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(EN)GENDERING ROMANTICISM:
A STUDY OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S NOVELS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Brontë's Feminized Romanticism:

"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," Charlotte Brontë wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey in May, 1836 (Wise and Symington I:139). The portrait of herself that she presents is that of a Romantic artist, consumed by the fire of her imagination which alienates her from society. She is an outcast because her dreams elevate her above the prosaic people around her. That is the Byronic Brontë who bears her mark of Cain with Satanic pride. Yet, Brontë's Romanticism is also informed by the other Romantics. She greatly admired Wordsworth's poetry and was familiar with Coleridge's. She was also sufficiently versed in Shelley to quote from *Prometheus Unbound*.¹ Shelley's conception of poetic imagination clearly informs Brontë's; there are parallels between her and Keats on the subject as well. Her challenge to norms of society and literary genres, and the enforced silence of female voices in both, is fueled by her Romantic spirit of protest. In this respect she offers an analogue to the radicalism of Blake. Yet Brontë's social protest included her objection to the situation of women, an objection that also applied to their placement within Romanticism as defined by the male poets. Brontë's Romantic inspiration, therefore, is also informed by the female Romantics who gave voice to women's issues, most notably in the feminist arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Romanticism is a term that evokes manifold associations. However, an exploration of the movement of Romanticism in all of its facets is beyond the scope of this study which is limited to the aspects that bear on Brontë's writing. In particular, Brontë was drawn to Romanticism for its elevation of subjectivity, the poet's creative

imagination, and emotional intensity – qualities she recognized in herself. The representation of the individualistic questing spirit and its pursuit of self-definition and transcendence was another aspect of Romanticism that Brontë translated into her own works. Brontë ultimately succeeded in breathing the Romantic spirit into her novels, though she had to first surmount the obstacles she faced as a woman writer. The poets who shaped English Romanticism wrote from a male perspective which excluded women from the center of the Romantic experience. This situation forced Brontë to confront what Christine Battersby describes as "the problem of aligning Romantic notions of art as an instinctive, non-rational activity against [the] need to assess (rationally and consciously) the likely reactions to a *female* voice" (103-104). It is that very female voice that became central to Brontë's rendering of Romanticism. In order to grant women the position of Romantic subject, rather than mere objects, Brontë had to release them from their marginalized positions. She accomplished this objective by creating a new type of heroine, one who used her voice to express her feminized Romanticism. Her triumph is first fully realized in *Jane Eyre*, though the antecedents of this distinctive heroine can be traced back to the juvenilia.

Throughout her writing, Charlotte Brontë develops her own formulation of Romanticism, a rendering of the advancement of the male Romantic poets into a woman's discourse. However, like the Romantic poets themselves, Brontë demonstrates an understanding of the limits of discourse. Her writing evinces an awareness of the limitations imposed on representation by language which cannot fully re-present experience, the gap between imaginative vision and its expression.² The corollary of that understanding is the recognition that texts do not contain meaning but, rather, offer fields of interpretations. The absence of fixity is emphasized by Romantic irony; the integrity of the text is unsettled by the intrusion of the narrator who highlights the contrivance of the narrative. Susan Wolfson finds that "in English Romanticism . . . the play of interpretive strategies emerges as a primary subject – a 'principle of action' in itself," and

the poems "dramatize the uncertainties of interpretation." Like the urn in Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the import of these poems is their teasing quality, the effect they have on our "thought -- provoking questions and refusing to confirm any sure points and resting places for our reasonings" (Wolfson 34, 46-47). Conscious of the narrator's manipulation of and the reader's expectation of a pointed message attached to the text, in her own writing Brontë opts for Romantic irony over novelistic conventions. Most patently in the last two novels, though to some extent even in *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*, Brontë deliberately refuses to grant the closure and defined meaning anticipated by the novel reader.

As many women writers of the nineteenth century did, Charlotte Brontë established her reputation as a writer through the novel. Yet, though her choice of genre brackets her with writers of her own gender, Brontë's novels do not conform to the pattern of the traditional women writers who -- even when anonymous -- presented their works as the compositions of "a lady," for Brontë consciously chose to emulate male writers.³ Her use of male pseudonyms, a practice that she had already established in choosing the names of the narrators of her juvenilia, indicates that she associated the role of author with a male persona. Although she read and approved of works by contemporary women writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau, she did not care for the compositions of popular female poets of the time such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Brontë's literary tastes are revealed by the reading list she made up for her friend Ellen Nussey in a letter dated July 4, 1837. The authors Brontë endorses include nineteenth-century writers such as Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, and, with some apologetics, Byron, but not a single woman writer (Gaskell 151). Her discussion of writers indicate that she did not perceive women to be part of the great literary tradition which concentrated on poets and was exclusively male.

Brontë's Romantic roots are noted by various critics, most extensively by Helene Moglen in her well-known book *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*, and by Irene

Tayler in her study of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, *Holy Ghosts*.⁴ However, Moglen restricts Brontë's Romanticism to the Byronic strain, an influence which, according to her interpretive perspective, is inimical to the novelist's feminist independence.⁵ Thus she argues that Romanticism had to be renounced in order for Brontë to come into her own as a woman writer. Moglen also takes a psychoanalytic view of Brontë's authorial self-conception, concentrating on the tension in Charlotte's relationship with her brother Branwell, her partner in writing the Angrian saga. In the same manner, Tayler makes Brontë's father the center of her male muse theory by focusing on Charlotte's dilemma of feeling compelled to choose between active "doing" and passive "being", stemming from her dual desire to emulate her father – also a writer – and be loved by him, which would entail refraining from creative activity. Moreover, in a book devoted to Emily as well as Charlotte, Tayler clearly regards Charlotte's Romanticism as secondary to her sister's.

My dissertation offers a divergent approach to Brontë's conception of herself as an author and the importance of her Romanticism. Tracing the development of her writing by marking the progression from the juvenilia to the novels demonstrates that Brontë advances as both a Romantic and a woman writer. The key to this double advancement is the evolution of the Brontë heroine. It is for this reason that I begin with an examination of the rise of the distinctive heroine of Brontë's fiction and then proceed to analyze her writing in chronological order. In my analysis *The Professor* and *Shirley*, which had often been discounted as unfortunate failures, emerge as important works that reveal Brontë's artistic aim and development. Clearly, Brontë was conscious of herself as a writer, and her authorial identity was firmly established already in childhood. As Christine Alexander points out, her scrupulousness "in dating and signing almost all her manuscripts," even though they were not intended for publication, "reflects her early awareness of her role as an author" (*Early Writings* 232). It is this strong sense of her authorial identity that underlies her censure of a review of *Jane Eyre* that "praised the book if written by a man, and pronounced it 'odious' if the work of a woman." Brontë

attacked the inconsistency of the reviewer, responding with, "'To you I am neither man nor woman -- I come before you as an author only. It is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me -- the sole ground on which I accept your judgment'" (Wise and Symington III 11). Refusing to be labeled and consequently limited on the basis of her gender, Brontë did not wish to present herself as a woman writer but rather as an artist whose work was to be judged on its own merit, not according to the standards of female decorum.⁶ Confident of her authorial powers, Brontë endeavored to find a place for herself in the male literary tradition, particularly that of the Romantic poets.

In her writing Brontë ventured to cross the gender line to allow herself the same liberty that men are granted as artists. Presenting her novels as the works of the androgynously named Currer Bell, whom she referred to as "him" when alluding to her public role of author, Brontë refused to be cast into a gender-imposed mold. Women writers earned pretty praise for ladylike expressions suitable to their domestic sphere, so long as they celebrated home and hearth and devotion to the happiness of others; even poetry was acceptable, for they were clearly not threatening to rival the serious and political work of men. Brontë broke with the tradition of women writers whose "fear of crossing over the line, of becoming a literary crossdress," as Ross terms writing in the masculine tradition (*The Contours of Masculine Desire* 190), kept them within the restricted sphere allotted to women in the literary realm. In contrast, Brontë insisted that she must follow the dictates of her imagination rather than in the footsteps of exemplary female writers.

