction of her creative self. In 1834, for example, when she felt that her hopes of becoming a painter had received their death-blow, she wrote this description of Zamorna, her "mental King," on his death-bed:

all was still in the wide & lofty chamber, the windows darkened with long, rich drapery of crimson velvet, to which the morning sun shining behind gave a peculiarly vivid & brilliant appearance. the grand state-bed surrounded with curtains of the same, all drooping in deeply-fringed festoon folds, & sweeping the floor with their glittering gold tassels, like the canopy of a royal tent[;] the rest of the furniture lay in dense shadow, only here & there a marble stand of silver lamps, glistened as pure as snow through the gorgeous gloom by which they were encompassed . . . [A]n armchair . . . stood near . . . . all the [bed-]clothes, the splendid counterpane, the delicate cambric sheets, were tossed & tumbled in wild disorder, & lying on his back with his face turned restlessly to the ample pillow of white velvet, appeared [Zamorna] . . . Death fills the room  
. . .

MacLean, ed., The Spell, pp. 70-71. MacLean's transcription being slightly inaccurate, the manuscript is freshly transcribed here. A facsimile of the leaf containing the passage quoted can be found in WSW, I, p. 391.



threatening rather than sustaining her inner self, Jane's mind is prepared for open rebellion against the Reeds (15).

For a long time, Jane has channelled her exceptional visual powers into two wholly self-contained areas of mental experience. One of these, the inner world perceived by her imagination, is now closed:

when I turned over [the] leaves of [Gulliver's Travels], and sought in its marvellous pictures the charm I had, till now, never failed to find -- all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies malevolent and fearful imps, Gulliver a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions. I closed the book, which I dared no longer peruse . . . (20).

As a result, in confronting the Reeds, Jane can only draw upon her perceptual experience of her outer world. This is a source of strength, for to her this experience represents no less than the absolute truth. Yet it is also a source of weakness, for it is this experience which holds her concentrated bitterness and resentment. Both the strength and weakness inherent in her reliance on this experience manifest themselves in her use of language.

To the child, her words appear to present themselves spontaneously: at times "it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me" (28). In fact, this sudden power of speech is due not so much to Jane herself, but to the kind of language with which she is now confronted. Prior to the red-room crisis, she had not been insensitive to the continuous stream of scorn and abuse directed at her, but, apart from the harping on her dependence, it had failed to tap the fund of images in her mind. Following the red-room crisis, and indeed because of it, the servants, the apothecary, and the Reeds employ a highly concrete language which, in various ways, appeals directly to her perceptual experience and thus effectively forces her into speech. When Bessie tells the apothecary that Jane has had a fall, for example, she cannot but respond: "'I was knocked down,' was the blunt explanation jerked out of me" (22). The apothecary, by presenting Jane with his perceptions ("You have

a kind aunt and cousins," "Don't you think Gateshead Hall a very beautiful house?"), also precipitates her into speaking out (23). So does the aunt when she verbalizes Jane's solitary exile in the nursery: "she is not worthy of notice[, John]; I do not choose that either you or your sisters should associate with her" (28). Overhearing these words, Jane cries out "suddenly and without at all deliberating on [her] words, 'They are not fit to associate with me'" (28).

Jane's statements, although brief, are uttered with all the force of her long pent-up visual experience of her environment. The immediate result is that she is to be sent to school, a place peculiarly attractive to her, for Bessie had told her "of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers" executed by the young ladies, and "of French books they could translate" (25). Confident that by asserting her perceptions, she has succeeded in creating an opening in the real world for her expanding inner self, the window, once her precarious last defence against the forces of reality encroaching upon her imagination, is now felt to be a hindrance to self-realization: "I fell to breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted, and thus clearing a space in the glass through which I might look out on the grounds" (31).

Jane, however, has only succeeded in precipitating her release from Gateshead Hall by further antagonizing the Reeds. Previously, they had considered her "an underhand little thing," stubbornly refusing to acquire a "franker, more natural" manner (10, 3). Viewed in that light, her recent verbal outbursts could not but be deliberate distortions of their characters, designed to provoke them. Her "worst fault," as the aunt tells Mr Brocklehurst, is "a tendency to deceit" (35). Jane, for her part, feels that her perceptions have been deliberately misrepresented by her aunt in order to poison Mr Brocklehurst's mind against her and thus ensure that she will never be able to find self-fulfilment. Knowing that the harm has already been done, she nevertheless asserts her vision of the Reeds, and the aunt in particular, once more: "Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely and must turn" (38). Even before finishing, she feels "as if an invisible bond had

burst, and that [she] had struggled out into un hoped-for liberty" (39). Soon, however, she recognizes that her aunt has been silenced and driven from the room, not by "the truth," but by the fierceness of her speech: "half an hour's silence and reflection had shewn me the madness of my conduct, and the dreariness of my hated and hating position" (39, 41).

Her imagination, Jane had come to realize in the red-room, could not adequately protect her inner self from the Reeds' malevolence. Now her attempts to confront the Reeds with her perceptual evidence of their malevolence appear to have been equally futile, if not worse, for her bitterness and contempt, having found an outlet in speech, now trouble her conscience to the point that, after her final outburst, she is prepared to submit to her aunt's tyranny: "Willingly would I now have gone and asked Mrs. Reed's pardon" (41).<sup>4</sup> Once more, she tries to "find nourishment" for her true self: "I took a book -- some Arabian tales; I sat down and endeavoured to read. I could make no sense of the subject; my own thoughts swam always between me and the page I had usually found fascinating" (41). Once more, too, she wanders into the shrubbery: "the black frost reigned, unbroken by sun or breeze, through the grounds . . . I leaned against a gate, and looked into an empty field" (41). The spiritual death foretold by her vision of the spirit-like creature in the red-room mirror seems to be approaching fast.

Soon after her arrival at Lowood, Jane observes Helen Burns, who is reading a book. Helen's occupation "touche[s] a chord of sympathy": at last she appears to have found a kindred spirit (55). When, in the course of the next few days, she observes how the teachers and monitors are continually scolding and punishing Helen, apparently unjustly, she feels that Helen is being persecuted, like herself at Gateshead Hall, for preferring the pleasures of the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Brontë's outbursts of anger, both on paper and in speech, towards her pupils and Miss Wooler, and her subsequent self-accusations.

imagination to her dreary surroundings. Jane wonders, therefore, why Helen does not rebel against her persecutors.

Helen does indeed have a vigorous imagination, which, like Jane's, does not plumb the depths of romantic sensibility, but focuses upon concrete visions "of nations and times past; of countries far away" (85). This is the substance of Helen's "soul," manifesting itself in a "swelling spring of pure, full, fervid eloquence" (85). However, as her reading of Rasselas suggests, rather than encouraging her imagination, she endeavours to attain a firm grip on it lest it interfere with her duty to cope with her immediate environment: "Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope . . . ; attend to the history of Rasselas."<sup>5</sup> Helen, moreover, endeavours to employ her imagination constructively to strengthen her understanding of her environment and particularly of the characters of the teachers, to whom her frequent reveries are a source of continual irritation. Although her imagination proves stronger than her will to come to grips with the confining reality of Lowood, she thus succeeds in patiently enduring the teachers' ceaseless upbraiding.

Inspired by Helen's example, and overlooking her essential failure, Jane sets to work, "resolved to pioneer [her] way through every difficulty" (87). In part, she succeeds in creating a space for herself at Lowood because, suppressing her yearning for an exciting life, she directs all her energies to the main business of the school: to prepare for a career as a governess or teacher by acquiring a proper education. In part, too, she succeeds because one subject on the school curriculum, drawing and painting, not only opens up a channel for her creative impulse, but also offers a means of harnessing the visual strength of her imagination to her perceptual understanding of her environment. The division between her inward and outward vision at Gateshead Hall had in some measure clouded her understanding of her environment,

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 39.

because she had seen it only in terms of its hostility to her inner world. At Lowood, progressing from a cottage whose walls "outrivalled in slope those of the leaning tower of Pisa" to the skilfully executed water-colours admired by Bessie, Rochester, and the Rivers girls, she learns, like Helen, to look at her physical and human environment with an eye to itself (87). As William Hazlitt wrote:

The painter . . . learns to look at nature with different eyes. He before saw her 'as in a glass darkly, but now face to face.' He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and 'sees into the life of things,' not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties . . . . The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from actual experience . . . . The most sensible men I know . . . are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds.<sup>6</sup>

And yet, although more successful in adapting herself to life at Lowood than Helen, Jane, too, ultimately fails. After eight years of unremitting hard work, having risen to the office of teacher, she can no longer contain the yearnings which had been the root cause of her rebellion against the Reeds. Again her imagination fills with images of a superior sphere of reality. Again she perceives the landscape surrounding her home as "prison-ground, exile limits" (100). Again, too, she is haunted by visions of spiritual death, whose colouring and imagery suggest that she is recalling her red-room experience. These visions she copies in water-colour.

According to Barbara Gates and other commentators, Jane's water-colours catch "the essence of surrealistic art, which tends toward the kind of involuntarism best known in dreams, aiming, when it does aim, at automatism and toward the

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<sup>6</sup> William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasure of Painting," P.P. Howe, ed., The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, vol. 8, Table-Talk: or, Original Essays (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1931), pp. 9-10.

unconscious. Jane of course was not aiming anywhere."<sup>7</sup> Much ingenuity has therefore been expended on the details of the water-colours in order to demonstrate that in painting them, Jane was unconsciously but, somehow, meticulously mapping out her future life.<sup>8</sup> Jane, however, claims that she saw each vision distinctly "with the spiritual eye, before [she] attempted to embody them" (153). Later she tells Rochester: "I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize" (154).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the significance

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Gates, "'Visionary Woe' and Its Revision: Another Look at Jane Eyre's Pictures," Ariel, 7 (October 1976), 37.

<sup>8</sup> It has frequently been argued that Jane's water-colours are to be considered as prophecy. Thus Gates maintains that the second painting foreshadows Jane's wandering on the moors just before her arrival at Moor House ("'Visionary Woe,'" pp. 40-41). However, as in this example, the parallels suggested are often arbitrary. Moreover, many pages intervene between the paintings and the events and people which they supposedly anticipate. It is unlikely that Brontë looked so far ahead while writing her novel. Indeed, as she told Gaskell: "Sometimes weeks or even months elapsed before she felt that she had anything to add to that portion of her story which was already written" (Gaskell, p. 306). Neither is it likely that Brontë expected the reader to remember the contents of the paintings so long (although she may not have realized that to visualize them at all is no mean feat). For the reader to recall the red-room scene after some one hundred pages while reading the description of the paintings, on the other hand, requires no extraordinarily tenacious imagination.

<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that Brontë was familiar with the writings of John Locke or the empiricist tradition in psychology which they initiated. Still, the key-term "idea," denoting a visual impression with intellectual properties, occurs eleven times in Jane Eyre. Thus Rochester, having heard Jane's voice at Ferndean, tries to describe "the idea, the picture these words opened to [his] mind" (572; see also pp. 5, 14, 162, 180, 277, 355, 374, 509, and 520). It may be that Brontë remembered the term from her reading of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century works on poetics and aesthetics, in the course of which it acquired a special meaning for her, which made it especially appropriate to her visual approach in Jane Eyre. It may also be that, like many late eighteenth-century novelists, she employed the term loosely as a synonym for a vivid mental picture. Cf. "I have bade a final adieu to felicity; to-morrow, to-morrow at this hour, oh, Madeline! and I shall be far, far distant from this

of the water-colours lies not in their details, although it is essential to note their origin in Jane's red-room experience, but in the fact that during the critical period of her progressive restlessness, Jane's imagination supplies her with stark images of her past experience, which she then conscientiously tries to paint in order to integrate them into her perception of her present environment and her place in it. Inward and outward vision thus meet in her art, crystallizing her understanding that during the eight years which she has spent learning to cope with reality, her inner self has been neglected. While there is no immediate danger of its extinction, for the water-colours are only cautionary images, the time has come to expand and enrich it.

Jane's recognition that she must leave Lowood corresponds to William Crimsworth's decision to throw in the towel at X-. Yet there have been crucial differences in the manner and presentation of their progress so far. Crimsworth determined to go to X- for no apparent reason, only to discover that he could not sustain his tight grip on what he vaguely describes as his "Cherished-in-secret, Imagination." In Jane's case an intricate causal pattern between imagination and reality emerges, for her cramped imagination first causes her to withdraw from reality, then impels her to tackle it, and eventually compels her to relax her grip on reality. Crimsworth, moreover, fearful of losing credibility as a go-getter, hides his imaginative nature behind a cynicism comparable to the mask worn by William Percy. Jane, too, might have survived at Gateshead Hall if she had adopted the defensive outward cheerfulness of Elizabeth Hastings and Miss West. Being only a child, she failed to do so. This failure

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spot! -- I shall only behold this lovely face in idea" (Regina Maria Roche, Clermont [1798; London: Folio Press, 1968], p. 24).

Brontë also employs the term "idea" in a letter to Nussey (1836), WSC, I, p. 141; MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 35; "All this day I have been in a dream"; Shirley, pp. 138, 614; and Villette, pp. 173, 274.

enabled Brontë to bring the extraordinary visual strength of Jane's imagination and perception, which in Crimsworth's case was only implied, to the surface of her narrative. As a result, Brontë could share intimately in Jane's experiences, thus succeeding where she had failed in The Professor.



## Chapter Ten

### AT THORNFIELD HALL AND MOOR HOUSE

Soon after Jane's arrival at Thornfield Hall, the starvation of her faculties becomes intolerable: "my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, . . . and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it -- and certainly they were many and glowing" (132). Contrary to critical opinion, she does not indulge in romantic day-dreams, anticipating her susceptibility to Rochester's Byronicism. Her visions, representing "the busy world, towns, regions full of life [she] had heard of but never seen," derive from her strongly held belief that women

need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags (132, 133).

In this passage, Brontë recalls her resentment that Branwell, but not she, should have been able to train to be a painter. As such, it indicates not only the depth, but especially the nature of the frustration which Jane is channelling into her reveries in the weeks before Rochester's arrival.

Echoing Brontë's view in 1848, Thackeray wrote: "There are many more clever women in the world than men think for. Our habit is to despise them."<sup>1</sup> Jane, therefore, is

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<sup>1</sup> William Thackeray, "On Love, Marriage, Men, and Women," Sketches and Travels in London, Punch (June 1848), The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (London: Smith, Elder, 1898), vol. 14, p. 270.

agreeably surprised when, during their first conversation, Rochester takes a more than usual interest in her education and reading habits. She is even more gratified by the serious attention which this connoisseur ("I can recognise patch-work") gives to her drawings and paintings (152).<sup>2</sup> Weeks of progressive intimacy follow, during which Rochester opens "to a mind unacquainted with the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways" (180). Before long, Jane's "keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imaging the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed," grows into love (180).<sup>3</sup> Hers, indeed, is no transcendental passion, but a sharing of "tastes" as well as "feelings" (220). It is the "something in [her] brain" as well as in her heart which "assimilates [her] mentally" to Rochester (219). Eventually, just before Rochester's proposal of marriage, she cautiously describes her love thus:

I love Thornfield . . . . I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright, and energetic, and high. I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence; with what I delight in, -- with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. I have known you, Mr. Rochester . . . (317).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Arthur West's interest in Marian Fairburne's drawing of a bridge and William Percy's admiration for Elizabeth Hasting's ornamental vase (pp. 104-105, 115-116 above).

<sup>3</sup> Modern editions print "imagining" instead of "imaging," a verb which, like "ideas," underlines the visual nature of Jane's imagination.

<sup>4</sup> "Originality" is a loaded term in Brontë's writings. In the early juvenilia it serves to distinguish between artists and non-artists:

It consists in raising from obscurity some theme, topic, employment, or existence which has hitherto never been thought of by the great mass of men, or thought of only to be despised; in pouring around it the light of genius, proving its claim to admiration by the subtle tools of logic, clothing it with all the bright hues of a lively imagination, and presenting it thus adorned to the astonished world.

(The Tragedy and The Essay [6 October 1833], WSW, I, p. 305).

Rochester, in effect, has become Jane's "master," that is, not a lover of masculine strength of body and character, but a maître or teacher, who encourages the expansion of her creative and intellectual faculties by allowing her to share in his mental wealth.<sup>5</sup> Such a fulfilling relationship reconciles her to a life far from the superior reality for which she has been longing ever since her fruitless search for elves in the shrubbery.

However, the principal focus of interest in the Thornfield chapters is not Jane's expanding inner self, but her gradual recognition that Rochester is an imperfect master. From Rochester's own account, one gathers that in adolescence, like Jane, he was unable to adapt himself to his confining environment. In contrast to Jane, who created a fragile inner world to sustain her, he responded by trying to impose his visions of a superior reality upon the inferior reality hemming in his vigorous imagination. In early manhood, he is

In the later writings, in its wider meaning of creative intelligence, the term "originality" also serves to divide the sheep from the goats. Thus Jane is original (339, 478) and Blanche Ingram is not ("her mind was poor . . . ; she was not original" [232]). Often the term is accompanied by depreciatory references to "inferior minds" and "the great mass of men," illustrating the unmistakable strain of intellectual arrogance running through Brontë's writings, even after the Roe Head crisis. Although one can accept that within the Angrian context Captain Tree is an inferior being, and although one can understand that little Jane feels superior to the Reeds by virtue of her "capacity" and "propensities," one cannot but be disturbed by the potentially objectionable meanings lurking in such apparently innocent characterizations as: "Mrs. Fairfax turned out to be [a] kind-natured woman, of competent education and average intelligence. My pupil . . . had no great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood" (131). The awkward question, moreover, presents itself: did Brontë look upon the reader, so often addressed in the novel, as a sheep or a goat?

<sup>5</sup> Brontë habitually addressed M. Heger as "mon maître" in her letters: WSC, II, p. 11 (24 July 1844), p. 22 (8 January 1845), p. 68 (18 November 1845). In the last letter, she translates it as "Master" (p. 69). Crimsworth and Louis Moore are also addressed as "Master" by Frances and Shirley respectively long after they have ceased to be their proper teachers (The Professor, p. 224; Shirley, p. 709).

inveigled by his father and brother into marrying Bertha. Instead of profiting by this experience, he persists in his refusal to come to grips with reality. After fifteen years of aimless wandering, he arrives at Thornfield Hall, meets Jane, and conceives the plan of jointly asserting their imaginations in the face of reality.

The key to Rochester's subsequent actions is the Byronism found fault with by generations of critics. "[H]e does not appear to me to be a real character at all," Leslie Stephen wrote. As "self-conscious as a young lady on her first appearance in society," his account of his early life is "taken from the first novel at hand of the early Bulwer school, or a diluted recollection of Byron."<sup>6</sup> To May Sinclair, Rochester's confessions show him

at his worst and most improbable . . . . The alternate baldness and exuberant, decorated, swaggering boldness . . . alone betrayed the hand of an innocent woman. Curious that these makeshift passages with their obviously second-hand material, their palpably alien mise en scène should ever have suggested a personal experience . . . .

To Q.D. Leavis, Rochester is "a woman's man," proving that Brontë was not "immune to the vulgarization of the Romantic movement represented by Byronism."<sup>8</sup> Only Gérin has defended Rochester by insisting that to Brontë at least he was an authentic human being: "as familiar to her as her own brother," he "must be seen as the logical outcome of his author's earliest conceptions of a man[, which] were deeply imbued with the Byronic model . . . He had no other antecedents but Zamorna."<sup>9</sup>

Rochester's Byronism unquestionably rings false. Brontë, however, showed no marked interest in the Byronic hero

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Stephen, Cornhill Magazine (December 1877), Heritage, pp. 418, 419.

<sup>7</sup> Sinclair, The Three Brontës, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Leavis, ed., Jane Eyre, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Gérin, pp. 89, 333.

until early 1834, when she transformed Douro into Zamorna. Zamorna's Byronism, moreover, had no inherent interest for her, but served a specific purpose -- to dramatize the impenetrability of her imaginary world of art and artists. This suggests that Rochester's Byronism, including its peculiar histrionic quality, is also dictated, not by a sudden taste for the flamboyantly romantic on Brontë's part, but by the course which her narrative is taking. Indeed, Zamorna's strength is Rochester's weakness. Zamorna's imperious imagination was the centripetal force in a narrative realm which before long became an extension of his identity. More particularly, he controlled a visual domain, each aspect of which reflected the omnipotence of his imagination. Lesser characters, like Charles Wellesley, could only watch in admiration. Rochester, in contrast, tries to assert his imagination within an indifferent, and often hostile, reality. This reality, too, is a predominantly visual domain. Yet it not only resists his efforts to subordinate it to his imagination, but actually externalizes his misuse of his imagination. By the time he meets Jane, he is reduced to suppressing the visual evidence of his past excesses, while trying to manipulate her imagination to the detriment of her perceptions. As their first meeting suggests, his efforts are doomed from the start.

Late one wintry afternoon, a dark, mysterious stranger, complete with "tall steed" and "lion-like" dog, passes Jane in Hay Lane (136). Seconds later, he is ignominiously unsaddled, almost at her feet. "When will novelists give up introducing their heroes and heroines by means of runaway horses and broken-down carriages?", George Eliot was to complain later.<sup>10</sup> However, it was not lack of invention which suggested either Rochester's second-hand romantic appearance or the hackneyed device of a fall to Brontë, but their very derivativeness. The initial contrast between the country lane setting and Rochester's self-

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<sup>10</sup> George Eliot, "Belles Lettres," Westminster Review, 9 n.s. (January 1856), 299.

dramatization as a latter-day romance hero illustrates his refusal to adapt his imagination to ordinary reality. His subsequent fall exposes this persistent denial of reality in a supremely comic way. It takes only a small sheet of ice -- a piece of the real world -- to reduce him to a middle-aged man with a sprained ankle, propped up on a governess's shoulder.

Jane's reponse to Rochester's self-presentation in this scene is equally revealing. When, seated on a stile and contemplating the "utter solitude and leafless repose" of the winter landscape, she is disturbed by a strange noise, "all sorts of fancies bright and dark" crowd into her mind (134, 135). Yet despite her spiritual desolation, mirrored in the barren landscape, she resolutely refuses to allow her imagination to interfere with her perceptions. Hence she sees only "the common-place human form [of] a traveller taking the short cut to Millcote" (136). After his misadventure, she sees him "plainly": here is "no handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman," but a plain-featured man of average height, who might be thirty-five (137, 138). Neither does the incident possess any "romance" for her (140).

The next evening, Jane is invited into Rochester's private apartment, which bears a striking resemblance to the red-room. The entrance arch and windows are hung with "Tyrian-dyed" purple curtains, and the room itself is

spread with white carpets . . . [and] ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantel-piece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire (126).

Once more, as the colour scheme and mirrors suggest, Jane finds herself in a room in which imagination and spiritual death exist in close proximity. Yet the pervasive presence of death in the red-room has been replaced by a sensuous, almost aesthetic atmosphere.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this time Jane's inner self is

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the description of Zamorna's salons on p. 51 above.

threatened, not because reality is sapping her imagination, but because the only way of sharing intimately in Rochester's mental wealth is by agreeing to withdraw with him into an enclosed space, ruled by the imagination, the spiritual equivalent of the window-seat. Still, as the conclusion of their first interview suggests, Jane is no easy victim. Looking through her portfolio, Rochester is especially fascinated by three water-colours which, he claims, show that she was trying to forget her unhappiness "in a kind of artist's dreamland" (154). Jane, remembering how she had endeavoured to assimilate anterior visions into her perception of reality by means of her art, dismisses the suggestion, telling him that her "handiwork" resulted from an earnest desire to capture concrete ideas (154). Insisting that such "elfish" thoughts must have been seen "in a dream," Rochester hastily commands her to remove the portfolio, fearful lest his illusory conception of her dependence on her imagination be disturbed (154).

During their second interview, Rochester tells Jane: "It would please me now to draw you out" (162). Instead of displaying the depth of her imagination, Jane remains silent, deeming it useless "to talk for the mere sake of talking" (163). Undeterred, Rochester, launches into the story of his own life, in part to explain that it was not his own fault that he has failed to assert his imagination ("fate wronged me"), and in part to prove that he has succeeded in transforming even his misfortunes into a romantic experience (167). Nimble he treads between self-accusation ("I had not the wisdom to remain cool: I turned desperate"), romance ("I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed half the globe"), and savoury details (his "'grande passion'" for a French opera dancer) (167, 163, 173). Anticipating that Jane will object to the derivativeness of his narrative, he himself points out that he ruined himself "in the received style" (173). Jane, however, does not suspect this art connoisseur and man of the world to have any designs on her: "To speak truth, sir, I don't understand you at all" (168). When Rochester persists in being "enigmatical," she

breaks off their conversation, "deeming it useless to continue a discourse which was all darkness to me" (170).

Rochester's fertile imagination is by no means exhausted. "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night," he tells Jane, "I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (149). Confident that the visions of a superior sphere of existence evoked by such allusions to fairy-tales and the Arabian Nights' Entertainments cannot fail to tempt Jane into giving free rein to her imagination, he begins to address her consistently as "elf" (307), "ignis fatuus" (307), "Mustard-Seed" (325), "sprite" (330), and "fairy, . . . come from Elf-land" (337). Each time he employs this idiom, however, Jane is reminded of her vision of herself in the red-room mirror as a tiny phantom, "half fairy, half imp," thus only strengthening her resolve not to lose her grip on reality (12). When Rochester call her "my pale, little elf," she tells him: "It is Jane Eyre, sir" (325). When he calls her "a very angel," she tells him: "I will be myself" (327). And when he tells Adèle that "Mademoiselle is a fairy," with whom he is going to live in an "alabaster cave" on the moon, the child speaks for Jane by "denominating Mr. Rochester 'un vrai menteur'" (337).

Progressively, Rochester's approach becomes more direct. Thus he tells Jane point-blank: "I see, at intervals, the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of the cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high" (170-171). At first, confusing his allusions to her imagination with his appreciation of her "peculiar" and "unique" mind, she is gratified by her master's apparent perceptiveness (176). His subsequent diagnoses tend to disturb her. Thus, disguised as a gypsy crone, he tells her:

The flame flickers in the eye<sup>12</sup>; the eye . . . smiles at my jargon: it is susceptible; . . . its pride and reserve

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<sup>12</sup> The "flame" is "the more dangerous flame" of imagination, which Crimsworth also notices in Frances' eyes (The Professor, p. 169).



only confirm me in my opinion . . . I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow; and that brow professes to say, -- 'I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure, born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld . . . (251-252).

Puzzled by this charge of excessive self-control, for she has channelled all the energy of her starved faculties into their relationship, Jane assumes that Rochester has merely "been talking nonsense to make [her] talk nonsense" (253).

All this time, Jane is most acceptable to Rochester when she is silent, for her "needle of repartee," that is, her tendency to oppose an authentic voice to his stagey rhetoric, only disturbs his illusion that he has her in his spell: "Know . . . that it is not your forte to talk of yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves" (344, 166). Dimly aware of the verbal "web of mystification" which Rochester is weaving round her, however, Jane cannot yet speak out, for her outward vision, while still as acute as at Lowood, has not yet been able to get a firm grip on the visual evidence of the flaw in his nature (250). She has observed him sitting on a stile in Thornfield meadows on a summer evening, "a book and a pencil in his hand," like a man whose expansive and serene mind is reflected in the landscape (306). But then, he knew she was observing him. She has watched him in the orchard towards dusk, his senses feasting on the fragrance and colours of the flowers and his mind occupied by the insect life, like a man content with his little world. Again, he knew she was watching him. Yet, she has noticed that the third storey of the Hall has "the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory" (128). She has also discovered the fire in Rochester's bedroom and sat up with the injured Mason. So far, however, Rochester has succeeded in preventing her from seeing Bertha.

Once more, Jane's imagination comes to the aid of her perception of reality. One evening just before the wedding, while Rochester is away on business, she is walking in the garden and, as she later tells him -- "I beheld you in imagination" (354). When a storm comes on, she continues her reverie indoors, and during the night its conclusions come to

her in two nightmares. In the first nightmare, she tells Rochester next day,

I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, and wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you . . . ; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment (355).

In the second nightmare, she is wandering at night through the ruins of Thornfield Hall, still carrying the child. Hearing the gallop of a horse, she climbs on a "shell-like wall":

I saw you like a speck on a white track, lessening every moment . . . I bent forward to take a last look; the wall crumbled; I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee; I lost my balance, fell, and woke (356, 357).

The image of the abandoned child echoes Jane's vision of her diminishing selfhood in the red-room mirror. Only this time, it is an emblem of Rochester's innermost self. Rochester himself is once more the self-styled romantic horseman, lured on to spiritual death by his imagination, while Jane is urging him to return and confront reality. When he fails to listen, she, too, faces spiritual death, for her mind has become anchored in his.

While these nightmarish images are still imprinted on Jane's mind, Bertha finally presents herself before her eyes. The resulting experience is "half dream, half reality" (360). On the one hand, Bertha's face is seen "quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass," another allusion to the "visionary hollow" of the red-room mirror (358). On the other hand, "the thing was real" (359). Entering Jane's mind on an imaginative as well as a perceptual level, Bertha proves to be the key to Rochester's behaviour, for she is both a hyperbolic projection of his unbridled imagination and a living reminder of its past excesses.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brontë's conception of Bertha's madness as a visual manifestation of Rochester's uncontrolled imagination can be

Next morning, Jane reluctantly puts on her "wraith-like" wedding-dress, a present from Rochester, which closely resembles the "white and straight . . . gown, sheet, or shroud" worn by Bertha (347, 358). Reflected in the bedroom mirror in which she saw Bertha, she perceives "a robed and veiled figure, so unlike [her] usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (362). Now very close to realizing that by marrying Rochester she surrenders herself to his fiery imagination, she is whisked off to church. Having throughout their acquaintance been steadfast in her adherence to reality, she is saved by one of its agents. "[U]ttering each word distinctly, calmly, steadily," the unimaginative "Briggs -- a solicitor of -- street, London," discloses the unassailable fact that "Mr. Rochester has a wife now living" (365, 366).

In a characteristically histrionic gesture of

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traced to one of the principal tenets of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century empiricist psychology, thus summarized by Samuel Johnson:

All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can controll and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depreivation of the mental faculties: it is not pronounced madness but when it [be]comes ungovernable, and apparently [,i.e., manifestly,] influences speech or action (Rasselas, p. 133).