Brontë's refusal to pattern herself after female predecessors is most patently expressed in her interchange with a contemporary novelist who reviewed her novels, George H. Lewes. She insisted, "I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand" (Gaskell 386). What Lewes considered properly "elegant and charming" was the writing of Jane Austen which he urged Brontë to emulate in his

criticism of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë responded to his advice to attempt "to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's 'mild eyes,'" and "'to finish more and be more subdued,'" by clearly indicating that she had no intention of doing so.⁷ She argues that writers produce their best work under "an influence . . . which becomes their master - which will have its own way," obliterating any other consideration. According to Brontë's account, the creative imagination takes over the composition, eclipsing the authorial self and, by extension the author's gendered identity. Therefore, she maintains that she cannot think of what is appropriate for her to write as a woman when she composes, for she is overtaken by her imaginative spirit, which transcends her gender. In her view yielding control of composition to "this influence" is positive; she does not accept that it should be countered (Gaskell 336). Brontë's portrayal of the operation of the imagination parallels Shelley's description of the inspired artist in his "Defence of Poetry": "the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, . . . and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure" (503-504). Their analogous descriptions show that Brontë, like Shelley, conceives of the imagination as the operation of the unconscious. She also shares his sense of artistic identity as the recipient of this unconscious influence.

Brontë's experience as a writer also offers a parallel to Wordsworth. They both had a love for walking which operated as a constituent part of their writing. Particularly in poems like "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and in parts of *The Prelude* such as the famous account of crossing the Alps, Jeffrey Robinson observes that "the walk characterizes [Wordsworth's] entry into experience" (25). An enthusiastic account of the Romantic experience of walking is given by William Hazlitt in "On Going a Journey":

Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green
turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three

hours' march to dinner -- and then to thinking. It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things . . . burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. (qtd. in Edwin Valentino Mitchell 137)

The goal of walking for the Romantic is not to reach a physical destination but a mental one, to free the constraints on contemplation, to "plunge into" memory, to rejuvenate the senses, and ultimately to return to the essential self.

Walking as a Romantic trope is not confined to the English writers. Rousseau relates his predilection for walking, which he claimed enhanced his imaginative capacity, in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. The purpose of the walk is not to passively view the beauties of the physical world but to construct "a fictitious world, that *pays des chimeres*," which Rousseau preferred to "the real world." Like Wordsworth, he privileges the mind's eye over the bodily eye. Walking is particularly congenial to imaginative reflection, as Irving Babbitt explains, because it provides an outlet for "the *Wanderlust* of body and spirit" concurrently (69). Certainly, Brontë was familiar with both the French and the English Romantic writings, but her penchant for walking is not imitative but innate.

The Brontë sisters enjoyed walking outdoors and often went on long rambles on the moors about Haworth. Their appreciation of the wild, isolated beauty of their native region comes across in their novels; the rugged moors are particularly dominant in the landscape Emily depicts in *Wuthering Heights*. But it was not only the beauty and sublimity of nature that lured them to outdoors for inspiration. They also found the

physical activity of walking, even in confines of the parsonage, conducive to imaginative expression. When Gaskell visited Brontë at her home in Haworth, she learnt of the Brontë habit of walking from the old servant Tabby:

[S]ince they were little bairns -- Miss Brontë and Miss Emily and Miss Anne used to put away their sewing after prayers and walk all three one after the other round the table in the parlour till near eleven o'clock. Miss Emily walked as long as she could, and when she died Miss Anne and Miss Brontë took it up -- and now my heart aches to hear Miss Brontë walking, walking, on alone.

Gaskell continues the account with her own discovery of Brontë's solitary pacing which she kept up as a continuation of the practice she had grown accustomed to with her sisters (Wise and Symington IV, 93). Once their father and aunt would retire for the night, "the girls [were] free to pace up and down (like restless wild animals) in the parlour, talking over plans and projects" (Gaskell 199). Freed from the constraints of parental authority, the girls found their own secluded space to give vent to their pent up creative energy. The physical release of pacing allowed them an outlet for the "wild" and "restless" spirit which they shared with each other and mirrored in the characters they created.

Charlotte's protagonists particularly favor walks, and their own feet bring them to the critical junctures of their quests. In *The Professor*, walking leads the protagonist to fateful encounters with others and his inner self. Walking also leads to revelations in *Shirley*. Yet the full expressiveness of the trope of walking as a reflection of the psyche is only developed in *Jane Eyre*, in which the significance of walks becomes notably prominent. It opens with the declaration of the impossibility of walking on the day Jane's narrative begins. At the conclusion of the novel, when Jane rejoins Rochester, she leads him on a walk. In between are the many walks that mark the progression of Jane's

spiritual journey and her state of mind. Jane's own restless pacing allies her with the imprisoned mad Bertha; both women chafe at the checks imposed on their desires. The image of the discontented woman's refusal to sit submissively still, a feature of all of the novels, becomes paramount in *Villette*. Lucy, despite her passive appearance, walks her own way to achieving independence. From her initial walk under the aurora borealis to her penultimate walk, a deliberately transgressive nocturnal escape to the park, she rebels against the fateful restraints imposed on her. Her ultimate walk is the one that leads to her own house, her own school, and her own independent life.

The function of walking in Brontë's writing bears out Moers's assertion that "[a] whole history of literary feminism might be told in terms of the metaphor of walking" (130). The heroines' walking, like their creator's writing, constitutes an assertion of self in defiance of the physical or literary restrictions imposed on women. Thus walking for Brontë was associated with her writing, for it served as an outlet for her otherwise suppressed wild spirit and as means to imaginative contemplation. Brontë's writing was not merely a continuation of the authorized route of women writers but a deviation, a transgressive excursion onto the road untrodden by female feet, that of the male literary tradition as defined by Romanticism. The image of the walk, according to Rachel Bowlby, warrants two views "of women's writing: as a question of progress, forward along a given line, or a question of transgressiveness implicit in the position outside that of masculine normality" (45). Brontë both advanced Romanticism and transgressed its norms by displacing its masculinist center, engendering a feminized Romanticism.

Brontë's rendering of Romanticism is not synonymous with what Anne K. Mellor calls the "female Romanticism" of the female contemporaries of the six male poets enshrined by the English canon. The women who wrote during the Romantic period include novelists: Mary Hays, Elizabeth Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Brunton, Barbara Hofland, Elizabeth Hamilton, Susan Ferrier, Mary Mitford, Frances Burney, and, of course, Jane Austen. The list of women poets is equally extensive. Some of the

novelists, namely, Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Amelia Opie, and Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson), also published poetry, as did Mary Robinson, Mary Tigh, Joanna Baillie, Mary Bethan, Margaret Hodson, Mary Russell Mitford, Caroline Bowler Southey, Jane West, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Landon. Obviously, poetry was produced by women during the Romantic period. However, these women were not participants in the Romantic literary movement which, as Susan Sniader Lanser points out, centered around the "male voice" (161). The decidedly masculinist center of Romanticism, as defined by the canonized poets, did not allow for the female voice to be heard. Consequently, the women writers of the period were compelled to carve out a markedly different literary niche than that of the Romantic male poets that enabled them to give expression to female experience.

The women writers usually bracketed with the Romantics are Mary Wollstonecraft, the feminist thinker and novelist; Dorothy Wordsworth who wrote descriptive journal entries that provided material and inspiration for her brother's poetry; and Mary Shelley, who worked to establish her husband's poetry, though her own writing portrays the dark side of Romanticism.⁸ Known for their accomplishments in prose rather than poetry, they established a literary domain for themselves that is distinct from that of their contemporaneous male writers, for the masculinist perspective of Romanticism did not accommodate the expression of female experience. As Marlon Ross argues, in "Romantic Quest and Conquest," "Romanticism is historically a masculine phenomenon," and its poetry is directly linked to male identity (29). The female writers' adaptation of the Romantic mode is shaped by their consciousness of the reality of a woman's existence, the experience of a self in relation to others. Such a consciousness is patent in the events and perspectives recorded in journals, but it underlies the women writers' choice of genre for fiction as well. They favored the novel for their self-expression, for it contextualizes an individual's perception within a social

framework of family or community (Tayler and Luria 120-21; Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* 209-10).

Of course, as a woman writer, Brontë shared some of the concerns of the female Romantics, and there are parallels between them. Wollstonecraft's writings offer a potential source for Brontë's feminist sentiments as well as Romantic self-expression.⁹ Yet Wollstonecraft did not manage to integrate the two successfully. In her autobiographical novel, *Mary*, Wollstonecraft attempts a portrayal of a heroine of feeling, yet she lapses into the sentimental mode of eighteenth-century fiction. Her last novel, *Maria*, is an endeavor to integrate "a rational feminist program with one woman's subjective feminine vision," but it does not succeed and remains an unfinished work (Myers, "Unfinished Business" 107). The reason is, as Mary Poovey observes, that Wollstonecraft had misgivings about female creative imagination, for she recognized that women's lack of influence in the public sphere would prevent them from effectively carrying out their designs. Imagination, for women particularly, carries the potential danger of becoming an end in itself and an evasion of the real world. Consequently, in *Maria* the female imagination is depicted as ineffectual and escapist. Both the heroine and her fellow inmate Danford write while in the madhouse, but his concerns in writing are political whereas she uses hers merely as a means to indulge in sentiment (Poovey, "Mary Wollstonecraft" 121). Wollstonecraft's imaginative self-expression does not effectually come across in her fiction, though it does in her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, a travelogue in which her "physical journey is matched by a teleological journey of the mind" in the manner of the Romantic quest narratives (Myers, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters:" 175). Although they were released for publication, the *Letters*, of course, were not originally composed as a work of fiction. The concept of the woman's psychic search as the subject of a novel only took shape in Brontë's composition. Though she may not have been the first to attempt it,

Brontë is the first writer to succeed in creating a novel that presents a heroine as a female version of the Romantic questing hero.

Brontë's writing also manifests the dark view of Romanticism conveyed by the novels of a second-generation female Romantic, Mary Shelley. In *The Last Man*, Shelley envisions humanity consumed by a plague, and in *Mathilda* she relates the ruinous consequences of incestuous desire, a notable feature of the poetry of Byron and Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley's most famous work, *Frankenstein*, highlights the dangers of a man's immersion in his quest, a transcendence that denies the human interconnection.¹⁰ This concern emerges in *Jane Eyre* which, through the Jane and Bertha dichotomy, also explores another dimension of Shelley's novel -- the representation "the divided self"; within the self-restrained individual lurks "a monstrous, destructive, and self destructive" force.¹¹ "The angel in the house entails a demon outside it, the Monster leering through the window at the horrified Victor and the murdered Elizabeth" (Levine 15). The contrast between idealized and demonized others is the manifestation of one type of literary doubles, though the central division in Mary Shelley's novel is between the scientist and his creation who are both foils for each other and inextricably linked together as a single entity. The double as alter ego's function is to highlight the division inherent in the individual character. Brontë invokes the divided self not only in the sane and mad split of Jane and Bertha but in her other novels and juvenilia. In *The Spell*, one of her early compositions, she proposes the existence of an identical twin brother to her central hero, Zamorna. In *The Professor*, the narrator finds his alter ego in the somewhat mysterious and diabolical Hunsden. The paired heroines and their corresponding heroes in *Shirley* offer two sets of doubles. In her final novel, Brontë explores the capacity of doubles most extensively in the various female characters who act as foils for Lucy in *Villette*, ranging from Miss Marchmont to Vashti, Madame Beck, Ginerva, and, most notably, Paulina, who is actually referred to as her double.

However, Brontë's persistence in expressing her own subjective vision, even in the traditionally more objective genre of the novel, places her in closer affiliation with the male Romantics than with their female counterparts. The dominance of what Virginia Woolf (*Common Reader* 158) calls her "overpowering personality" accounts for Brontë's closer affinity with William than with Dorothy Wordsworth. In her journals Dorothy records that she views the same landscapes as her brother, but whereas he transfigures them in his poetry by adapting them to his mind's eye, she faithfully records her observation of the scenes. The central difference between the brother and sister was noted by Frederick A. Pottle in his essay "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth." For William "poetic subject is a mental image" viewed not only through "the mode of common perception" but with the "inward eye," that is to say "imaginatively" (76, 78). Although Dorothy was capable of writing poetry and did, most of her writing was devoted to her journals in which she does not attempt to impose a personal vision on what she sees and thus eschews encroaching on William's domain as a poet. Dorothy desists from the masculine sphere of poetry, restricting herself to "the proper channel for female artistry," the representation of the physical word through accurate pictures rendered into the textual equivalent – journal writing – of amateur painting (Mitchell 98). In her journal entry of March 18, 1802, Dorothy notes that a particular view "made me more than half a poet." She qualifies her poetic identity as fractional and presents herself as the passive recipient of nature's inspirational impact. As Margaret Homans observes, Dorothy does not possess the "active agency of mind" that constitutes "visions of interfusion." This essential attribute of the Romantic imagination is what prevents Dorothy from being "fully a poet" (Homans, *Poetic Identity* 87-88). Dorothy leaves the poetry to her brother and adheres to what Paul Wotipka identifies as the tradition of female "pictorial representation" (107). Instead of "visions of interfusion," Dorothy's writing strives to present accurate verbal pictures of the scenes she records.

Of course there were women poets during the Romantic period, as cited above. Yet, despite their success as poets, in the nineteenth century poetry was nonetheless viewed as the province of men. Indeed, an anthology of women poets, ranging from the Renaissance to the early Victorian period, compiled by Frederick Rowton in the middle of the nineteenth century was intended to serve a dual purpose. In publishing *The Female Poets of Great Britain*, Rowton's aim was to rectify the fact that "the Poetesses of Britain are either left unnoticed altogether, or mentioned with a flippant carelessness which is even more contemptuous than total silence" in literary histories and to show that the modes of poetry of the two sexes do not rival but rather complement each other: "while Man's intellect is meant to make the world stronger and wiser, Woman's is intended to make it purer and better" ("Preface" xxxvii; "Introductory Chapter" xxxix). Rowton's preface suggests that bestowing recognition on women poets does not detract from the lofty position held by male poets, for their sphere of writing is distinct to their sex. Indeed, the poems produced by women could be safely endorsed so long as they conformed to the expectations of a woman's intellect and did not infringe on the prerogative of man's. In "The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel" Nancy Armstrong observes that in the nineteenth century, the "moral authority" of women writers was based on their "lack of access to economic and political power" which barred them from competition with men (131). It was acceptable for a woman to write, so long as she wrote strictly as a woman, concerning herself only with the issues deemed appropriate to her gender.

The women writers of the period generally complied with the restrictions of gender, writing according to what was deemed appropriate to their sex. Indeed, modern critics remark on the difference in the self-expression of the male and female poets. Thus Stuart Curran observes that the poems by women in the Romantic period are distinguished by a celebration of "quotidian values," which makes them divergent from the works associated with male poets (190). As Rowton's preface makes clear, though,

the form of poetic expression which received literary recognition in the nineteenth century was the masculine one. Women poets were marginalized to the extent that Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Brontë's contemporary who is included in Rowton's collection, claimed that she had searched for literary mothers but, with the exception of Joanna Baillie, could not find any "poetesses" (David 102). Marilyn Williamson explains that women writers who often were very important literary figures in their own time were completely forgotten, and this phenomenon of the nineteenth century is part of a "pattern" of what Germaine Greer calls the "transience of female literary fame" (xxvi-xxvii). Given that historical reality, it is not surprising that Charlotte Brontë's perception was that the great literary tradition of poetry was in the hands of men.

Such a view was reinforced by Southey's famous response to Brontë when she sent him a sample of her poetry. Although he admitted that her writing evidenced talent, he went on to warn her to suppress literary ambition:

The day dreams 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. Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. (Gaskell 172-73).