The destructive force of Bertha's madness, however, derives from none other than Zamorna:

Yes! there are black veins of utter perversion of intellect born with him and running through his whole soul; he acts at times under the control of impulses that he cannot resist; displays all the strange variableness and versatility which characterize possessed lunatics (MacLean, ed., The Spell, p. 4).

It should be noted that although Brontë, in her letter of 6 November 1847 to Lewes, describes the creative imagination as "a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised," there is no suggestion in her writings that she believed, with Schopenhauer, that genius and madness are necessarily closely allied (WSW, II, p. 153). Indeed, in Shirley she speaks scornfully of people who, themselves devoid of imagination, hold the view that the imagination is "a rather dangerous, senseless attribute -- akin to weakness -- perhaps partaking of frenzy -- a disease rather than a gift of the mind" (56).

defiance, Rochester hurries Jane off to Bertha's den. Confident that he has his "Vampyre" well under control, the words "I'm on my guard" have scarcely passed his lips when "the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She . . . showed virile force in the contest -- more than once she almost throttled him" (358, 370, 371). While she watches the struggle, Jane cannot but conclude that Rochester will never master his imagination.

In the afternoon, Rochester attempts "to tell [his] tale plainly" (396). His language is "torture" to Jane (401). For one thing, she can now distinguish between the voice of the "intellectual epicure," who is longing for "a good and intelligent woman," "an intellectual, . . . loving woman," and the voice of the man who refuses to face reality (400, 395, 398). Also, she discovers that he has all along had a false conception of her inner life:

[On the morning after my arrival] I observed you -- myself unseen . . . . [Y]ou lapsed at once into deep reverie: you betook yourself slowly to pace the gallery . . . . There was much sense in your smile: it was very shrewd, and seemed to make light of your own abstraction. It seemed to say -- 'My fine visions are all very well, but I must not forget they are absolutely unreal. I have a rosy sky, and a flowery Eden in my brain; but without, I am perfectly aware, lies at my feet a rough track to travel . . . .' (399-400).

Jane was not indulging in escapist day-dreams that morning. On the contrary, suffocated by her solitude, she was piecing together a "fiery mosaic," representing "the busy world, towns, regions full of life," which she was eager to explore (145, 132). Until the very end, therefore, Rochester confuses Jane's yearning for a fuller life, long since assuaged by his companionship, with self-sufficient fantasies. Also, he assumes, in the face of all evidence, that she shares his conviction that imagination and reality are incompatible. His suggestion that she is prepared to face reality fearlessly is no more than a digressive manoeuvre, designed to lull her, to him, incomprehensible fear of "kindling in pure, powerful flame" their mutual imaginations (402).

In a final effort to subdue Jane, Rochester channels all the strength of his imagination into his eyes: "He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance" (405). Telling herself that "only an idiot . . . would have succumbed now," she defies him: "My eye rose to his" (406, 405). That night, she has a "vision" or "trance-like dream," in which she relives her red-room experience (407, 408). The "gleam" which she perceives, however, becomes a "Mother," who urges her to "flee temptation" (407). She leaves the Hall at once.

The company of the Rivers girls in some measure compensates Jane for the loss of Rochester's exciting presence:

I liked to read what they liked to read . . . . [W]ith eagerness I followed in the path of knowledge they had trodden before me. I devoured the books they lent me . . . . They discovered I could draw: their pencils and colour-boxes were immediately at my service. My skill . . . surprised and charmed them. Mary would sit and watch me by the hour together: then she would take lessons . . . (446-447).

Before long, more determined than ever to cope with the real world, she accepts the humble position of schoolmistress in a nearby village, secured for her by the progressively intrusive St. John.

St. John and Jane are essentially two of a kind. Both have powerful imaginations. Both, too, are impelled by their vigorous minds to seek fulfilment outside the confining sphere of ordinary reality. Only a year before, St. John had "burnt for the more active life of the world -- for the more exciting toils of a literary career -- for the destiny of an artist, author, orator" (462). However, whereas Jane, having learnt that a well-regulated imagination is crucial to the expansion of one's inner self, is able to resign herself to her present cramped existence, St. John conceives that there is "a plain without bounds" still open to him, if only he manages to suppress his imagination. In order to enter this superior reality, God's Kingdom, he must become "a cold, hard, ambitious man," a man of "Reason" (478). Thus, ironically, he falls a victim to the imagination which he is trying to root out, for the visionary images which it engenders steer him

towards the very death-in-life which at Moor House he finds unbearable: "I can[not] be content . . . to live here buried in morass, pent in with mountain -- my nature, that God gave me, contravened; my faculties, heaven-bestowed, paralyzed -- made useless" (454).

Before long, St John, while recognizing that Jane's "tastes lean to the ideal," has persuaded himself that she can be made to share the world of his visions, which he insists on calling reality (452). Undeterred by her justification for giving up her job at the village school ("I want to enjoy my own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people"), he assails her with his withering eloquence (498). He nearly succeeds: "I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent" (509).

Having narrowly escaped the web of imagination which Rochester was weaving round her, it is psychologically convincing that Jane should nearly yield to the pressure of a man who claims that his ideals are firmly rooted in reality. Her utter helplessness in St John's hands, however, as various critics have suggested, is wholly out of character. While writing these last chapters, Brontë engaged to send her manuscript to Smith, Elder.<sup>14</sup> Interrupting her creative flow, this correspondence reminded her that Jane Eyre was not a private narrative. Possibly, therefore, she felt that she should tone down Jane's irrepressible urge to self-realization, lest she seem too selfish, by heightening her susceptibility to St John's vision of a serving Christianity. This is also suggested by the "touch of the circulating-library"<sup>15</sup> in the description of St John's character, most noticeably in the concluding paragraphs of the novel. Jane's comments on his

<sup>14</sup> On 7 August 1847, Brontë told Smith, Elder that Jane Eyre was "nearly completed . . . In about a month I hope to finish it" (Arthur Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," BST, XVIII, 92 [1982], 102). She posted the manuscript on 24 August 1847 (WSC, II, p. 141).

<sup>15</sup> George Henry Lewes, Fraser's Magazine (December 1847), Heritage, p. 85.

letters from India appear to deny the very values which her own life, and Brontë's, stand for.

Still, Brontë loaded the dice against St John, as originally planned. Closely watching his all too obvious struggle to resist the sensuous appeal of Rosamond Oliver, Jane easily discovers that "he could not bound all that he had in his nature -- the rover, the aspirant, the poet, the priest -- in the limits of a single passion" (469-470). At the same time, she progressively loses control over her imagination:

I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy -- dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of . . . being loved by him -- the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire (468).

These extreme fantasies help her to counter St John's verbal assaults. Comparing his adjuration to "[s]implify [her] complicated interests, feelings, thoughts, wishes, aims," with the enriching intellectual and emotional relationship which her true master had offered her, she realizes the enormity of St John's demands both upon himself and upon her (518). Speaking out at last, she tells him that she scorns his "idea of love," for it is tantamount to spiritual suicide: "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (522, 526). Only Rochester's summons, however, enables her to break free.

Rochester's summons depends, not on sense perception, but on the "something in [Jane's] brain and heart, in [her] blood and nerves, that assimilates [her] mentally to him" (219). The voice which Jane hears is an "inspiration" (539). In this lies the answer to Leslie Stephen's question: "What would Jane Eyre have done, . . . had she found that Mrs Rochester had not been burnt in the fire at Thornfield?"<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen, Cornhill Magazine (December 1877), Heritage, p. 421. Quarrelling with the supernatural overtones of the summons is hardly profitable, not least because Brontë herself,

fact that Rochester is stirring her innermost self without at the same time attempting to gain control over her imagination -- the implied alternative being his appearance at Moor House in his favourite guise of a mysterious horseman -- suggests to Jane that events have occurred which have forced him to recognize that he must come to grips with reality. It is this near certainty that Rochester is prepared to reform himself which sends her on her journey back.

From the innkeeper, Jane learns that after her disappearance, Rochester dismissed his servants, "broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up, like a hermit, at the Hall . . . He would not cross the door-stones of the house; except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchard as if he had lost his senses" (547). Apparently an incorrigible romantic, therefore, Rochester only withdrew further from reality by playing the hermit, in imitation of the lovelorn heroes of such popular romances as Zara Wentworth's The Recluse of Albyn Hall (1819) and the anonymous Dellingborough Castle; or, The Mysterious Recluse (1806).

Having been blinded in the fire started by Bertha, Rochester retired to Ferndean, an even more attractive hermitage, for the house, with its "dank and green . . . decaying walls," stood on an "ineligible and insalubrious site," and was "deep buried in a . . . gloomy wood" (551, 550). In the ordinary course of events in romances, Jane should then have arrived on his doorstep in some providential manner. Heroines always do so. But not Jane. Months pass. "Doing nothing, expecting nothing; merging night in day; feeling but the sensation of cold when I let the fire go out," he finally realized the error of his ways: "I merited all I endured" (560, 572). Dreading to face reality on his own, he called out into the night for Jane.

Reaching Ferndean at nightfall, Jane watches as the

when confronted with such scepticism, "replied, in a low voice, drawing in her breath, 'But it is a true thing; it really happened'" (Gaskell, p. 401).



front door opens and Rochester advances "slowly and gropingly" into the "amphitheatre of trees" (552). There he halts, on an empty, unlit stage, with only one unseen spectator, and at a loss to know what role to play or what lines to speak. Then Jane steps forward to become his "master" in the art of coping with reality:

Literally, I was . . . the apple of his eye. He saw nature -- he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam -- of the landscape before us; of the weather round us . . . . [H]e claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation (577).

While Rochester uses his chastened imagination to recreate the true version of reality which Jane shows him, she enjoys his companionship, which, ever since their first conversation, she has accepted as a wholly satisfactory substitute for a life spent in the superior reality of her adolescent visions: "We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking" (576).

When Brontë embarked on The Professor, she told herself that her protagonist "should work his way through life as [she] had seen real living men work theirs" (3). Jane's unexpected inheritance, her marriage to a wealthy landowner, and the many hours which she devotes to drawing and painting suggest that by the time Brontë wrote Jane Eyre, she had abandoned this resolve. In fact, she had already been compelled to compromise after Crimsworth's false start at X-, when she provided him with a more congenial occupation and a wife with whom to share both his inner life and his determination to win a stake in the real world. In Jane Eyre, she refined upon this compromise. For one thing, she opened her novel by focusing upon the child's extreme susceptibility to her hostile environment and her proportionate disinclination to adjust herself to its limitations. Thus, in contrast to Crimsworth, a self-confident adult, Jane starts from a position of extreme weakness. As a result, Crimsworth's successes remain suspect because of his initial failure,

whereas each step which Jane takes in coming to terms with reality is felt to be a positive advance. Also, and most importantly, while Crimsworth only shares his imagination with Frances, Jane learns to channel all the strength of her imagination into her perceptions, enabling her not only to keep a tight grip on reality during her encounters with Rochester and St John, but to shape her marriage to Rochester into a relationship which, while satisfying her creative and intellectual needs, is firmly anchored in the real world. Jane's strength is Brontë's strength, for the interaction between imagination and perception creates a visual narrative field which enables Brontë to participate intimately in Jane's experiences.

## Chapter Eleven

### SHIRLEY (1847-1849)

The popular success of Jane Eyre could not bear comparison with the "literary fame, -- a passport to the society of clever people," of which Brontë the poet had dreamt during the 1830s.<sup>1</sup> Still, writing a novel had brought her into contact with such men as George Smith and William Smith Williams, and earned her one hundred pounds. Money, indeed, was no mean consideration, as she told her publishers:

One hundred pounds is a small sum for a year's intellectual labours, nor would circumstances justify me in devoting my time and attention to literary pursuits with so narrow a prospect of advantage did I not feel convinced that in case the ultimate result of my efforts should prove more successful than you now anticipate, you would make some proportionate addition to the remuneration you at present offer.<sup>2</sup>

The bank-bills of one hundred pounds each for the second and third editions of Jane Eyre, published in January and April 1848, dispelled any lingering doubts about her decision to adopt novel-writing as a full-time professional career.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor to Gaskell; Gaskell, p. 589.

<sup>2</sup> Brontë to Smith, Elder (12 September 1847), Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," pp. 102-103.

<sup>3</sup> It was only after Charlotte received five hundred pounds for Shirley, which gave her a reasonable income, and the deaths of Branwell and Emily, which, although it may sound callous, made it less imperative for her to earn more than she required for her own expenses, that money became only a secondary motive for writing. The letters to her publishers suggest that by the autumn of 1849, it was primarily her father's anxiety about her future which made her care for its financial rewards: "I am pleased to earn so much, for Papa will be pleased . . . . [I]t is Papa's great wish that I should realise a small independency" (14 September 1849,

Walter Scott, the poet-novelist, had produced novel after novel to pay off his bankruptcy debts without compromising his artistic integrity. With his example in mind, and "Truth and Nature" as her guides, Brontë decided that it was an author's duty to make "a conscientious study of Art as shall enable him to interpret eloquently and effectively the oracles delivered by those two great deities."<sup>4</sup> When the reviews of Jane Eyre began to arrive, therefore, she studied them carefully "in hopes of extracting precepts and advice from which to profit."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, "having read comparatively few novels"<sup>6</sup>, she told her publishers in September 1847: "if you can point out any works peculiarly remarkable for the qualities in which I am deficient, I would study them carefully and endeavour to remedy my errors."<sup>7</sup> Such willingness to learn underlines her earlier disregard for the conventional novel as an art-form meriting serious attention, and testifies to the diligence with which she applied herself to her new career. As her peppery letters to Lewes suggest, however, she was not amenable to outside influence, believing too much in the autonomy of her creative impulse, which put "out of view all behests but its own."<sup>8</sup>

The only contemporary novelist whom Brontë acknowledged as her guide was Thackeray, the "eagle," to whom she dedicated the second edition of Jane Eyre.<sup>9</sup> Thackeray's appeal for her at this time may in some measure be attributable to his fulminations during the early 1840s against the contemporary disparagement of novelists and their craft:

Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," p. 104).

<sup>4</sup> Brontë to Williams (14 August 1848), WSC, II, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> Gaskell, p. 379.

<sup>6</sup> Brontë to Williams (28 October 1847), WSC, II, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> Brontë to Smith, Elder (12 September 1847), Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Brontë to Lewes (12 January 1848), WSC, II, p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> "Preface" (21 December 1847), Jane Eyre, p. xxxii.

To do your work honestly, to amuse and instruct your reader of to-day, to die when your time comes, and go hence with as clean a breast as may be; may these be all yours and ours, by God's will. Let us be content with our status as literary craftsmen, telling the truth as far as may be, hitting no foul blow, condescending to no servile puffery, filling not a very lofty, but a manly and honourable part . . . Our calling is only sneered at because it is not well paid. The world has no other criterion for respectability.<sup>10</sup>

Still, Thackeray's influence went deeper. Upon finishing Jane Eyre, Brontë was at a loss to know what direction her writing should take. In September 1847, she helplessly applied to her publishers for "any advice you can give me as to choice of subject or style of treatment in my next effort."<sup>11</sup> In October, they suggested another governess novel. By this time, however, she had become fascinated by Vanity Fair: Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society, and was proportionately reluctant to write another "mere domestic novel," which had "no learning, no research," and "discusse[d] no subject of public interest."<sup>12</sup> Thackeray, whom she now idolized as "the first social regenerator of the day" and "the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things," should be her master, too.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "A Brother of the Press on the History of a Literary Man, Laman Blanchard, and the Chances of the Literary Profession," Fraser's Magazine (March 1846), The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), vol. 25, pp. 90-91.