Brontë appears to have acquiesced to the male voice of literary authority. She labeled this letter "Southey's advice to be kept forever" (Wise and Symington I. 156) and sent a most humble reply, thanking Southey for his consideration and his permission for her to continue writing so long as she does not think of herself as an author and neglect her womanly duties. She attests: "I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my

name in print; if the wish should rise I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it" (Gaskell 176). However, this prediction made in 1837 was belied by Brontë's continued writing and pursuit of publication. Though Brontë apparently assented to Southey's warning that literary accomplishment and home life do not mix, when she wrote to Williams on April 12, 1850 about Southey's biography, she argued to the contrary: "Some people assert that Genius is inconsistent with domestic happiness, and yet Southey was happy at home and made his home happy; he not only loved his wife and children *though* he was a poet, but he loved them the better *because* he was a poet" (Wise and Symington III 98). Brontë's assertion that being a poet does not detract from one's personal and household happiness but actually improves it concurs with the sentiment Shelley expresses in his *Defence of Poetry*: "A Poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men" (506).

Though Shelley speaks of a poet as an accomplished man, the same would apply to a woman writer, as Brontë must have had in mind in her defense of the poet's family life. Ironically, Brontë's defense of Southey subverts his assumption that a woman must fail in her domestic duties if she is to devote herself to poetry. Implicitly, if a man who is a poet is a better husband and father, a woman of Genius would better fulfill her domestic role as well. Indeed, in Gaskell's biography Charlotte Brontë is presented as the exemplar of the combination of Genius and home life. As Charles Kingsley wrote to Gaskell, commending her on her work, "Be sure that the book will do good. It will shame literary people into some stronger belief that a simple, virtuous, practical home life is consistent with high imaginative genius" (Wise and Symington IV. 189). The underlying purpose of Gaskell's biography was the validation of Brontë's pursuit of a literary career in light of the censorious judgment reflected in Southey's letter. She set out to prove that Charlotte Brontë put her duties as a woman first and only in leisure assumed the pen of Currer Bell. Brontë herself, in her response to Southey's letter, took

comfort in his not forbidding her to write altogether so long as she does not neglect her household priorities.

Notwithstanding the submissive posture of her letter to Southey, Brontë did not lose her ambition to see her name – or at least her pseudonym – in print. In fact, she was quite particular about the quality of print. In 1846 when Charlotte submitted her poems along with those of her sisters' to the publishers Aylott and Jones, she desired that the volume would have "the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon's last edition of Wordsworth." When she realized that she had overestimated its size, she suggested that instead of the octavo, "[t]he book may be done up in the style of Moxon's duo-decimo edition of Wordsworth" (Wise and Symington II, 81, 93) Even in the details of the physical materialization of writing, Brontë took a Romantic poet as her touchstone.¹²

Yet, Brontë could not simply extend the tradition of the Romantics whose poetry expresses a male perspective. Although she did not wish to be subject to the restrictions placed upon her sex in the realm of literature, Brontë could only fully express her subjectivity in a female voice. Despite her self-assurance about her artistry and her strong Romantic conviction, translating Romanticism into a female voice was no simple feat, for it required overturning the masculine domination of Romantic poetics. The voice of Romantic poetry is male; the female is relegated to the mute realm of otherness. As Meena Alexander explains, women were silenced by "the Romantic vision of the feminine" (5-6). The restricting effects of Romanticism for women is strikingly portrayed by George Eliot in *Middlemarch*: when the "Shelleyan" Will Ladislaw responds to Dorothea's wistful expression of her inability to compose poetry with the assurance she *is* a poem, his compliment actually freezes her as a work of art, in much the same way as Naumann's portrait of her as Santa Clara does, rather than allowing her the agency of the artist who possesses imaginative capacity (217, 211; ch. 22). Indeed, Dorothea's fate is that of the Romantic heroine, to find fulfillment in her husband's achievements rather than pursuing her own goals. Thus Asia offers guidance for

Prometheus but, as his complement, becomes subordinate to him in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

As objects rather than subjects of poetry, women are subordinated to the masculine center of Romantic texts. Following the line of this tradition, Robert Graves asserted "woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing" (500). When a woman does appear in the poems of the Romantics it is more often as a "sister image or mirror image of the poet" than as an independent entity. The female character serves as the poet's "projection, the imaginative extension of himself" (Tayler and Luria 115). This is strongly marked in Shelley's poetry with its preoccupation with the quest for wholeness with a female complement. In *Alastor*, for example, the poet-protagonist is so immersed in his quest for this elusive female ideal that he completely ignores the Arabian maiden who tends to all his needs. Real women are ignored while the male poet-aspirant pursues the female ideal. The theme is similar in Keats's *Endymion*. Even Blake, an outspoken advocate of sexual freedom, adheres to the traditional division between the sexes. He asserted that "time is a man, space is a woman." Whereas man is allowed the progressive movement inherent in the concept of time, woman is confined in "a static space of passivity" (W. Mitchell 93). Woman, as the Emanation of man, loses her own Will. The "female" in the prophetic poems is correlated with the attributes of "receptivity, passivity, softness"; she is subsidiary to the male who embodies the "sublime power of the true artist" (Battersby 91). On a more concrete level, William Wordsworth projects himself onto his real life sister Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey". Dorothy's function in the poem is to serve as the representation of the poet five years earlier, allowing him to effect a dialogue with his former self. She has been bound to a fixed space and time so that he can reflect on his own advancement. Like other women in Romantic poetry, Dorothy is inscribed as an object; the role of subject is reserved for the male poet.

The link of "Romantic subjectivity with male voice" was so firmly entrenched "that constructing a female 'Romantic hero' demanded a double overturning of Romantic

norms: the displacement of male subjectivity from center to periphery , and the transformation of plot to allow the tropes of Romantic questing a plausible female form" (Lanser 161). In order to achieve this, women, who were effectively debarred from the Romantic quest in the masculinist poetic mode, turned to the medium of the novel through which they came into their own as authors. However, as a more objective mode of writing, the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novel's primary aim was to impart an accurate visual perception, not subjective imagination. It is this accuracy of vision that is devoid of the distorting influence of artistic subjectivity that Charlotte Brontë objects to in her condemnation of Jane Austen's writing as "[a]n accurate, daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face" (Gaskell 337). Brontë found in her reading (or misreading) of Austen that the subject of writing is, in effect photographed, rather than imagined; it is seen only with the bodily eye, not the inward one. The feminine preoccupation with the visual is "manifested in the frequent occurrence of the heroine or female narrator as painter or keen-sighted viewer, a 'seeing' as opposed to a 'speaking' subject" (W. Mitchell 97). The heroine also was a seen object, for her appearance is what brings her to the hero's notice.¹³ Thus sight serves as the impelling force for desire.

In contrast, for Brontë, vision is a subordinate sense, and the power of the voice is key. Her frequent linking of voice with the inspiration of imagination attests to her association of the influence of imagination with voice; her muse did not just appear but spoke to her. Mary Taylor wrote to Mrs. Gaskell what when she visited Brontë at Roe Head, her friend related her experience of imaginative influence: "She told me that one night, sitting alone, about this time, she heard a voice repeat" stanzas of poetry:

Come thou high and holy feeling,
Shine o'er mountain, flit o'er wave,
Gleam like light o'er dome and shieling.

This went on for another "eight or ten lines" that Taylor could no longer remember.

What impressed her more than the poetry itself was Brontë's claim of their composition:

"She insisted that she had not made them, that she had heard a voice repeat them" (qtd. in Ratchford, *Legends of Angria* xxxi). In her Roe Head journal, Brontë refers to the spirit of imagination coming to her even when her surroundings are mundane and uninspiring: "What in all this is there to remind me of the divine, silent, unseen land of thought, dim now and indefinite as the dream of a dream, the shadow of a shade. There is a voice, there is an impulse that wakens up that dormant power which in its torpidity I sometimes think dead" (qtd. in Gerin 103).

Brontë found her creative genius in the internalization of that voice, and it is in terms of voice that she refers to her gift of self-expression. Thus she said of herself, "Though I knew I looked a poor creature, and in many respects actually was so, nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion" (qtd. in Gordon 254). The voice's power is infused by emotion. Consequently, Leslie Rabine finds that in Brontë's "novels erotic feeling emanates from talking" (126). For instance, in *The Professor*, Frances first comes to William's notice when he hears her reading in class and is impressed by her voice and the purity of her accent; thus it is her voice rather than her appearance that attracts him. Brontë recognizes the basis of love as "talking which . . . enables the two people, by remaining different, to construct their intimacy," as opposed to "seeing which suppresses the woman as difference" (Rabine 125). The heroines Brontë creates in her novels are not merely passive female others but speaking subjects who are granted a voice with which they express their own Romanticism. The impact of speech is particularly striking in *Jane Eyre*. Jane effects a change in others' view of her through her speech when she acquires "a new way of talking" (33; ch. 4) and is frank about her feelings. It is true that in *Jane Eyre* and in the other three novels, as well as the juvenilia, Brontë does dwell on visual perceptions, particularly the observation of the protagonists. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of individual identity and emotional connection is based on voice. In giving her heroines the role of speaking subjects, Brontë overcomes the conventional dichotomy between

masculine voice and feminine "pictorial representation" (Wotipka 107). Thus she introduces what Tayler and Luria (115) call the "woman's version of the shift from mirror to lamp" into the novel and founds new ground for the woman writer through the infusion of Romantic intensity into a woman's voice.

Brontë's feminized Romanticism evolves gradually. She commences writing with the assumption maintained by the literary attitude of the early nineteenth century, that only a male voice could articulate a Romantic perspective. Therefore, in her juvenilia she attempts to mimic the style of the male authors, often assuming a male persona to compose her poems or narrative tales. She makes a Romantic hero, Zamorna, the center of her fictional world and her poetic mouthpiece. Although her female characters include some striking personalities, such as Zenobia, they are essentially victims of their passions and forfeit their independent existence for a place as a mere satellite to a powerful man. Yet, in her later juvenilia, Brontë begins to explore the possibility of women with greater strength of character and creates Elizabeth Hastings, a precursor of the staunch heroines of the novels. As she gains confidence in the potential of female characters and allows them to constitute their own story's center, Brontë meets and overcomes the difficulty of a woman writing a Romantic work, the displacement of "the male subject and hence male voice as textual center" and the adaptation of the "tropes" of Romanticism to a woman's experience (Lanser 175). Brontë also gains confidence in her own female voice as a narrator and author.

Despite the fact that she wrote as Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë could not effectively conceal her woman's voice. Though she was much chagrined to find critics pronouncing the production of Currer Bell to be the composition of a female hand, she did not retreat further into the guise of masculinity. On the contrary, with each succeeding work, her female point of view becomes more pronounced. Although a male narrator and hero is maintained for this first novel, the heroine is not as peripheral as she may seem; the story of *The Professor* is equally hers. With *Jane Eyre*, Brontë moves on

to a heroine who is clearly the equal of the questing heroes of male Romantic poetry. *Jane Eyre* features a woman as speaking subject and the center of her own narrative. Moving away from the strong subjective voice of the first-person narrator used most effectively in *Jane Eyre*, in *Shirley* Brontë experiments with a third-person narrator, which allows her to explore a fragmented perspective that highlights irresolution and indeterminacy of meaning. *Shirley* considers the lot of women and to what extent their fates are determined by men. In *Villette* Brontë introduces an unreliable first-person narrator whose deliberately ironic shifts mark a refusal to provide the closure anticipated by a reader. *Villette's* central character presents a heroine whose story does not culminate in union with her beloved but remains independent and alone.

Through her writing, Brontë takes issue both with the masculinist assumption of Romanticism and the limitations of the conventional woman's novel. Brontë's novels demonstrated the possibility of adapting "poetic vision to the exigencies of character and plot," and this revelation resulted in an expansion of the novel genre, so that "by the end of the nineteenth century the novel had assimilated the chief goals and methods of Romantic poetry" (Tayler 16). In her novels, Brontë infused the individualistic spirit of Romanticism into a social context that reflects the reality with which women have to contend. Thus she translated the distinctly male voice at the center of the Romantic poets' texts to female experience, allowing Romanticism to be articulated in a woman's voice. As her own writing developed, Brontë engendered a transformation of the Romantic heroine. Women in Brontë's novels are not the passive mirror image of the male found in Romantic poetry but a female version of the Romantic hero. Ultimately, Brontë's Romanticism and feminism merged in a synthesis that engendered a new range for the novel and a reformulation of Romanticism.

¹See page 363 of *Caroline Vernon* in *Five Novelettes*.

²See, for example, Raimonda Modiano's "Word and 'Languageless' Meanings: Limits of Expression in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*." *Modern Language Quarterly* 38.1 (March 1977): 40-61.

³For another observation on Bronte's departure from the women writers' tradition, namely, her heroine's "revolt against their circumstances . . . in a man-made world," see Allen, p. 183.

⁴Irene Tayler's study postulates a male muse whom she sees embodied in the dominant male characters of Charlotte's opus, ranging from Zamorna to William Crimsworth, St. John Rivers, Louis Moore, and, ultimately, M. Paul. Following the paradigm she sets up, Tayler distinguishes *Villette* as the novel in which Bronte achieves her transcendent ambition of subsuming the male muse into the female artist, though this goal entails relinquishing the domestic affections that her previous heroines opt for.

⁵Moglen's study amplifies an argument made by Winifred Gerin in a 1966 article, "Byron's Influence on the Brontes."

⁶For the definition of irony in this sense, see David Simpson's *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* p. 190.

⁷For an account of the difference of writing style between Austen and Bronte, which was remarked on by the Victorians, see Showalter pp. 102-105.

⁸Jane Austen's placement among the Romantics is a matter of debate. Based on the period of her composition, she should be classed as a Romantic. Yet critics like Walter Allen maintain that she was "untouched by the romantic movement" (*The English Novel* 112). More recent critics dispute the displacement of Austen by pointing to features of her novels that they label Romantic. For example, Nina Auerbach calls Jane Austen "a challenging member of her Romantic culture" (Introduction to *Romantic Imprisonment* xvii). On the other hand, Mary Poovey asserts that Austen "regarded the poetry of her romantic contemporaries with a certain lofty and sardonic mistrust if she regarded it at all" (*Proper Lady* 174). Poovey's view is consistent with Anne K. Mellor's "Why Women Didn't Like Romanticism," which presents Jane Austen and Mary Shelley as representatives of women's negative response to "romanticism's celebration of the creative process and of passionate feeling" (277-78). Similarly, Susan Lanser observes, "Jane Austen might be said to have created a Romantic subject in Anne Elliot, who is *Persuasion's* superior and sensitive, lonely and misunderstood outsider-protagonist," but negates Anne's Romantic status, for "she is not given the utter centrality of personal voice" (161-62). Susan Morgan advances the argument for Austen as a Romantic in her book *In the Meantime*. Yet, Austen is not among the three writers discussed in Meena

Alexander's *Women in Romanticism*. Certainly not everyone is convinced that Austen should be classed with the Romantics even though *The Wordsworth Circle* devoted an entire issue to the case that she should in 1976. One of the essays in that issue, Alison G. Sulloway's "Emma Woodhouse and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*," is cited by McGann for misapplying the term Romantic, for Sulloway assumes that "a subversive idea is equivalent to a Romantic idea" (*Romantic Ideology* 29). McGann's critique is pertinent to others who focus on a detail discernible in some Romantic poetry which they take as the definition of Romanticism and on that basis claim Austen (or just about any author) as a Romantic. Just as Sulloway equates Romanticism with subversion, Auerbach defines it as the "imagination of confinement," (7) and Morgan aligns it with perception. These qualities are indeed present in Romantic poetry, but they are also present in other literary movements that are not Romantic per se.

⁹In her biography of Charlotte Brontë, Lyndall Gordon suggests that *Shirley* advances "the form of the polemical novel which explores the position of women, a mode begun by Mary Wollstonecraft" (189).

¹⁰Lanser offers an interesting interpretation of the function of the "maleness" of *Frankenstein*, suggesting that "because it represents the exaggerated inefficacy of female voice and the exaggerated potency of male voice," it allowed "Shelley to write out male Romanticism and to move on in her next novel [*Mathilda*] to a female-centered narrative" (166).