<sup>11</sup> Brontë to Smith, Elder (12 September 1847), Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Brontë to Williams (28 October 1847), WSC, II, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> "Preface," Jane Eyre, p. xxxii. Vanity Fair appeared in monthly numbers between January 1847 and July 1848. When Brontë wrote her encomiastic preface in December 1847, therefore, she could have read only the first eleven numbers. It is questionable, moreover, if she was familiar at this time with Thackeray's other writings. The early instalments of Vanity Fair, she did not read until the autumn of 1847 (WSC, II, p. 314). Possibly her publishers happened to send them, along with other examples of contemporary fiction, in reply to her request for guidance. In December 1847, moreover, she once more tried to persuade Smith, Elder to publish The Professor, which bears the same title as Thackeray's then famous parody

Brontë initially proposed to recast the Brussels section of The Professor, because she felt that by giving "a new view of a grade, an occupation, and a class of characters -- all very commonplace, very insignificant in themselves," she could rouse her readers' sympathy for people who, like herself, were well-educated, but had to struggle for their livelihood.<sup>14</sup> When her publishers vetoed this plan, she apparently announced an even more ambitious venture into social realism, as the references to Frances Trollope's The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy (1840) and to "political and social truths" in her reply to their objections suggest:

I think I comprehend the spirit of your precepts, and trust I shall be able to profit thereby. Details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with, lest I should make even a more ridiculous mess of the matter than Mrs Trollope did in her 'Factory Boy' . . . Yet though I must limit my sympathies; though my observation cannot penetrate where the very deepest political and social truths are to be learnt; . . . though I must guess and calculate and grope my way in the dark . . . where such writers as Dickens and Thackeray, having access to the shrine and image of Truth, have only to go into the temple, lift the veil a moment, and come out and say what they have seen -- yet with every disadvantage, I mean still, in my own contracted way, to do my best.<sup>15</sup>

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of the romances of such women novelists as Letitia Landon ("The Professor, A Tale of Sentiment," Bentley's Miscellany [September 1837], The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray, vol. 25, pp. 241-257). Had Brontë read this story of a shellfishmonger's daughter's passion for a cockney dancing-master, she would hardly have changed the title of her novel from The Master to The Professor, a Tale, and stuck with it. Her sudden outburst of admiration for Thackeray in late 1847 may be explained, therefore, by the fact that she happened to read the first half of Vanity Fair during the weeks when she was trying to define her new role as a professional novelist. Possibly Vanity Fair crystallized ideas which should be traced to a much older source -- Mr Brontë's novels, designed to "allure to well-doing" (see p. 24 above).

<sup>14</sup> Brontë to Williams (14 December 1847), WSC, II, p. 161.

<sup>15</sup> Brontë to Williams (28 January 1848), WSC, II, p. 184.

By early February 1848, she was working on John Henry.<sup>16</sup>

John Henry reintroduces the Crimsworths as John Henry and William Moore. The setting is once more a northern town, initially called Mamonville in the manuscript, and later Everintoyle. Yet, as these Carlylean names suggest, there is a distinctly different approach to the story of a young man's entrance into an alien world of commerce and industry. John Henry, whose principal feature in The Professor was his irrational animosity towards William, is now characterized by

<sup>16</sup> This untitled, undated manuscript is printed in Shirley, pp. 805-835. References will appear in parentheses within the text.

It is generally agreed that John Henry was written between Jane Eyre and Shirley: Joseph R. Geer, The Artist at Work: A Critical Study of Charlotte Brontë's Manuscript, 'John Henry', Diss. Princeton University, 1965, summarized in BST, XV, 76 (1966), 20-27; Alexander, pp. 222-223; Shirley, pp. xiii-xiv. Pointing to Brontë's letter to Williams of 14 December 1847, these critics suggest that John Henry was an attempt to rewrite The Professor. However, the passage in question reads:

Three commencements have I essayed, but all three displease me. A few days since I looked over 'The Professor' . . . My wish is to recast 'The Professor' . . . I have not forgotten that 'The Professor' was set aside in my agreement with Messrs Smith & Elder; therefore before I take any step to execute the plan I have sketched, I should wish to have your judgment on its wisdom (WSC, II, pp. 161-162).

The first two sentences suggest that Brontë turned to The Professor only after the three commencements. Also, as she herself acknowledges, she had bound herself by contract "not to publish 'The Professor' or any work till after the appearance of the two books of which you are to have the refusal" (18 September 1847, Pollard, ed., "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," p. 103). For this reason, she had not yet taken "any step" to carry out her plan of rewriting a novel which her publishers disliked. In consequence, the three commencements were not attempts to rewrite The Professor, and most likely contained altogether different material. John Henry, therefore, which does incorporate material from The Professor, was not one of the three commencements which displeased her, and was not written before 14 December 1847. Moreover, since John Henry was probably written after Brontë received her publishers' unfavourable reply to her proposal to rewrite The Professor, it must be the opening of a separate novel, as indeed the internal evidence, discussed in the text, confirms.

an "insatiable grubbing for gain" (809). Capable only of appreciating "the sense of the senses -- the sense of the substantial -- the sense of self-interest," he is indifferent to the plight of the "dismal population" of Soothill Road, who earn their daily bread in factories which their masters claim to be "healthy, cheerful and cheering establishments," but which to the narrator "look pestilent and prison-like" (808, 809). William, unlike the introspective Crimsworth, need not be goaded into speaking his mind. Cutting through pretensions based on class and wealth with perfect sang-froid, he vexes the arrogant Alicia Wynne, for example, by diagnosing her love of luxury as an ingrained acquisitiveness: "If you had been poor you would have . . . stinted yourself of sugar in your tea all week to have laid by sufficient to purchase a smart bonnet . . . As soon as the children were old enough you would have sent them to the mill and made them work and looked well after their earnings" (832-833). Also, several years' experience as a newspaper sub-editor have made him scornful of class distinctions and wary of politics and religion:

I cannot for my life believe in any political leader -- I cannot be a thorough-going party man to any side -- when I know that a certain systematic course of opposition is factious -- when I see that a certain pretended philanthropy is hollow I cannot earnestly maintain the opposition or cry up the philanthropy -- As far as my experience goes I have ever found Self-Interest all dominant -- and all-influential alike in the Church-Convocation and in the Electioneering Committee (818).

Other details, pointing to a nascent social conscience, suggest that William was to have actively challenged the irresponsible behaviour of both his brother, the millowner, and Tim Steele, "a joined Wesleyan Methodist and eminent class leader" (835).

An equally prominent theme is the effect of the mill-town environment on women. Julia Moore, for example, has been trained by her father to conceive of "respectability" in terms of the size of one's dining-room (806). Having married John Henry because he engaged to settle her "like a queen," she can only assert her identity by looking upon herself as his most prized possession:



- [John Henry:] there's not a stool in this house nor a mat -- nor a bit of carpeting but what is new -- . . . I went all the animal -- the whole --
- [Julia:] Yes John Henry, yes . . . Well I am worth it all -- am I not John Henry,
- If I had not thought so you should not have had it
- I am the best thing you possess new or old . . . .
- No -- that you're not
- Indeed I should like to know what you have more precious
- The Mill the old Mill in Soothill Road to be sure (805-806)

"I hate the Mill -- I'm ashamed of it," Julia replies (806). Her friend, Alicia, agrees: "What would the world be without intellectuality and ideality -- Oh if the sole occupation of mankind were trade -- if the whole population of the globe were tradesmen!" (828). To Brontë, ever mindful of the close connection between economic prosperity and the freedom to engage in intellectual and creative pursuits, such genteel shame and empty enthusiasm illustrate most forcefully the degrading materialism of Everintoyle. William Moore, predictably, is going to look for a wife "amongst the pale, busy, thrifty ranks trained by Adversity and Labour -- rather than amongst the untried, untaught daughters of Luxury and Ease" (831).

John Henry was to have exposed "the warped system of things" as Brontë had observed it in Yorkshire.<sup>17</sup> In late January 1848, however, a wave of revolutions engulfed Europe. Reading the newspaper accounts of "the spasms, cramps, and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent and threatening Ireland," Brontë abandoned John Henry, for a novel about the

<sup>17</sup> Brontë's comments on the engraved portraits of Sir Robert Peel ("he has not a very sincere look") and Lord John Russell ("I should hate to hear of that man being cruelly set upon by a party and torn and baited and worried to death -- Politicians seem to think nothing of the human heart when they turn savage") suggest that the events of John Henry were to have taken place in 1846 or 1847 (624). Between the autumn of 1845 and June 1846, Peel, the Tory prime minister, was an object of exceptionally ferocious attacks by his own followers because of his decision to support the repeal of the Corn Laws. In July, a month after the repeal, they drove him from office. Russell, the Whig leader, succeeded him.

contemporary condition of England might well fuel the discontent at home.<sup>18</sup> Guided possibly by Vanity Fair, which opens in June 1813, she decided to approach her theme indirectly by setting her novel in the time of the Luddite riots. Resolved to avoid the ignorance in which Fannie Trollope had become ensnared, she sent away for files of the Leeds Mercury for the years 1812, 1813, and 1814.<sup>19</sup>

However, tragic events twice interrupted the writing of the new novel. Within days of completing the fair copy of Volume One, Charlotte was confronted with Branwell's sudden death on 24 September 1848, followed by Emily's death on 19 December.<sup>20</sup> Volume Two, begun in February 1849, was only just completed, when she took Anne to Scarborough on 23 May 1849.<sup>21</sup> Anne died on 28 May. Volume Three was begun immediately afterwards and finished on or just before 29 August 1849.<sup>22</sup> Each death left Charlotte more heart-broken, resulting in major changes in her handling of her themes and characters.

Q.D. Leavis was "always shocked" when reading Brontë's description of the children arriving at Hollow's Mill on a raw winter morning (70):

how unfeeling she is . . . . Being the children of 'working-people' their feelings and sufferings are of little account, yet they suffered more than Jane in the

<sup>18</sup> Brontë to Margaret Wooler (31 March 1848), WSC, II, p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> Gaskell, p. 378.

<sup>20</sup> On the last leaf of the manuscript of Volume One appears the date "Septr 1848" (Shirley, p. 227).

<sup>21</sup> Brontë sent Volume One to her publishers on 4 February 1849, together with a letter suggesting that she was about to take up her novel again (WSC, II, pp. 306-307). Volume Two must have been completed before Anne's death because, according to Gaskell, Brontë wrote "the Valley of the Shadow of Death," the first chapter of Volume Three, immediately after Anne's death (Gaskell, p. 380). Brontë's letter to George Smith of 30 October 1852 confirms this: "I have . . . no one to whom to read a line, or of whom to ask a counsel. 'Jane Eyre' was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of 'Shirley'" (WSC, IV, p. 13).

<sup>22</sup> Brontë to Williams (29 August 1849), WSC, III, p. 15.

warmth and plenty of Gateshead, or than any governess; how extraordinary that so sensitive a woman should not have seen this! She literally averted her eyes.<sup>23</sup>

Brontë, however, deliberately understated the children's piteous condition in order to point out that she declined "harrowing up [her] reader's soul" by portraying mill-owners as "Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers" (71). In Hollow's Mill, she proposed to promote reconciliation between the two nations.<sup>24</sup>

In Volume One, Brontë draws a panoramic picture of middle-class society in a manufacturing district. The picture is bleak. The "moping old vicars" merely complain about their curates (9). The curates expend their energies in arguing about "minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves" (12). Mr Helstone, continually harping on "religion and order" and "God and the king," has subordinated his feelings to an inflexible High Tory ideal of "a decent English parish," in which he is both temporal and spiritual master (64, 17). Only the self-effacing Mr Hall truly sympathizes with his parishioners, but as his minor role in Volume One suggests, his good works have scarcely more effect than those of Henrietta Noble, the tiny old sugar-thief in Middlemarch.

Among the mill-owners, Hiram Yorke and Robert Moore stand out. Yorke, a freethinker, is "much beloved by the poor, because he was thoroughly kind and very fatherly to them" (57-58). To his workmen, he is "considerate and cordial," thus winning their respect and obedience (58). Yet, he wants "imagination":

He could not place himself in the position of those he vituperated; he could not compare their errors with their temptations, their defects with their disadvantages; he could not realize the effect of such and such circumstances on himself similarly situated . . . . To judge by his threats, he would have employed arbitrary,

<sup>23</sup> Leavis, ed., Jane Eyre, pp. 481, 482.

<sup>24</sup> Hollow's Mill was the working-title of Volume One (Brontë to Williams [21 August 1849], WSC, III, p. 12).

even cruel, means to advance the cause of freedom and equality (55).

Robert Moore only pushes his own interests. Grimly determined to introduce new machinery, "he never asked himself where those to whom he no longer paid weekly wages found daily bread" (36). There are, indeed, hints of "a childhood passed at the side of a saturnine mother" while his father's business was failing, and of a manhood blighted by the final bankruptcy (35). Also, his foreign background is emphasized, and qualifying adverbs are introduced in descriptions of his character with awkward regularity: "it perhaps rather agreed with Moore's temperament than otherwise to be generally hated" (38). Brontë, however, is not trying to excuse his "hard bilious nature," but to put into practice the empathic imagination in which Yorke is deficient in order to create a more moderate version of Edward Percy, Edward Crimsworth, and John Henry Moore (44). In Volume One, Robert Moore is not, as the Hooks claim, a "romantic hero."<sup>25</sup>

The women in this world dominated by egocentric clergymen and mill-owners do not think or act for themselves. Hortense Moore is a domestic edition of her brother. Mrs Yorke shares her husband's "brooding, eternal, immitigable suspicion of all men, things, creeds, and parties" (165). Mrs Sykes and the Misses Sykes copy Mr Sykes by setting themselves up as "the standard of what is proper" (122). Anyone choosing to differ from them -- "be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice -- therein they are wrong" (122). Even the unmarried women are guided by the men, who transfer their own social responsibility to them: "Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted" (194).

Only eighteen-year-old Caroline Helstone has sufficient imagination to question the men's values. It is she who, by making Robert Moore read Coriolanus, tries to persuade him that his "notions of the best means of attaining happiness" are false and his manner of treating workmen like

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew and Judith Hook, eds., Shirley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 29.

"frames and shears" unjust (82, 83). Yet, she is hemmed in by prejudice. Her guardian, Mr Helstone, "liked to see [women] as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be, -- inferior" (130). "[L]earn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day," he tells his niece encouragingly (111). Robert Moore is hardly less narrow-minded: "I hate ugliness and delight in beauty . . . . My taste must have satisfaction" (183). Unable to afford such an ornament, he has "settled it decidedly that marriage and love are superfluities, intended only for the rich" (182-183). Disregarded by her uncle, neglected by the man she loves, and increasingly rebellious as she watches the "abnegation of self" of the local spinsters, Caroline determines to become a governess (194).

The last chapter of Volume One introduces Shirley Keeldar, Robert Moore's pretty, free-spoken landlord, who "adore[s] the counting-house" and thinks that "trade is to be thoroughly respected" (226). Shirley, as presented in this chapter, bears a close resemblance to Jane Moore, the "handsome, generous, clever, flashy, proud" daughter of an Angrian mill-owner, who was "as matter of fact as any manufacturer of Edwardstown, & like[d] as well to receive her penny's-worth for her penny."<sup>26</sup> Even "Captain" Keeldar's tendency to adopt a masculine pose can be traced to Jane. Thus, at a county-ball, she teasingly proposes to Lord Hartford a reversal of their roles:

I am a sailor -- Captain Arthur Fitz-Arthur, commander of the Formidable -- one hundred guns. Your Lordship is Miss Jessy Heathcote. I love you and intend to run away with you. You are very little and very slender, and you like me because I am so brave . . . . Now Miss Jessy, will you dance with me?<sup>27</sup>

Brontë, in effect, initially conceived of Shirley partly as a

<sup>26</sup> "My Compliments to the weather." See pp. 97-99 above.

<sup>27</sup> The Duke of Zamorna, WSW, II, p. 378.

foil to the sensitive, imaginative Caroline (as Jane Moore had served to define the character of Elizabeth Hastings more sharply), and partly as a foil to the gloomy, self-centred Robert Moore.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of Volume One, the gallery of men incapable of responding sensitively to the plight of the poor and the needs of women had been completed. Now Brontë required a catalyst to rouse these men from their self-complacency. Having a thorough grasp of the historical period of which she was writing, and having warned her reader that "[s]omething real, cool, and solid" lay before him, it is unlikely that she proposed to assign this role to Shirley, a woman (7). Indeed, the evidence points to the man who arrives in Shirley's wake, Louis Moore. The antagonism between two brothers, arising from their conflicting characters and social positions, had been a recurrent theme in Brontë's previous writings. In each case, the younger brother arrived in a northern town where the elder one was manufacturer. Louis Moore -- well-educated, a lover of nature and poetry, and determined "to push his own fortune" -- is just such a younger brother (74). Also, the passage in which Louis is first mentioned not only closely follows the elaborate introduction of Hiram Yorke, who bears some resemblance to the Yorke Hunsden who precipitated William Crimsworth's rebellion against Edward, but also contains hints of Louis' mild contempt for his brother: "all [Robert] said and did was remarkable in [Hortense's] eyes . . . ; nothing could be more irrational, monstrous, and infamous, than opposition from any quarter" (74). When Louis finally arrives, he immediately befriends the Rev. Hall, and together they visit the poor of the district. At the same time, he begins to

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<sup>28</sup> On three occasions in the manuscript, Brontë began to write the name Elizabeth instead of Caroline (135, 147, 274). As Margaret Smith points out, this suggests that Caroline was partly based on Elizabeth Hastings ("The Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë's Novels," *BST*, XVIII, 93 [1983], 197-198). Elizabeth being Jane Moore's lady companion, this supports the view that Brontë initially intended Shirley to resemble Jane. Jane had also been in Brontë's mind towards the end of Jane Eyre, when she drew the character of Rosamond Oliver.

dwell on the inalienable rights of a poor man: "This September afternoon is . . . [a]s pleasant for me as for any monarch . . . With animals I feel I am Adam's son: the heir of him to whom dominion was given over 'every living thing that moveth upon the earth' . . . [N]o caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me: they are mine" (517). Eventually, having "such a thirst for freedom -- such a deep passion to know her and call her mine," he rebels against his employers (700).

Also, in one scene in Volume One, Caroline recites some "real poetry" to Robert (107). Before she has even started, he enjoins her to "mind your accent: especially let us have no English u's" (106). Then, instead of paying attention, he gazes at her face, pleased to find that "there was not the grievous defect of plainness to pardon in her case" (107). In the next two volumes, there are a scene in which Louis recites one of Shirley's French *devoirs* while she is listening intently, and a recollection of Louis "sitting at his easel, and [Shirley] standing behind him, holding the candle, and watching him draw the snowy cliff, the pine, the deer couched under it, and the half-moon hung above" (523). Bearing in mind Shirley's early affinity with Jane Moore, the pointed contrast between these scenes suggests that Brontë initially meant Louis to satisfy Caroline's longing for a kindred spirit, and indeed to marry her. Robert was to have married Shirley.<sup>29</sup> Shaping Louis into a masterful character, combining a vigorous imagination with a sensitive social conscience, Brontë evidently saw him as the man who was going to force the Moores, the Yorkes, and the Helstones to wake up to "the warped system of things," and to support Caroline in

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<sup>29</sup> Had Brontë, as planned, demonstrated Robert's susceptibility to Shirley's more humane capitalist spirit through their progressive intimacy and ultimate marriage, she would have avoided his implausible conversion during his visit to Birmingham and London, as well as the ill-conceived episode in which he proposes to Shirley with an eye to securing her property, which "in a hero -- in the man for whom our sympathies and admiration are almost exclusively claimed -- to imagine it possible, is a decided blunder in art" (George Henry Lewes, "Currer Bell's 'Shirley,'" Edinburgh Review, 91 [January 1850], 164).

her struggle for self-realization.

Within two months of Emily's death, Charlotte embarked on Volume Two, but only because writing "took [her] out of dark and desolate reality into an unreal but happier region."<sup>30</sup> Like the grief-stricken Dickens, who introduced Mary Hogarth into Oliver Twist as Rose Maylie, she developed Shirley into a portrait of Emily as she "would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity."<sup>31</sup> In November 1849, Charlotte did tell Nussey pointedly: "We only suffer reality to suggest, never to dictate. The heroines are abstractions." By this time, however, all Yorkshire was discovering that many of the characters in Shirley had their counterparts in real life, so that, in order not to tell a palpable untruth, she added: "Qualities I have seen, loved, and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting."<sup>32</sup> Four years later, she admitted to Gaskell that "the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily."<sup>33</sup>

"Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone."<sup>34</sup> It was this contrast in Emily's character which Charlotte tried to capture in the first chapter of Volume Two. Shirley, being "Yorkshire in blood and birth," passionately loves the moors (237). Shirley has strong views on men -- they should be "kind to animals, to little

<sup>30</sup> Brontë to Williams (29 August 1849), WSC, III, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Gaskell, p. 379. When Anne dies, Charlotte's response bears an even more striking resemblance to that of Dickens. Both Caroline and Rose catch a mysterious fever on a warm summer's night, nearly die, and miraculously recover. While they are recuperating, both girls discover a lost relative (Mrs Pryor and Oliver) and the men whom they have long worshipped in silence declare their love (Robert Moore and Henry Maylie).

<sup>32</sup> Brontë to Nussey (16 November 1849), WSC, III, p. 37. Cf. Brontë's equally disingenuous reply when Nussey asked her in May 1848 if she was "publishing" (WSC, II, pp. 211-212).

<sup>33</sup> Gaskell to a friend (September 1853), WSC, IV, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" (19 September 1850), in Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack, eds., Wuthering Heights (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 439.



children, to poor people," and not like women "only for vain and selfish reasons" (243). Shirley is "out of the common way in mind and attainments," and has "the right taste in poetry: the right sense for discriminating between what is real and what is false" (251). The coda is a description of Shirley sitting at a window on a stormy night: "Snatches of sweet ballads haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza: her accents obeyed the fitful impulse of the wind; they swelled as its gusts rushed on, and died as they wandered away" (252). Shirley, in effect, dwarfs all other characters except Louis Moore in terms of sense, sensibility, and strength of imagination.

Shirley, initially conceived of as a subsidiary character, now had to be moved into prominence at a point in the novel when Caroline was already firmly established as its heroine. Brontë, therefore, cast her as Caroline's mentor. Caroline, who in Volume One had been courageously struggling to force her uncle and Robert Moore to acknowledge her right to an active, meaningful life, is reduced to pining for Robert and reciting Cowper's Castaway in order to enable Shirley to hold forth on the condition of women. Supposedly guided by Shirley, Caroline can eventually stand up for herself when, for example, Mrs Yorke suggests that her "romantic ideas" have made her less able to cope with the real world than a "hard-working milkmaid": "I think more and more correctly than milkmaids in general do; consequently, where they would often, for want of reflection, act weakly, I, by dint of reflection, should act judiciously. . . [Yet] I must and shall love" (455). "Don't waste your dramatic effects," Mrs Yorke replies; "That was well said, . . . but it is lost on two women" (455). Indeed, once Shirley becomes the driving force behind the women's theme, it detaches itself from the dramatic situation. Caroline's newly-won self-confidence plays no role in her eventual success in commanding Robert's respect and love. Shirley's wordy feminism evaporates in the presence of Louis.

Shirley also monopolizes the social theme. When she invites Helstone and his fellow-clergymen to divide three hundred pounds among the poor, they at once forget all hostile feelings and, "to their infinite credit, showed a thorough

acquaintance with the poor of their parishes, -- an even minute knowledge of their separate wants" (306). William Farren, a workman dismissed by Robert Moore, cannot but be struck by Shirley's "frank, hospitable manners" (364-365). She, in her turn, "preferred his conversation far before that of many coarse, hard, pretentious people, immeasurably higher in station" (364). Before long, she has convinced him that "Mr. Moore himself hates nobody; he only wants to do his duty, and maintain his rights" (367). Joe Scott, Moore's hard-headed foreman, is tackled next: "I cannot get out of my head a certain idea that we manufacturers and persons of business are sometimes a little -- a very little selfish and short-sighted in our views, and rather too regardless of human suffering, rather heartless in our pursuit of gain: don't you agree with me, Joe?" (369-370). Joe soon does. Robert Moore, his conscience roused by Shirley's reply to his proposal of marriage, flees to Birmingham:

I went where there was want of food, of fuel, of clothing; where there was no occupation and no hope. I saw some, with naturally elevated tendencies and good feelings, kept down amongst sordid privations and harassing griefs . . . To respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more forbearing to suffering than I have hitherto been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust (616).

Masters and men alike prove susceptible to Shirley's generosity and commonsense. By the end of Volume Two, the the condition of England question, too, has slid into a dramatic vacuum. Only Michael Hartley, "the half-crazed weaver," survives, for the plot demands that Robert Moore be shot (726).

Volume Three, written after Anne Brontë's death, has the distinction of being the longest-drawn-out happy ending in English literature. Caroline, now recognizably a portrait of Anne<sup>35</sup>, falls ill, recovers, and finds that Mrs Pryor is her

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<sup>35</sup> The resemblance between Caroline and Anne Brontë in

mother. Having been smuggled into the wounded mill-owner's bedroom, she is only too eager to forgive "Naughty Robert" (692).

Shirley's love-story is even more protracted, for Louis Moore only makes his appearance at the end of Volume Two. Extracts from Louis' diary ("Reader: do not be shy: stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles"), Louis' stagey soliloquies, conversations between Louis and Henry Sympson about Shirley, conversations between Shirley and Henry about Louis, and various other awkward devices throw light on his character and previous relations with Shirley (591). Sir Philip Nunnely and a rabid dog provide some unconvincing drama and suspense. The outcome is predictable:

'Mr. Moore,' said [Shirley] . . . 'teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well. Your judgment is well-balanced; your heart is kind; your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant; be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!' 'So help me God, I will!' (712-713)

Louis is a puppet. But, as Sinclair suggests, Brontë "lavished on this puppet half the wealth of her imagination. She flings phrase after perfect phrase to him to cover himself with -- some of her best things have been given to Louis Moore to utter."<sup>36</sup> Louis, indeed, is the hero Shirley would have had, but for the death of Emily Brontë.

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Volume Three is discussed in J.M.S. Tompkins, "Caroline Helstone's Eyes," BST, XIV, 71 (1961), 18-28.

<sup>36</sup> Sinclair, The Three Brontës, p. 137.

## Chapter Twelve

### VILLETTE (1850-1853)

In due course, Brontë conceded that there were artistic defects in Shirley. Still, rather than attributing them to the obvious incongruity of Shirley's prominent role, which might reflect on Emily, she preferred to think that the subject-matter had been ill-chosen: "I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying."<sup>1</sup> During the first months after the publication of Shirley, however, she did not bear its unfavourable reception with exemplary humility. "Mere novel-readers," always clamouring for more "excitement, interest, stimulus," could not be expected to appreciate "its dryer matter."<sup>2</sup> The mass of critics, too, were "entirely ignorant and incompetent."<sup>3</sup> To Eugène Forçade, a French critic, she "would say 'you know me, Monsieur -- I shall deem it an honour to know you.'" But she "could not say so much to 500 men and women in all the millions of Great Britain."<sup>4</sup>

Brontë's disgust with readers and critics alike, her comparative financial security, and the loss of the only two persons with whom she could share the tribulations and triumphs of a literary career, might well have left her without any incentive to embark on another novel. So, indeed, might her recurrent headaches and chest-trouble, which caused a haunting fear lest she, too, prove consumptive, and her continuing grief, which engendered a profound sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Brontë to George Smith (30 October 1852), WSC, IV, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Brontë to Williams (15 November 1849), WSC, III, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Brontë to Williams (22 November 1849), WSC, III, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Brontë to Nussey (22 November 1849), WSC, III, p. 42.

hopelessness: "I hope and expect little in this world, and am thankful that I do not despond and suffer more."<sup>5</sup> In fact, she was keener than ever to write. Her loneliness could "not be helped and therefore imperatively must be borne."<sup>6</sup> She "must absolutely get accustomed to a life of solitude; there is no other plan."<sup>7</sup> Her work was her "best companion" and the only "congenial occupation."<sup>8</sup> For one thing, like Caroline Helstone, she considered that it gave her "something absorbing and compulsory to fill [her] head and hands, and to occupy [her] thoughts," thus preventing her from breaking her heart with "a single tyrant master-torture."<sup>9</sup> Also, her imagination was now her most precious possession:

The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world produces an effect upon the character: we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of new-strung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking . . . I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift and to profit by its possession.<sup>10</sup>

Thackeray was tottering on his pedestal, for he had "no love for his Art or his Work: he neglects it; he mocks at it; he trifles with it."<sup>11</sup>

In late January 1850, Brontë drafted an opening chapter for her next novel, but abandoned it because, as she told Harriet Martineau, "I have not accumulated, since I published Shirley, . . . what makes it needful for me to speak again."<sup>12</sup> During the spring and summer, in order to relieve

279. <sup>5</sup> Brontë to Gaskell (20 September 1851), WSC, III, p.

<sup>6</sup> Brontë to Nussey (25 August 1852), WSC, IV, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Brontë to Smith (7 November 1851), WSC, III, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> Brontë to Williams (26 July 1849), WSC, III, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Shirley, p. 257 (written after Emily's death).

24. <sup>10</sup> Brontë to Williams (21 September 1849), WSC, III, p.

<sup>11</sup> Brontë to Smith (12 May 1851), WSC, III, p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> Harriet Martineau, Obituary (Daily News, April 1855), Heritage, p. 301.

her depression, she travelled extensively. This proved counter-productive: "I cannot describe what a time of it I had after my return from London -- Scotland &c. [T]here was a reaction that sunk me to the earth -- the deadly silence, solitude, desolation were awful -- the craving for companionship -- the hopelessness of relief -- were what I should dread to feel again."<sup>13</sup> In the autumn of 1850, she settled down to editing Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, compiling the "Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell," and writing the "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell," the "Editor's Preface" to Wuthering Heights, and a prefatory note to the "Selections."<sup>14</sup> Villette grew out of this imaginative confrontation with the past.