¹¹Cora Kaplan associates Bertha's mad laughter with "the dark side of Romantic female subjectivity" (*Sea Changes* 173).

¹²Interestingly, the publisher that printed her novels employed William Smith Williams who actually had put out Romantic poetry, for he "had done his apprenticeship with Coleridge's and Keats's publishers, Taylor and Hessey" (Gordon 171).

¹³In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Darcy sizes up Elizabeth from the first, and Jane Austen's heroines who start out plain, like Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, bloom into beauty before they are pursued by suitors.

Chapter 2

Becoming a Brontë Heroine

The rise of a new type of heroine in Charlotte Brontë's writing is key to her advance of her feminist position as well as Romanticism. In developing the female characters that would evolve into the distinctive Brontë heroine, Charlotte Brontë worked through and out of the archetypal literary models. As Brontë shifted from the male center of poetry to the female center of the novel, her heroines displaced the primacy of the male protagonist, appropriating the attributes of the Romantic hero for themselves. In *Becoming a Heroine* Rachel Brownstein explains the alteration of a heroine's role according to the genre in which she is placed:

The paradigmatic heroine of courtly love poetry and aristocratic romance is a creature of art and idea Beautiful and virtuous as real people never are, she is the Ideal incarnate. Therefore, in romance, the Lover seeks her. He represents yearning, aspiring Man. In a novel, a 'realistic' rewriting of romance, a conscious female protagonist takes the quester's place. It is a she who is the representative of searching humanity: and she also continues to represent the obscure and vulnerable beautiful ideal. In the woman-centered novel she represents specifically the ideal of the integral self. What the female protagonist of a traditional novel seeks – what the plot moves her toward – is an achieved, finished identity,

realized in conclusive union with herself-as-heroine.

(Brownstein xxi)

As Brontë's writing progresses, her heroines make the transition from being to defined as art objects to women who seek to define themselves.

In Brontë's early works of poetry, which are always ascribed to the hand of a man, women appear in the traditional poetic mode of aesthetic object. As embodiments of ideals, they virtually become art. The woman constituted as art is literalized when a woman's portrait represents her in "Lines on Seeing the Portrait of ____ [Marian Hume] Painted by De Lisle," one of the many compositions ascribed to the Marquis of Douro. The poem remarks on the "Spotless snow so fair" beauty of the subject of the painting, who is characteristically dressed all in white, and asserts that her external pristine appearance represents her essential goodness. Addressing the painting as the woman it depicts, the speaker asserts that the purity of her appearance is: "Symbol of thy angel-mind / Meek, benevolent, and kind" (ll. 17-20).

The viewer's response to seeing the portrait in Brontë's poem is evocative of the poet's reaction to a woman's beauty in "She was a Phantom of Delight" by William Wordsworth.¹ In Wordsworth's poem the woman is physically present, though the impression left on the poet is not that of a woman but of an ornamental apparition:

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;
(ll. 1-4)

After comparing her beauty to twilight and dawn, he takes another view of her: "I saw her upon nearer view, / A Spirit, yet a Woman too!" (ll. 11-12). Finding that she is

indeed a mortal, "not too bright or good" (l.17) for domestic life, he presents a new picture of her. No longer a mere ornament, she is now:

A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warm, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

(ll.17-20)

Wordsworth accepts the fact that this vision of beauty treads earthly ground, and so she is no longer to be considered a denizen of the heavens but an angel in the house.

Though Brontë adheres to the masculinist tradition by portraying angelic heroines in her early works, she comprehends that such angels lack the substance that women need in order to survive. In "The Bridal," a composition dated August 20, 1832, Marian Hume's appearance is described in ethereal terms; she is called, "infinitely too beautiful for this earth" (Bentley 80). The description turns out to be only too apt, for this paradigm of feminine virtue is fated to die to make way for her husband's new love interest. Her character, as well as the masculinist environment of the world of the juvenilia is revealed by Lord Ellrington's assessment: He tells her, "You are an obedient and praiseworthy girl, and if I had the management of you would soon arrive at the perfection of feminine meekness and humility." Certainly, "meekness and humility" are the outstanding attributes of this insipidly passive character. She has not achieved the consummate state of those qualities, though, for she has a slight spark of spirit which is kindled by her anger at Lord Ellrington's insinuations. However, this spark is so slight that it dies instantaneously. She breaks off, "the half-formed words died away on her lips, and with them the transient flash of spirit likewise vanished" (*The Secret* 52). Therefore, Marian never becomes a speaking subject and remains fixed as a passive heroine of romance.

Even when she adhered to the general formula of the romance, though, Brontë consciously overstepped the conventions of the literary heroine. An instance of her hint of subversion occurs as early as in "The Green Dwarf,"² a narrative with all the elements of a romance, including a dashing hero in love with a beautiful woman, named Lady Emily, who is pursued and imprisoned by a villain who tries to force her to marry him. The lady's situation is typical for a heroine of romance, though Brontë pointedly indicates that her heroine does not perfectly fit that mold: "Her eyes, dark, bright, and full of animation, flashed from under their long lashes and finely penciled brows an arch, laughing, playful light, which though it might not have suited well in a heroine of romance, yet added to her countenance a most fascinating though indescribable charm" (21). In her behavior, too, she does not adhere to strict standards of virtue. When her uncle asks her a direct question whose answer would incriminate her, Lady Emily does not hesitate: "She instantly did what perhaps will not be thought very becoming in the heroine of a novel, viz: coined a little lie" (53). That she is not perfectly virtuous and yields to practical exigencies shows her to be less an ethereal angel than a real flesh and blood character. Her bodily demands become pronounced when, after being deprived of food for three days, she eagerly partakes of the coarse fare of the poacher who happens to discover the castle that imprisons her. The hero does not get to rescue his fair lady, for it is a poacher with no heroic pretensions who releases her (100).

In addition to subverting some of the ideals of romance, "The Green Dwarf" actually shows a man measuring a woman's worth by her mind rather than her charms. When one man asks another, "do you not think Lady Emily the most beautiful of earthly creatures?" his companion acknowledges her physical attractiveness, though, as her tutor, he is concerned less with her aesthetic impact than with her thinking. Thus he continues, "but for her mind, I fear it is a waste, uncultivated field, which, where it is not wholly barren, presents a rank crop of the weeds of frivolity." Yet he stops short of making a feminist argument for female education. He concedes that her learning should not be too

scholarly; rather it would consist in studying "abridged treatises" that had been "carefully digested by some able and judicious *men*" [emphasis added] (15-16). Learning, after all, is still to be in the hands of men who would monitor what pieces of knowledge may be imparted to feebler female minds.

The female character who pursues learning beyond predigested treatises is Lady Zenobia Ellrington. "She was the most learned and noted woman in Glass Town" whose "conversational talent" rivals that of "Madame de Stael herself" ("Albion and Marina" 74). Her greatest distinction is not her beauty but her intellectual attainment, though her value is still assessed in terms of being "an ornament."³ In "Albion and Marina" Zenobia is introduced as Lady Zelzia Ellrington, a more mature and sophisticated woman than Marian Hume who is in her teens. Zenobia is "about twenty-five or twenty-six years of age." Her appearance is more regal than delicate; she is tall, with a "dark glowing complexion" and "jetty black" eyes and hair. Though "Albion and Marina" does not indicate that Zenobia actively pursued the Marquis of Douro, the Preface insinuates otherwise. The narrator of this story, Lord Charles, admits to falsifying some of the facts in his thinly veiled account of his brother's love affairs and suggests that the character of Zenobia is less worthy than his portrait of her:

She is not nearly so handsome as I have represented her, and she strove far more vigorously to oust some one from another person's good graces than I say. But her endeavors failed. Albion has hitherto stood firm. What he will do I cannot pretend to even guess; but I think that Marina's incomparable superiority will prevail over her Frenchified rival, who, as all the world knows, is a . . . blue-stocking, charioteer, and beldam united in one . . . ("Albion and Marina" 67)

For all of her sophistication, Lady Zenobia proves to be a woman out of control and a type of anti-heroine, the threateningly dangerous rival of the angelic Marian Hume. As one of the slaves to a passion of Zamorna, Zenobia abases herself, "bowing her forehead to the ground in attitude of adoration, she kissed his feet," and later begs of him, "Oh! do not kill me with such cold, cruel disdain" ("The Bridal " 84, 86). Despite the fact that the Marquis of Douro is affianced to Marian Hume, Zenobia desperately follows him on foot for five hundred miles until she appears before him as a "ghastly apparition": "Her head was bare, her tall person was enveloped in the tattered remains of a dark velvet mantle. Her disheveled hair hung in wild elf-locks over her face neck, and shoulders, almost concealing her features, which were emaciated and pale as death." She rants about her rival, Marian., "Viper! viper! Oh that I could sheathe this weapon in her heart!" ("The Bridal" 83-84). Instead of violence, she resorts to trickery, invoking the magical powers of the evil Genius Danhasch for an elaborate ruse to convince Douro that his union with Marian Hume would result in both of their deaths. Through the intervention of "some friendly spirit," the illusion is shattered, and the marquis is saved from binding himself by an oath to not marry his beloved Marian ("The Bridal" 87).