Two early drafts for Villette have been preserved. In the first draft, written in January 1850, an elderly woman, Elizabeth Home, describes how, "[r]etired now from active life and needing an object to give my existence some interest," she has sat down to record some recollections.<sup>15</sup> Like the Lucy Snowe of the Bretton chapters, she claims to be "plain-spoken, sensible, unimagnative" (754). This last attribute, she qualifies:

am I unimagnative? Certainly for I prefer history to romance, biography to fiction -- travels to fairy-tales -- but then what do I like in history --? the stirring -- what in biography? the narration of lives striking and original -- what in travels? -- the adventurous, perilous, and fresh (754).

Her own life has been uneventful: "Quiet has waited on my steps all along the path I have here tofore\* trodden" (753).

<sup>13</sup> Brontë to Nussey (23 October 1850), WSC, III, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> Currer Bell, ed., Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, by Ellis and Acton Bell. A New Edition Revised, With A Biographical Notice of The Authors, A Selection From Their Literary Remains, And A Preface, By Currer Bell (London: Smith, Elder, 1850). Published on 7 December 1850.

<sup>15</sup> "I have never had time for much writing" (dated at the top "Jany 23rd 1850"), Villette, p. 753.

Yet, as her reflections suggest, her well-regulated imagination has enabled her to share intimately in other people's experiences.

In the second draft, written after Brontë completed her editorial work, a woman, exercising her memory with almost painful intensity, tries to recall her earliest childhood: "Memory . . . reflects with finger raised to her lips and eyes bent on the pavement."<sup>16</sup> Her melancholy recollections of her father, their splendid house in Paris, and her arrival in England on a cold December day, suggest that she is Paulina Home, à la recherche du temps perdu.

Turning to the opening chapters of Villette, it is evident that Lucy Snowe is not, as Margaret Lane remarks, a "shadowy figure."<sup>17</sup> Lucy disapproves of an over-excitabile imagination, for it exacerbates one's suffering: "I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination" (15). Lucy disapproves of sudden changes of mood: "These sudden, dangerous natures -- sensitive as they are called -- offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries" (16). Lucy considers Bretton a perfect haven from harsh reality: "The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; but I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance" (7). Lucy, indeed, while watching Paulina with uneasy sympathy, obtrudes her own well-digested experience of life as the absolute standard by which Paulina's character must be judged. Measured by this standard, which is also the standard of the white-haired narrator, Paulina's character is as yet wholly unformed.

A comparison of the two early drafts with the Bretton episode confirms Sinclair's instinctive recognition that Paulina -- "the inscrutable creature of nerves,

<sup>16</sup> "It was in the cold weather" (c. January 1851), Shirley, p. 755.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Lane, ed., Villette (London: Dent, 1978), p. viii.

exquisitely sensitive to pain" -- was to have been the focal character of Villette, and that she was "obviously predestined to that profound and tragic suffering which is Lucy Snowe's."<sup>18</sup> The sane and sober Lucy was going to record Paulina's struggles with adversity, and to assist her by precept and example. At the end of Chapter Three, therefore, it is not her own future, but that of the "very unique" Paulina, which occupies Lucy's mind: "How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh?" (44, 45)

Chapter Four bridges the gap of eight years between Bretton and Villette, where the principal events of the novel, centring on Paulina's doomed passion for Graham Bretton, were to take place. In addition to a vague summary of Lucy's domestic misfortunes, a test of fortitude which she passed with flying colours, it introduces the monitory figure of Miss Marchmont. Miss Marchmont, when her lover was killed, channelled all the strength of her imagination into her rage

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<sup>18</sup> Sinclair, The Three Brontës, p. 150. As Ratchford points out, Paulina Home bears a close resemblance to Marian Hume, Zamorna's long-suffering wife (Ratchford, p. 234). Also, in "All this day I have been in a dream" (11 August-14 October 1836), Brontë describes a girl, Lucy, who evidently lacks Lucy Snowe's strength of mind. This Lucy has fallen in love with Dr Charles Brandon, "a tall handsomely built man," who affectionately calls her a "little silly thing [because] she fainted at the very sight of the [medical] instruments," reflecting Graham Bretton's condescending kindness to Paulina. Lucy is next seen "sitting at the door of a lone cottage on a kind of moorish waste [--] sorrowful & sickly," waiting for Brandon, who is unconscious of her passion for him. Since Lucy does not appear in any of the other juvenilia, it is unclear if the "dim concatenation of ideas" and the "certain set of reminiscences" which her name evokes to Brontë, refer to an actual story, now lost. The similarity between the names Hume/Home, Lucy/Lucy, and Dr Brandon/ Dr Bretton, however, suggests that Brontë was recalling a particular Angrian heroine when writing the opening chapters of Villette, especially if Home is pronounced [hju:m]. Moreover, bearing in mind that in Volume One of Shirley, Brontë drew upon the strong-minded Elizabeth Hastings in creating Caroline Helstone, the parallels between Marian Hume, the Roe Head Lucy, and Paulina Home suggest that in planning Villette, she was looking for a protagonist whose strength lay in endurance rather than action.



against God's apparent injustice in condemning her to a life of sorrow and loneliness. For thirty years, this "mental canker" festered, turning her into a "morose" and "selfish woman" (49, 55). Then, on the night of her death, her memory, aided by her imagination, recreates the past "with singular vividness":

I love Memory to-night . . . : I prize her as my best friend. She is just now giving me a deep delight; she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities -- not mere empty ideas -- but what were once realities, and that I long have thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with the grave-mould. I possess just now the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth (52).

Seeing Frank in her vision, she recalls his exceptional character and love for her:

O my noble Frank -- my faithful Frank -- my good Frank! so much better than myself -- his standard in all things so much higher! This I can now see and say -- if few women have suffered as I did in his loss, few have enjoyed what I did in his love . . . : it was such a love as honoured, protected, and elevated, no less than it gladdened her to whom it was given (53).

Too late, she understands that God, in His infinite wisdom, had provided her with the means of bearing her suffering. He had given her not only twelve months of companionship with an extraordinary man, but also the power of memory.

Lucy, by witnessing the concluding stage of Miss Marchmont's struggle, was to have gained the necessary experience to support Paulina. But Brontë realized her mistake. In Jane Eyre, the formal distinction between the narrator and the protagonist had worked, because the memories recorded and commented upon by the elder self were the experiences which the younger self was in the process of gathering, and thus had the same immediacy. To distinguish between two separate characters, on the other hand, would not work for, as Lucy's passive role in the Miss Marchmont chapter suggested, it would reduce Lucy to watching Paulina, listening to Paulina's descriptions of her mental and emotional turmoil, and giving wise counsel. As the contrast between chapters twenty-four to twenty-seven -- containing the remnants of the Lucy-Paulina

relationship as originally envisaged -- and the surrounding chapters shows, mere words would replace the acuteness of sight and hearing associated with authentic experience. Brontë, therefore, decided to locate the interaction between reason, imagination, and memory within one mind, Lucy's.

Unlike her fellow-passenger Ginevra Fanshawe -- whose mind is impervious to "history, geography, arithmetic, and so on," and most of whose "other faculties seemed to be in the same flimsy condition" -- the Lucy Snowe who steps ashore in Boue-Marine is intelligent and alert (73, 118). Unlike Mme Beck<sup>19</sup>, who is "faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; . . . insensate," Lucy has "sensibility and genius" (102, 98). Also, unlike earlier protagonists such as Elizabeth Hastings, whose imaginations spur them on to rebel against their confining lives, Lucy resignedly enters upon the duties of a humble governess:

I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children's frocks . . . [T]he negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. Besides,

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<sup>19</sup> Nearly all names of persons and places in Villette have an easily recognizable meaning, which typifies them. Only Mme Beck's name is obscure. Since Beck is not a French name or word, Georgia S. Dunbar suggests that Brontë added a k to 'bec', meaning beak or snout, which thus refers to Mme Beck's prying nature ("Proper Names in Villette," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 15 [June 1960], 79). This is unlikely because the spelling of other French names has not been changed. As a name, Beck is rare in Holland and Flanders, and as a word has no meaning. Brontë, however, spelled Dutch names from memory and usually made mistakes. Thus Vandenhuten should be Vandenhouten (The Professor, p. 196) and Vanderkelkov should be Vanderkerkhof (Villette, p. 186). Possibly, therefore, she meant to write Beeck, pronounced [beik], which is fairly common, especially in Flanders. A 'beeck' is a small, fast-flowing stream, like Yorkshire 'beck', which may explain the omission of one e. That Brontë had a Dutch name in mind is also suggested by Mme Beck's maiden name, Kint, which means child (99). Be[e]ck and Kint may have been used satirically, for Mme Beck has a sluggish temperament and engages in far from childlike scheming. It is more likely, however, that Brontë chose these names in order to underline that Mme Beck is a Flemish bourgeoisie, and thus, in her view, inferior to Lucy and the Brettons, who are English, and M. Paul and the De Bassompierres, who are of French descent.

I seemed to hold two lives -- the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter (105).

Lucy's silence on the contents of her "still shadow-world" and the weak term employed to indicate its source, "fancy," suggest that it should not be confused with the dynamic "world below," Angria, in which Brontë herself sought relief at Brussels (164).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as the conditional clause ("provided the former . . .") and its phrasal quantifier ("a sufficiency of") confirm, Lucy feels that she requires only a moderate amount of imaginative stimulance in order to resign herself to her restricted existence.

Reason, which controls Lucy's outward life, is not necessarily inimical to imagination. In Elizabeth Hasting's case, it manifested itself as a burdensome but vital reserve, shielding her imagination from her environment. In Lucy's case, however, reason, while securing her imagination against the mean reality of the pensionnat, also rigorously circumscribes the area of mental experience from which her imagination can draw sustenance, and forces it to abandon any course which might undermine her resignation to her lot. Indeed, the key to Lucy's progressive depression is not, as in Elizabeth Hasting's case, the barrenness of her environment, but the starvation of her imagination, caused by the continual disagreement between her reason and imagination over the material from which she may be allowed to draw comfort. Her relations with Graham Bretton are designed to illustrate this conflict.

Brontë later conceded that one "defect" in Villette was "the discrepancy, the want of perfect harmony, between Graham's boyhood and manhood."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, when Lucy first meets

<sup>20</sup> Neither "necromantic" nor "shadow-world" imply that Lucy's withdrawal into an inner space controlled by her imagination indicates an unhealthy state of mind. See p. 111, n. 40, above.

<sup>21</sup> Brontë to Smith (3 November 1852), WSC, IV, p. 16.

him again, while the *bonne*, the cook, the portress, and herself are in *Fifine's* sick-room, she is immediately struck by his self-conceit: "his eye glanced from face to face rather too vividly, too quickly, and too often" (132). During the next few weeks, he accords to the plain teacher "that degree of notice . . . given to unobtrusive articles of furniture" (135). Being an "*Isidore*," a donkey, he prefers *Ginevra*, whose sensuous charms he considers to be unmistakable signs of "exquisite superiority and innate refinement" (173). Evidently, he is no god:

A god could not have the cruel vanity of *Dr. John*, nor his sometime levity. No immortal could have resembled him in his occasional temporary oblivion of all but the present -- in his passing passion for that present (281).

*Lucy*, therefore, "disclaim[s], with the utmost scorn, every sneaking suspicion of what are called 'warmer feelings'" (363). To believe that *Brontë* intended *Lucy* to be deceived in her own feelings is to overrate the complexity of *Graham's* role, for he is no *William Crimsworth* in search of a *Frances Henry*, but, like *Zoraïde Reuter*, a transitional character.

*Lucy's* continual watching of *Dr John*, alias *Graham*, during his early visits to the pensionnat awakens vivid memories of her childhood "in Old England, in long past days" (151). Yet *Graham* does not recognize her, so that her imagination, lacking an object which gives the past a definite shape within the present, only fills with an intense but undefined longing, which soon becomes unbearable: "I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence" (152). Then reason intervenes, commanding her "to knock [this longing] on the head; which I did" (152). Her imagination, temporarily subdued, holds "before the sealed eyes a magic glass, of which the sweet, solemn visions were repeated in dreams" (153).

In the meantime, *Graham's* infatuation with *Ginevra* has begun to unfold before *Lucy's* eyes. While her reason condemns the spectacle, her imagination is fascinated by it. At the end of term, *M. Paul* persuades her to act in the school play. Contrary to expectation, she plays her role, that of a

frivolous fop courting an empty-headed coquette, "with relish. What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven" (197). Next day, reason convinces her that any further exercise of this newly-discovered talent "would not do for a mere looker-on at life" (197). Neither would it do to debase her imagination by employing it to re-enact the love passages between Graham and Ginevra within the seclusion of her own mind.

Yet Lucy's imagination craves for sustenance: "Ginevra gradually became with me a sort of heroine" and Graham "I pictured her faithful hero" (222). By the middle of the long vacation, spent all alone at the pensionnat, her imagination has become as unmanageable as the "crétin" left in her charge:

I could not leave her a minute alone; for her poor mind . . . was warped; its propensity was to evil. A vague bent to mischief, an aimless malevolence made constant vigilance indispensable (220).

While struggling to suppress her flimsy fantasies, a nervous fever intensifies her already agonizing awareness of the death-in-life against which these fantasies are her last defense. Visions of death begin to haunt her, culminating in a fearful nightmare, in which she is not only dead, "the end come and past by," but doomed to further loneliness: "Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved me well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated" (223). One morning, come to the end of her endurance, she wanders into town, faints, and wakes up in the Brettons' house.

Diagnosing Lucy's breakdown as a straightforward case of "Hypochondria," to be cured by "[c]heerful society" and "plenty of exercise," Graham takes her on excursions to picture-galleries and other places of interest in Villette and its environs (261, 262). Graham's transformation into a "bland, glowing, and genial" character, bubbling with "bright animal spirits," paralleled by "the angular abruptness of his change of sentiment towards Miss Fanshawe," Brontë conceded to be another point where she was "conscious of defect" (279,

282).<sup>22</sup> In part, the change was dictated by the need to provide the nearly forgotten Paulina with a reasonably suitable husband. Primarily, however, it served to bring the conflict between Lucy's reason and imagination to a head. Upon her return to the pensionnat, when Graham the good companion has replaced the insubstantial hero haunting her imagination before her breakdown, Lucy considers that she can safely comfort herself with her memories of the weeks spent in his company and with his letters. Reason cautions her that such reliance on the charming but superficial Graham will end in disappointment: "insane [were] that credulity which should mistake the transitory rain-pool, holding in its hollow one draught, for the perennial spring yielding the supply of seasons" (326-327). Reason, Lucy bitterly complains, is a

hag, [who] could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down. According to her, I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination -- her soft, bright foe, our sweet Help, our divine Hope. We shall and must break bounds at intervals, despite the terrible revenge that awaits our return (327-328).