Forced to give up on Zamorna, Zenobia marries his arch rival Alexander Percy. Though Tayler (122) claims that this marriage results in Zenobia's becoming "more rebellious, more combative," the depiction of her as Percy's wife shows a far more submissive woman than the portrait of the unmarried Lady Zenobia Ellrington. Though she still pursues her intellectual studies -- she deciphers a Persian poem in the original language in *The Secret* -- she humbly swallows her husband's commands. She dares not cross him, and she suffers all of his love affairs which he makes no attempt to conceal from her. Among his children are numbered illegitimate offspring. For instance, in "Caroline Vernon," the title character is his acknowledged daughter from his mistress, Louisa Vernon.

Caroline Vernon offers an example of another woman who willingly falls victim to Zamorna's charms. As her author observes, "in a mind like Miss Vernon's, Conscience was feeble opposed to passion." Without any moral misgivings, though Zamorna is married to her half-sister Mary, Caroline agrees to accompany her former guardian to what he calls "a little retreat" entitled "Scar House" (*Five Novelettes* 354, 353). As Tayler points out, the "significance" of the house's name is unmistakable, for in the piece entitled "Captain Henry Hastings," Scar House is mentioned as the place that served as "the 'retreat,'" of Rosamund Wellesly (149). Rosamund also started out as Zamorna's ward and became his mistress, the shame of which, the narrative suggests, ultimately led her to take her own life.

For Mina Laury, on the other hand, the love of Zamorna is well worth the loss of a place in society. Putting her passion for Zamorna before life and honor, Mina Laury remains constant to him. She is described as: "Strong-minded beyond her sex -- active, energetic & accomplished in all other points of view -- here she was as weak as a child -- she lost her identity -- her very way of life was swallowed up in that of another" (*Five Novelettes* 165). Mina even rejects Lord Hartford's offer of marriage to remain the faithful mistress of Zamorna. In the character of Mina Laury, Brontë presents passionate devotion taken to an extreme that obliterates the self. For the sake of the few minutes in the year that he bestows on her, she willingly lives in the retirement required by a woman whose reputation cuts her off from society. Enthralled by her passion, Mina's utter devotion to Zamorna, in effect, renders her a slave, as she is at times described in relation to the man she refers to as her "master."

Though Zamorna's wife appears as desperately obsessed with him, in "Passing Events" written in 1836, the character of Mary Percy develops new depth. Longing for her husband, who has left her, as a means of revenge on her father, she realizes her existence as a pawn:

What am I? I am not an atom in the scale of existence . . .
 If Northangerland [her father] & Zamorna make me the
 link between them, must not I who have a separate
 existence, urge my separate claims, and still try to work for
 myself an even path in this vale of tears through which we
 are all traveling?

Instead of reverting to the "self-abandonment" that the women of Angria typically experience, Mary begins to question her identity independent of a relationship to a man. Though, she is ultimately left to die when Zamorna resolves to abandon her to that end, the resolution she exhibits offers a glimmer of what Brontë holds in store for her heroines, "point[ing] the way beyond Angrian romance" (K. Chase 23-24).

The Angrian woman who refuses to be enslaved by her passion is the independent-minded Elizabeth Hastings who offers a marked contrast to the women infatuated with Zamorna. The contrast is heightened by Brontë's linking of Elizabeth with Mina Laury through William Percy. He admits his admiration for Zamorna's mistress and that he considers her the ideal of beauty and sensitivity, though it is the plain and reserved Elizabeth whom he approaches. Thus he signals a shift in the appreciation of a lover, opting for a woman whose appeal lies not in her beauty but in the depth of her mind. Unlike Mina, Elizabeth is strong enough to reject the proposition of William Percy that she become his mistress, despite her admission that she loves him

Elizabeth Hastings offers a new development in Brontë's characterization.⁴
 "Unlike the typical early heroines who are chiefly the products of fairy tale and fiction, Elizabeth is almost wholly a creature of experience" (Alexander, *Early Writings* 216).
 As Winnifrith Gerin notes, the distinguishing characteristics of Elizabeth Hastings match those of Charlotte Brontë herself. Like the author, Elizabeth comes from "a rough, wild country" filled with "moors & mountains" which she prefers to the charms of a

cosmopolitan city. She also shares Brontë's "excitable imagination" (*Five Novelettes* 210-11, 244). Like Brontë, Elizabeth paces inside as she dreams of what she longs for and enjoys long walks outside that give her the freedom of contemplation. The likeness of personality between the author and her character is further revealed at a moment of crisis. At that point William Percy observes, "here was a being made up of intense emotions -- in her ordinary course of life always smothered under the diffidence of prudence & a skillful address, but now when her affections were about to suffer almost a death-stab -- when incidents of strange excitement were transpiring around her -- on the point of bursting forth like lava -- still she struggled to keep wrapt about her the veil of reserve & propriety" (*Five Novelettes* 220). Her passionate nature is what impels her to be "always burning for warmer, closer attachments" with an equal in intellect and emotional capacity (*Five Novelettes* 243-44).

Elizabeth Hastings exemplifies the Brontë heroine. Though she sustains a cool exterior, she burns within with the fire of passion and imagination which threatens to burst through the surface calm. She disciplines herself to follow reason, the quality a woman needs in order to survive, as Brontë realized. The women seduced by Zamorna give all for love, including their lives, but Elizabeth lives on, maintaining her freedom and independence. Yet, she retains the essential attribute of a Brontë heroine, her capacity for feeling. Brontë held no admiration for characters devoid of feeling who coldly follow the dictates of reason. She clarifies her position in the novels. In *The Professor*, Brontë indicates her sentiments through Frances, who asserts, "Better to be without logic than without feeling" (264; ch.24). This view is echoed in *Jane Eyre*. Pronouncing her judgment on the Reed sisters and the extremes of the vacuous Georgiana and the austere Eliza, Jane declares, "Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition" (224; ch. 22). Those two extremes typify the characters of anti-heroines that appear throughout Brontë's writings.

Brontë's novels illustrate what Karen Chase calls "*Bildung* by negative examples" (78). The anti-heroines against whom the Brontë heroines define themselves present either complete surrender to feeling or the opposite extreme, calculating judgment bereft of sympathy. The extreme of passion is embodied in characters like Zenobia, whose hint of madness anticipates the raving Bertha of *Jane Eyre*. There are also women engulfed by the passion of their art, such as Lucia in *The Professor* and Vashti in *Villette*. Yet, with all her emphasis on self-imposed constraint, Brontë's heroines are at heart Romantics, and they are markedly distinguished from the women who are derisively portrayed as lacking feeling and imagination. As the conniving Zoraide Reuter and the suave Madame Beck prove, the self-possessed anti-heroines pose the greatest threat to the Brontë heroines.