The four hundred word panegyric on imagination which then follows, indicates the fierce resistance which reason must overcome in its struggle for control of Lucy's mind. The struggle culminates when, at last, a letter arrives from Graham. Writing two replies, one in which she gives free rein to her imagination, and the other composed "under the dry, stinting check of Reason," she sends the latter (363).

During Lucy and Graham's visit to the theatre, shortly afterwards, Graham happens to save Paulina from being trampled by the crowd, which enables Brontë to dispose of them in the course of the next four chapters, thus making room for M. Paul. Lucy's fascination with Vashti's dramatic representation of a woman battling against death with all the

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<sup>22</sup> Brontë to Smith (3 November 1852), WSC, IV, p. 16.

strength of her iron will and ferocious imagination also looks forward to M. Paul's role in Volume Three:

Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor in finite measure, resenting it: she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance . . . [S]he fought every inch of ground, sold dear every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, would see, would hear, would breathe, would live, up to, within, well nigh beyond the moment when death says to all sense and all being -- 'Thus far and no farther!' (369, 373, 374).

Wick<sub>ed</sub>ly rebellious, Vashti re-enacts on its most elementary level Miss Marchmont's struggle against God's will. Yet there are two crucial differences. Miss Marchmont's confession had been addressed to the rational Lucy who was to be Paulina's wise friend, whereas Vashti's visual performance is designed to appeal to the imagination of the Lucy who herself needs guidance. Moreover, Miss Marchmont ultimately submitted to her suffering when she recognized the consoling power of memory, whereas Vashti acts out her rebellion to its terrifying conclusion. Armed with both examples, Lucy enters her doomed relationship with M. Paul.

Towards the end of the long vacation, Lucy and M. Paul meet in a picture-gallery. Both the setting and the three paragraphs in which Lucy proves her unerring taste for "original and good picture[s]," suggest that the ensuing conversation is going to reveal to them their spiritual kinship in yet one more variation on William Percy's admiration for Elizabeth Hasting's vase (284). M. Paul, however, instead of discussing with Lucy the merits of a scantily dressed Cleopatra, peremptorily orders her to look at a dull set of episodes in "La vie d'une femme" (287). Indeed, the contrast between M. Paul's ideal and actual responses serve to highlight the two obstacles dividing him from Lucy. For one thing, he is a "waspish little despot," whose violent likes and dislikes obscure his genuine kindness and compassion: "he often excited in ordinary minds fear and dislike" (434, 289). Also, caught in the web of Roman-Catholicism, he is both over-scrupulous in his insistence that others observe its restrictive moral code and exposed to the

manipulations of "the secret junta" -- Mme Beck, Mme Walravens, and le Père Silas (666).

Upon her return to the pensionnat, the forlorn teacher excites M. Paul's compassion. Presenting her with pamphlets, magazines, "a fresh interesting new work, or a classic, mellow and sweet in its ripe age," he soon discovers the true Lucy behind her forbidding reserve (496). Before long, he is giving her private tuition: "His own eyes would moisten, when tears of shame and effort clouded mine; burdened as he was with work, he would steal half his brief space of recreation to give to me . . . [M]y faculties began to struggle free, and my time of energy and fulfilment came" (508). M. Paul, indeed, despite his violent temper, is a perfect master:

I have heard him lavish, with careless, unconscious prodigality, such mental wealth as books seldom boast; his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss . . . [H]is tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit's eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong (551).

Lucy herself proves a model pupil. When two fellow-professors doubt the authenticity of the *devoir* of which M. Paul has boasted to them, she produces another, equally brilliant *devoir* on the spot. "[S]ubmitted by intellect to intellect's own tests," the pupil's love for her master is approved (678).

Then, on the night before M. Paul is due to sail for Guadeloupe, Lucy's imagination is set free by Mme Beck's opiate:

Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought -- to reverie peculiar in colouring. A gathering call ran among the faculties . . . Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous (650-651).

Wandering into the park, she observes M. Paul embracing a girl, infers that he has been persuaded to marry the girl upon his return, and, strangely elated, slips back to her bedroom. Imagination is wrong, for the girl is M. Paul's niece, shortly to be married to Heinrich Mühler. Yet the experience has been valuable, for it has been her imagination which has brought



home to her the vanity of deluding herself with dreams of fulfilment, a fact which her reason alone could never have persuaded her to accept: "Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand -- free!" (677). When M. Paul sails, therefore, imagination as well as reason are ready to respond constructively to disappointment.

For three years, letters arrive -- "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed" -- which anchor M. Paul's love in Lucy's heart and mind (713). Returning home, he is drowned.<sup>23</sup> Then memory takes over. Bearing in mind Miss Marchmont's dying vision, Lucy channels all the strength of her imagination into her recollections of the love and companionship of that exceptional man, M. Paul. Of all the heroes of Brontë's later writings, it is, indeed, M. Paul who most closely approaches Zamorna, for he, too, becomes "a mental King," the imaginative incarnation of a glorious past, reconciling Lucy -- and through her, Brontë -- to a solitary existence.

After the publication in January 1853 of Villette, the second of the two novels which she had contracted to write for Smith, Elder, Brontë was at liberty to revive The Professor. In May and June, she re-explored the X- chapters in Willie Ellin, but soon found that such subject-matter did not suit her peaceful mood.<sup>24</sup> In November and December, still pondering over Mr Nicholls' proposal of marriage, she drafted two chapters of Emma, whose theme was to have been the contentment derived from quiet affection:

<sup>23</sup> Although "the idea of M. Paul Emanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination till it assumed the distinct force of reality," Brontë drew a veil over his fate because her father, who "disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind . . . [,] requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy-tales) 'marry, and live very happily ever after'" (Gaskell, p. 484).

<sup>24</sup> The three untitled fragments (May 1853, 22 June 1853, the last one undated), known as Willie Ellin, are printed in BST, IX, 46 (1936), 3-22.

We all seek an ideal in life: a pleasant fancy began to visit me in a certain year that perhaps the number of human beings is few who do not find their quest at some era of life for some space more or less brief. I had certainly not found mine in youth though the strong belief I held of its existence sufficed through all my brightest and freshest time to keep me hopeful. I had not found it in maturity. I was become resigned never to find it. I had lived certain dim years entirely tranquil and inexpectant -- and now -- I was not sure -- but something was hovering round my hearth which pleased me wonderfully[.]<sup>25</sup>

On 29 June 1854, Brontë married Mr Nicholls: "Take warning, Ellen, the married woman can call but a very small portion of each day her own."<sup>26</sup> Mr Nicholls "always groaned literally -- when she talked of continuing" Emma.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Emma (dated 27 November 1853 at the top of the first leaf), The Professor, p. 306.

<sup>26</sup> Brontë to Nussey (7 September 1854), WSC, IV, p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Gaskell to Smith (17 March 1858), Chapple and Pollard, eds., The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p. 496.

## CONCLUSION

Tucked away in Thackeray's The Newcomes, is this thinly disguised description of Charlotte Brontë's first appearance in London society:

That is the coroner for Middlesex, conversing with the great surgeon Sir Cutler Sharp, and that pretty little laughing girl talking with them is no other than the celebrated Miss Pinnifer, whose novel of 'Ralph the Resurrectionist' created such a sensation after it was abused in the Trimestrial Review. It was a little bold certainly -- I just looked at it at my club -- . . . there are descriptions in it certainly startling -- ideas about marriage not exactly orthodox; but the poor child wrote the book actually in the nursery, and all England was ringing with it before Doctor Pinnifer, her father, knew who was the author.<sup>1</sup>

Thackeray's picture illustrates the confusion of fact and speculation which, 135 years later, has crystallized into three fundamental misconceptions about the nature of Brontë's "scribbling mania." The first misconception is that, from an early age, she had a "fierce sense of vocation as a writer."<sup>2</sup> The second misconception is that in adolescence her luxurious imagination lured her into composing "torrid romances," until, towards 1840, her troubled conscience and emerging self-

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<sup>1</sup> William Thackeray, The Newcomes (1853-1855), The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), vol. 5, p. 94. Thackeray is alluding to Elizabeth Rigby's notorious review of Jane Eyre in the Quarterly Review of December 1848. In 1860, J.C. Robertson apologized on behalf of the Quarterly Review, but in an effort to justify the earlier mistake, created an even more distorted picture of Brontë's character ("Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, & Mill on the Floss," Quarterly Review, 108 [October 1860], 469-471; an extract from this apology can be found in Jos Bemelmans, "Some Neglected Responses to Charlotte Brontë's Novels," BST, XVIII, 92 [1982], 121).

<sup>2</sup> Chernaik, "An Unpublished Tale by Charlotte Brontë," p. 1453.

criticism as a writer caused the "African aristocratic extravagance [to give] way to sober Yorkshire realism."<sup>3</sup> The third misconception is that the course of rigorous realism pursued in The Professor was dictated by her decision to renounce her Angrian heritage. Profiting by her failure, she evolved a compromise between realism and romance in Jane Eyre.

Closer study of Brontë's juvenilia, followed by a reconsideration of her novels, has revealed an altogether different picture. Brontë conceived of her early writings as a diary. Between 1829 and 1833, aspiring to become a painter, she recorded her visions of the realm of art and artists in which she hoped one day to participate. In 1834 and early 1835, when the career in painting was becoming progressively elusive, she was baffled in her attempts to actually share in her imaginary Athens, but drew comfort from watching it through her narrator's eyes. During the Roe Head and Dewsbury Moor years, while at home for the holidays, she withdrew to the margin of Angria in order to allow her exhausted imagination to recuperate. During these years, she saw a future for herself as a poet. Having in the later novelettes tried to devise a means of overcoming the burdensome reserve which protected her imagination against an indifferent outer world, she eventually, in 1839, resolved to leave Angria, but only for a while. Her half-hearted attempt to write a novel, Messrs Percy and West, at the age of twenty-four, was inspired by the hope of earning some money. The Professor and Jane Eyre were written, partly as financial ventures, and partly in order to come to grips with life in the periphery of the exciting world of artists and poets, now closed to her. She was, indeed, compelled to compromise, but only in order to make room in this peripheral reality for the creative self which had shaped her every thought since childhood. While working on the first volume of Shirley, she did warm to her career as a professional novelist, perceiving a role for

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Winnifrith, ed., The Poems of Charlotte Brontë: A New Annotated and Enlarged Edition of the Shakespeare Head Brontë (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. xv, xvii.

herself as a social reformer. The project collapsed after the death of Emily. In Villette, trying to come to terms with her grief and loneliness, she affirmed her faith in her memory and imagination.

George Richmond's crayon portrait of Brontë (1850) embellishes the dust-jackets and front covers of many biographical and critical studies. The cover of the present study should properly have shown the recently discovered carte-de-visite photograph (1854).<sup>4</sup> Yet it has not been designed as an exercise in iconoclasm. Neither does it claim to have exhausted its subject-matter. Many perspectives have, for clarity's sake, been ignored or only indicated. A cursory inspection of contemporary issues of the Times and Leeds Mercury, for example, suggests that the swift sequences of sharply defined images found throughout the juvenilia and, in a more sophisticated form, in Jane Eyre, can be traced, in part, to Brontë's voracious reading of newspapers. Presumably newspapers contributed in other, more complex, ways to the shaping of her imagination. It is one of many areas still to be investigated in the life and writings of the woman who, while working on Jane Eyre, wrote:

But if I could leave home Ellen -- I should not be at  
Haworth now -- I know life is passing away and I am doing  
nothing . . . .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Emery Walker's photograph of Brontë is reproduced in Sixty Treasures: The Brontë Parsonage Museum (Haworth: The Brontë Society, 1988), no. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Brontë to Nussey (14 October 1846), WSC, II, p. 115.

## Appendix A

### THE DATING OF PASSING EVENTS AND IT IS ALL UP!

Passing Events illustrates the manner in which Brontë wrote her Angrian narratives between 1835 and 1839. Whenever she could spare the time and felt like writing, sometimes at intervals of several days, she added some two thousand to three thousand words to her manuscript. After each section, she left a blank space to mark the end of the writing session. In nearly every section, the scenes are set on the day of the month and at the time of day she was writing. The weather conditions which she describes also tend to correspond to the actual weather conditions at the time of writing.

Passing Events, as printed in Five Novelettes, consists of seven sections. Section I is undated. Section II is dated "April 21st -36," a Thursday, and was written in the late afternoon: "The day is breathless, quite still & warm. the sun, far declined for the afternoon, is just melting into evening [&] sheds a deep amber light" (49, 42-43).<sup>1</sup> Gérin and Alexander therefore assume that section I was written earlier that day.<sup>2</sup> However, section I contains approximately three thousand words and section II approximately three thousand five hundred words. Since 21 April was Brontë's birthday, she is unlikely to have written nearly seven thousand words on this day. The frantic efforts to "fall into some regular strain of composition" in section I, too, make it unlikely that this section was written on her birthday (38). Presumably section I was written one day or several days earlier.

Section III is undated. Section IV was written on a

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Five Novelettes will appear in parentheses within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Gérin, Five Novelettes, p. 33; Alexander, p. 149.

"sweet April evening" (54). Section V was written on the night of Saturday "the 23 of April," while "the full & newly-risen moon hung over the Warner hills" (61). Since section II was written on Thursday evening, section III was written on Friday during the daytime and section IV on Friday evening. Section VI was written on Friday "April 29th 1836" (72).

Both Gérin and Alexander fail to notice that section VII is not part of Passing Events. For one thing, section VI ends with Brontë's customary farewell when she finished a manuscript before returning to school: "Good-bye Reader" (72). Moreover, the second paragraph of section VII describes a scene which took place "last Friday," which was "the 24th instant" (76). April 24th was a Sunday. June 24th, however, was a Friday. Brontë had returned from Roe Head on Monday 20 June<sup>3</sup>, and within days was immersed once more in Angria, as witnessed by her drawing of "The Cross of Rivaulx," which is dated 23 June 1836.<sup>4</sup> Section VII, therefore, was written in late June 1836.

This dating is confirmed by the contents, which refers to events described by Branwell between 22 and 30 June 1836.<sup>5</sup> Branwell's narratives record Northangerland's efforts to overthrow Zamorna's government, Zamorna's defeat on 26 June, and the establishment over the next few days of a French-style republic. The first paragraph of Charlotte's narrative describes Charles Townshend's excitement upon hearing of Zamorna's downfall and contains long extracts from Republican newspapers, in which Zamorna is denounced for his "actions of Nero-like brutality, ferocity, absurdity & filth," and, one hesitates to add, for his "obtuse Dutch stupidity"

<sup>3</sup> Brontë to Mrs Franks (2 June 1836), WSC, I, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> "The Gordon Bequest," BST, XIX, 1 and 2 (1986), p. 42, item 4.

<sup>5</sup> History of Angria VI (22 June 1836), WSW, II, pp. 186-187; History of Angria VII (24-27 June 1836), WSW, II, pp. 188-195; A Narrative of the First War (22-30 June 1836), unpublished manuscript, Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, contents summarized in Alexander, p. 151.

(74). In the next two paragraphs, Townshend witnesses the auction of "the Goods & chattels of Douro Villa, being the confiscated property of A. A. A. Wellesley prescribed outlaw & arch traitor" (76-77). In the last paragraph, Townshend describes how he revels in the chaos reigning in Verdopolis, a city "mad & racked with war without & within" (81).

The difference in contents, style, and mood between the four paragraphs of section VII suggest that they were written at four separate sittings. The dates of these sittings can be deduced from the text. "My Readers know what sort of a day Monday was," Townshend writes in the last paragraph, and then refers to it as "yesterday" (81). The fourth paragraph, therefore, was written on Tuesday 28 June. Since the second paragraph refers to "last Friday evening . . . the 24th instant," the second and third paragraphs were written on Sunday 26 June or Monday 27 June (76). Saturday is unlikely because Brontë would hardly refer to the previous day as "last Friday." Since she completed "The Cross of Rivaulx" on Thursday 23 June, the first paragraph was written on Friday, Saturday, or possibly Sunday if the second and third paragraphs were both written on Monday.

Brontë began section VII of Passing Events on a fresh leaf.<sup>6</sup> It is beyond all doubt, therefore, that the manuscript which is printed on pages seventy-two to eighty-two of Five Novelettes is a separate Angrian text. Henceforth be it known by its opening sentence: It is all up! (c. 24-28 June 1836).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> A facsimile of the first leaf is reproduced in Five Novelettes, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Between the end of June and 19 July 1836, Brontë wrote a poem of 573 lines, in which Zamorna analyses the tragic chain of events which led to his downfall and exile ("And when you left me what thoughts had I then," WSW, II, pp. 240-254). Brontë's recognition that Zamorna's own perspective on his downfall offered a suitably dramatic theme for a narrative poem explains the relative shortness of It is all up!



## Appendix B

### THE DATING OF BUT IT IS NOT IN SOCIETY

Only two leaves of But it is not in Society have been preserved.<sup>1</sup> The eight lines of poetry at the top of the first leaf read:

And not alone seems she from pillared halls  
To look forth on the night -- so to note the sky  
Bending above Fidena's moon-tipt walls  
And mirrored in the flood that wanders by[.]  
But where beside her in the chamber falls  
The window's clear reflection broad and high  
She deems another stands & that half-checked breath  
Now tells of wakened thought that know\* not death<sup>2</sup>

These lines are the conclusion of a longer poem, begun on the previous leaf. Neufeldt and Alexander suggest that the lines are not related to the prose fragment.<sup>3</sup> In fact, they describe Miss West in a crowded drawing-room in the Duke of Fidena's palace at Adrianopolis during one of "those moments of awakened feeling [--] those sudden, flashing fits of excitement which she could not always control." Her vision is of "one individual," presumably William Percy, who has divined her true nature.

The prose section which follows the poem begins:

But it is not in Society that the real character is

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<sup>1</sup> Partly unpublished manuscript, But it is not in Society, BPM: B113(6) (poem) and (7) (prose).

<sup>2</sup> Poems, p. 257. Neufeldt's transcription incorrectly reads "And" instead of "But" (l. 5) and a comma instead of an ampersand (l. 7).

<sup>3</sup> Poems, p. 431, n. 159; Christine Alexander, A Bibliography of the Manuscripts of Charlotte Brontë (Haworth: The Brontë Society in association with Meckler Publishing, 1982), p. 78, item 167.

revealed more especially when truth is so veiled by the shade of habitual & studied reserve as it was in the present instance -- let us behold her then under other circumstances in a scene so remote from the lighted & gorgeous drawing room -- from the royal capital & the precincts of the Ducal court -- that all we have witnessed in those regions shall seem but a dream -- well suited to the fevered & fickle fancy of such a mind as hers -- . . . The Adventuress is by herself now in her own humble bed-room [in the house on Boulshill] . . . . You see that same light figure that glided so stealthily through the crow[d]ed Saloons of Adrianopolis . . . .

Other details confirm that Miss West's adventures in Adrianopolis, prior to her arrival at remote Boulshill, have been described in detail on previous leaves. Also, the whole of the second leaf has been used. Unless Brontë broke off her narrative abruptly, which is most unlikely since all her early prose writings have formal endings of some sort, the story of Miss West was continued on subsequent leaves. Internal evidence, therefore, suggests that the two extant leaves of But it is not in Society were originally part of a much longer manuscript, and are not, as Alexander suggests, only a brief sketch.<sup>4</sup>

Although Miss West does not appear in Brontë's previous writings, she still belongs to Angria, as the references to Fidena, Adrianopolis, Boulshill, and Augusta Lonsdale suggest.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, she closely resembles Elizabeth Hastings in appearance and character, and is also a governess. Hence Alexander concludes that the fragment was written in late 1838, just before Henry Hastings (December 1838-26 March 1839).<sup>6</sup> Brontë, however, was at Dewsbury Moor until 22 December 1838.

Alexander disregards April and May 1839, the period between the completion of Henry Hastings and Brontë's departure for Stonegappe, partly because she assumes that upon

<sup>4</sup> Alexander, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> Augusta Lonsdale figures prominently in one scene in Henry Hastings (Novelettes, pp. 207-208).

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, pp. 184, 285 n. 14.

finishing Henry Hastings on 26 March Brontë decided not to write for a while, and partly because she adopts Gérin's suggestion that Brontë was at Stonegappe by the middle of May.<sup>7</sup> Since Charlotte had to help Anne prepare for her new post at Mirfield, she would have been too much occupied to write. However, Anne left as early as 8 April.<sup>8</sup> Charlotte, moreover, was at home at least until 24 May, when she finished her drawing of The Remains of the Temple of Venus at Rome.<sup>9</sup> She cannot have drawn this picture at Stonegappe, for her work-load there was enormous. As early as 8 June, she complained to Emily: "It is too bad for anything. I never in my whole life had my time so fully taken up."<sup>10</sup> This same letter also suggests that Brontë had left home only a few days earlier and in rather a hurry, because she thanks her sister for "seeking up my things and sending them all right," and anxiously inquires when "the other articles of raiment now manufacturing" can be expected.<sup>11</sup> Brontë, therefore, left home between 25 May and early June. Early June is the likeliest date because it would not have taken more than a few days for Emily to pack and despatch her sister's belongings. The nine weeks between Anne's departure and her own departure in early June would have allowed Charlotte ample time to write But it is not in Society.

Proof that Brontë actually did finish another manuscript after Henry Hastings can be found in the opening lines of Caroline Vernon, written soon after her return from Stonegappe:

When I concluded my last book I made a solemn resolve that I would write no more till I had somewhat to write about, & at the time I had a sort of notion that perhaps

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, p. 192: Gérin, pp. 140-141.

<sup>8</sup> Brontë to Nussey (15 April 1839), WSC, I, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> "Recent Donations," BST, VII, 38 (1928), 155.

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte to Emily (8 June 1839), WSC, I, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

many years might elapse before aught should transpire  
 novel & smart enough to induce me to resume my  
 relinquished pen -- but lo you --! Scarce three moons  
 have waxed & waned ere 'the creature's at his dirty  
 work again',<sup>12</sup>

Gérin, while assuming that Brontë was employed at Stonegappe for two months, nevertheless argues that the "three moons," or three months, refer to the length of time that Brontë spent at Stonegappe.<sup>13</sup> Alexander suggests that Brontë actually stayed at Stonegappe for three months, although she is known to have returned on 19 July.<sup>14</sup> Both, moreover, assume that the "last book" referred to is Henry Hastings.<sup>15</sup> Yet Brontë returned on 19 July and probably needed several days' rest before embarking on another novelette. Three months ago, therefore, refers to a day in late April, four weeks after Henry Hastings was finished. During these four weeks Brontë evidently wrote another "book." But it is not in Society is not necessarily the novelette which she had in mind when she wrote the opening lines of Caroline Vernon, but unless there is another lost manuscript, it is the only candidate.

In summary, it has been argued that But it is not in Society was a complete novelette, written during the last three weeks in April 1839. The "solemn resolve," known as the Farewell to Angria, was made immediately afterwards. To take her mind off Angria, Brontë spent the next few weeks drawing the ruins of a Roman temple. Within days of finishing the drawing, she was offered a temporary position as governess at Stonegappe, which necessitated a hasty departure.

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<sup>12</sup> Caroline Vernon, Novelettes, p. 277.

<sup>13</sup> Gérin, ed., Novelettes, p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, p. 192. See Brontë to Nussey (26 July 1839), WSW, I, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> Gérin, ed., Novelettes, p. 273; Alexander, p. 192.

## Appendix C

### THE DATING OF BRONTË'S LETTER TO HARTLEY COLERIDGE

The wrapper in which Hartley Coleridge returned Messrs Percy and West bears the direction "C.T., Parsonage, Haworth, near Bradford."<sup>1</sup> The date in the postmark is illegible, but the stamps were issued between 6 May 1840 and 9 February 1841.<sup>2</sup> The letter in which Brontë replied is post-marked "Bradford Yorks./ By Post/ De 10."<sup>3</sup> Since it is believed that Brontë wrote her Farewell to Angria in late 1839 and Messrs Percy and West in December 1839-January 1840, her letter has been dated 10 December 1840.

However, Coleridge made a draft for his letter to Branwell on 30 November 1840 and presumably carried out his resolve to send the fair copy to Haworth parsonage "forthwith."<sup>4</sup> If he wrote another letter to "C.T." that same week and addressed it to the very same parsonage, he would hardly have asked Charlotte unsuspecting questions about her identity or wondered if she thought she had written to his father:

I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I belong to the soft or the hard sex . . . . You ask how I came to hear of you -- or of your place of residence or to think of applying to you for advice -- these things are all a mystery.<sup>5</sup> Sir -- . . . I did not suspect you were your father.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.W. Hatfield, "Charlotte Brontë and Hartley Coleridge, 1840," p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 130, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Coleridge to Branwell (draft letter), Fran Carlock Stephens, "Hartley Coleridge and the Brontës," p. 544.

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte to Coleridge, Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 130.

Branwell, moreover, spent 1 May 1840 with Coleridge at Ambleside and must have told him about the parsonage household. Probably he mentioned his sisters' names. He may also have described how they shared his passion for poetry. Seven months later, therefore, Charlotte would hardly have been so confident that Coleridge could not penetrate her anonymity and even have hinted playfully at her first name ("whether his common-place 'C T' meant Charles Tims or Charlotte Tomkins"<sup>6</sup>). If, however, the correspondence took place nineteen months later, in December 1841, she could rely on the ineffectual Coleridge having forgotten all about Branwell, his sisters, and Haworth, as indeed his own letter showed only too plainly.

Another clue pointing to 1841 is Brontë's reference to Samuel Warren. Warren (1807-1877) published two works of fiction before December 1841. His Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician appeared in Blackwood's Magazine at irregular intervals between August 1830 and August 1837. This morbid and excessively melodramatic collection of sketches achieved a brief succès de scandale because it apparently revealed professional secrets. Between October 1839 and August 1841, Warren's Ten Thousand a-Year was serialized in twenty-one parts in Blackwood's Magazine. This novel tells the history of a draper's assistant, who acquires a large fortune by fraudulent means, and by equally corrupt methods wins a seat in Parliament. Eventually, he is exposed and goes mad. Drawing a grim satirical picture of contemporary middle and upper class society, Ten Thousand a-Year was immensely popular from the very first instalment. Its author was considered a serious rival to Dickens. According to John Lockhart, he "beat Boz hollow -- anyway, was fully his match."<sup>7</sup>

In Brontë's letter, Warren's name occurs in the

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Oliphant, Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his sons; their magazine and friends (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1897), 2 vols., II, p. 218. In December 1851 Brontë told Nussey that she "never liked Warren's writings" (WSC, III, p. 299).

passage in which she parries Coleridge's questions about her identity:

as to my handwriting, or the ladylike tricks you mention in my style and imagery -- you must not draw any conclusion from those -- Several young gentlemen curl their hair and wear corsets -- Richardson and Rousseau -- often write exactly like old women -- and Bulwer and Cooper and Dickens and Warren like boarding-school misses.<sup>8</sup>

Brontë's suggestion that "ladylike tricks" are a weakness even of novelists striving to write realistic fiction, indicates that she included Warren because he had written Ten Thousand a-Year, in which he adopts a satirist's detached view, and not because of Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician, in which the narrator tends to indulge in mawkish melodrama. The topicality of the reference to the author of Ten Thousand a-Year, and the fact that this novel, like her own Messrs Percy and West, is set in upper middle- and upper-class circles, also suggest that she had the later work in mind.

However, Warren's name was not added to the list of "Bulwer and Cooper and Dickens" merely as another example. Cooper was to have concluded the list, but his name reminded Brontë of Dickens, whose proposed tour of the United States was widely publicized in the press in November and December 1841. Hence she added "and Dickens." Dickens' name made her recall the exciting debate, five years earlier, about who the dickens Boz could be. Struck by the parallel with Coleridge's curiosity about the identity of "C T", she remembered an even more recent instance of a novelist whose pseudonym had only been penetrated after twenty-two months of intense speculation: Samuel Warren. Ten Thousand a-Year was serialized under the pseudonym "Z". When Blackwood and Sons published the novel in three volumes in August 1841, the author stuck to "Z". Only in early September 1841, the Newcastle Journal could reveal his identity. Even the Times considered the news worthy of

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<sup>8</sup> Brontë to Coleridge, Monahan, ed., Ashworth, p. 130.

inclusion:

'Ten Thousand A Year' -- The authorship of this highly popular work, recently concluded in Blackwood, is now universally attributed to Mr. Warren, of the Northern Circuit, and in consequence of the success which has attended it, we understand that gentleman has received several brilliant offers to write another work of a similar description, but he has declined them all; declaring his determination to devote himself henceforth to his professional pursuits only -- a course to be at once regretted and approved of by his friends and the public . . . -- Newcastle Journal.<sup>9</sup>

Warren did not stick to his decision. Two months after the publication of Jane Eyre, Now and Then appeared, which rivalled Brontë's novel in popularity.

Since Coleridge would not send two letters to Haworth parsonage within days of each other without guessing C.T.'s identity, and since Brontë evidently felt her pseudonym to be impregnable, it is reasonable to assume that she sent her letter, not on 10 December 1840, but on 10 December 1841. The circumstantial evidence derived from her reference to Samuel Warren confirms this dating. In December 1841, Charlotte was indeed still at Rawdon, but Emily probably forwarded Coleridge's letter, as she had forwarded Southey's letter to Roe Head in March 1837 and the rejected manuscript of The Professor to Manchester in August 1846. Letters sent from Rawdon bore the same Bradford postmark as those sent from Haworth.

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<sup>9</sup> Times, 16 September 1841, p. 5, col. 5.



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"About a week since I got a letter from Branwell." BPM: B92(1).

"All this day I have been in a dream." BPM: B98(8).

"Amen! Such was the sound given in a short shout which closed the evening Service at Ebenezer-Chapel" [Stancliffe's Hotel]. BPM: B114.

"But it is not in Society that the real character is revealed." BPM: B113(6) and (7).

"A day or two ago, in cleaning out an old rubbish drawer" [Four Years Ago]. Manuscript untraceable. Transcript by C.W. Hatfield in BPM.

"I'm just going to write because I cannot help it." BPM: B98(6) and (7).

"Ma chère Jane[,] Il y a longtemps que j'ai cessé de vous écrire." BPM: B122.

"My Compliments to the weather." BPM: B98(6).

"Now as I have a little bit of time." Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection.

"Well here I am at Roe-Head." Pierpont Morgan Library: Bonnell Collection.

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