William's Crimsworth account of Zoraide Reuter is telling of her character. He recalls a point when "her blue eye glittered upon me -- it did not flash -- nothing of flame ever kindled in its temperate gleam" (*The Professor* 183; ch. 18). Though his wife also becomes a successful school "directress" and professionally polished, Frances's Romantic spirit does flash into her eye. The other contrasting pair of heroine and anti-heroine professionals appears in *Villette*. Though Lucy appears to be a model of calmness, she betrays more anxiety for Madame Beck's daughter's injury than the mother, who steadily holds the girl's hurt arm. "Mine would have been feigned stoicism, forced fortitude. Her [Madame Beck's] was neither forced nor feigned," she explains (87; ch. 10). Lucy's intense agitation in waiting for Paul loosens her usual restraint. For once Lucy is candid with Madame Beck, and she castigates her for the harm she does, "Oh, madame! In *your* hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze." Behind Madame Beck's suave facade is revealed "a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble" (419-20; ch.38).

Another portrait of this type of anti-heroine appears in the novel Brontë began after *Villette* but never completed. In this fragment of a novel called *Emma*, Brontë

indicates the character's personality in her physical description. Though she has an attractive appearance, it belies a cold, narrow personality:

Many people would think Miss Wilcox . . . a very agreeable woman. She has regular features; the nose is a little sharp, the lips a little thin, good complexion, light red hair. She is very business-like, very practical; she never in her life knew a refinement of feeling or of thought; she is entirely limited, respectable, and self-satisfied. She has a cool, prominent eye; sharp and shallow pupil, unshrinking and inexpressive; pale irid; light eyelashes, light brow. Miss Wilcox is a very proper and decorous person; but she could not be delicate or modest, because she is naturally destitute of sensitiveness. Her voice, when she speaks, has no vibration; her face no expression; her manner no emotion. ("Emma" 375)

Brontë's choice of adjectives highlight the narrowness and shallowness of Miss Wilcox, which are revealed on her countenance. The lack of emotion in her manner attests to the lack of her capacity for feeling.

Such shallowness is decried by Jane Eyre who recognizes the innate superiority of her original mind over the superficial Blanche Ingram:

Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. . . . She was very showy, but she was not genuine; she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments, but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature; nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no

unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment, but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. (174; ch. 18):

Affectations belie a character who is essentially empty. Blanche's physical attractions are a hollow shell, for there is nothing of truth and feeling within her. From Brontë's Romantic perspective, that lack of essential genuineness negates Blanche Ingram's value as a person.

The contrast between the Brontë heroines, animated by their Romantic spirit, and the insipid women who, having no genuine selves, behave according to rule is underscored in an episode of *Shirley*. After Shirley exhibits her passionate spirit in singing, the women who have no comprehension of such feelings find fault for what they see as her impropriety:

The Misses Sympson and Misses Nunnlely looked upon her, as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis, or any other strange fowl. What made her sing so? *They* never sang so. Was it *proper* to sing with such expression, with such originality -- so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not: it was strange; it was unusual. What was *strange* must be *wrong*; what was *unusual* must be *improper*. Shirley was judged. (508; ch. 31)

Brontë satirizes this utter adherence to propriety which restrains passion and prohibits originality. Seeing propriety as the hallmark of women's writing, as epitomized by Jane Austen, Brontë rejected the model presented to her.

Reading Austen's *Emma* confirmed the opinion Brontë had already formed of the novelist that Lewes urged her to imitate. Brontë explained what she saw as the limits of Jane Austen's writing:

I have . . . read [Austen's *Emma*] with interest and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable -- anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as *outré* and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well; there is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting: she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood; even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; . . . but what throbs fast and fully, though hidden, what the blood rushes

through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death – *this* Miss Austen ignores, she no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete, and rather insensible (*not senseless*) woman; if this is heresy – I cannot help it. (qtd. in Fraser 363-64)

In Brontë's view Austen typified the photographic quality of women's novels. Surfaces are accurately delineated, but the throb of intense feeling does not come through. Austen, she found, was thoroughly ladylike and therefore could not convey the sensation of a woman's passion.

As a Romantic, Brontë regarded the feeling of love as the principal experience of humanity. Nevertheless, she realized that, for some women, a love relationship would never be an option. Certain that she was fated to be an old maid herself, Brontë was concerned about the adverse condition of the unmarried woman in nineteenth-century England. The heroine of *The Professor* is grateful that she is spared the plight of the old maid. Frances, secure in her position as Mrs. Crimsworth, avows, "An old maid's life must doubtless be void and vapid – her heart strained and empty. Had I been an old maid I should have spent existence in effort to fill the void and the aching. I should have probably failed, and died weary and disappointed, despised and of no account, like other single women" (279; ch.25). She may pity them, but Frances, who does not face the problem for herself, offers no remedy for the plight of the old maid.

"Old Maids" is the title of one of the chapters of *Shirley*, in which the reader is presented with portraits of women who represent that despised group. Caroline

subsequently reflects on the situation of these women and comes to question the justification of their lives being of no account simply because they never married:

God surely did not create us, and cause us to live, with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe, in my heart, we were intended to prize life and enjoy it, so long as we retain it. Existence never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me, among the rest.

Her discontent turns her to feminist thought. Contending that men expect women to stay at home, sewing and cooking, "contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else," she argues that if forced to live in such a situation themselves, "their weariness [would] ferment in time to frenzy" (376-78; ch.22). Despite her questioning, though, Caroline, like Frances, is safely married by the end of the book and so does not arrive at an answer for the plight of the single woman.

It is only in *Villette* that Brontë dared to present a heroine who is, after all is said and done, an old maid. Though her life may be lonely, Lucy Snowe does not lead a meaningless, empty existence. She is disappointed in love but does not give up on her own progression. She forges an independent life for herself, achieving professional success and financial security. Left bereft of her lover, she does not remain in the state of stagnation that Miss Marchmont submitted to; rather she proves that a woman can continue living for herself. She lives solitary, an emblem of Romantic isolation as an outsider with artistic consciousness.

As Charlotte Brontë's own voice comes through in her novels, her heroines reveal themselves through their writings. Frances distinguishes herself in the eyes of her professor by presenting compositions that convey her mind's capacity. Her capacity for

feeling is divulged by her poem in which the speaker's devotion to her master indicates Frances's love for William. Jane Eyre's writing actually establishes her identity. She scribbles her name on a piece of scrap paper which St. John finds, and as a result, she comes into her family and fortune. Shirley's schoolroom composition, like Frances's, reveals her identification with the character she creates. Like Eva, Shirley longs for a mate, whom she finds in Louis who actually has memorized her composition because it serves as a reflection of his beloved's character. Lucy Snowe, on the other hand, does not yield to the self-revelation of writing. Though she drafts passionate letters that reveal her feelings for Graham, she tears them up and sends suitable cool missives instead. However, though suppressed, and ultimately torn up, the expression of her feelings in writing attests to their intensity and Lucy's poetic capacity.

In *Shirley* Rose Yorke speaks out about a woman's putting her talent to use:

And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen-press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all . . . will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder. (385; ch. 23).

Rose's words reflect Brontë's own view on talent and the profit to be derived from it, specifically her own creative gift. In a letter to W.S. Williams, she declared, "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" (Gaskell 383).

Brontë infused her own imaginativeness into her heroines who display artistic talent, and, like their author, are aware of their distinctive abilities. In *The Professor*, when William compliments Frances's composition for its "taste and fancy," the look on her face expresses, "What you tell me in terms so qualified, I have known fully from a child" (165; ch. 16). Brontë also presents "the woman as artist" in her other novels. Jane Eyre writes her own story and produces paintings that reflect her Romantic spirit. Shirley creates myths of "female power" and shares Caroline's poetic sensibility (Boumelha 9). Lucy Snowe presents her own story, and within her narrative composes a creative work, constructing an original sketch on "Human Justice" when her literary abilities are put to the test (377-78; ch. 35). It is significant that these "inner texts are clearly wrought by female minds and female hands; no 'Currer Bell' takes credit for producing them" (Lonoff 404). Though Brontë adopted a male mask for her authorial representation, the substance of her novels validates the artistry of women.

¹Fannie Ratchford goes so far as to say that Wordsworth poem "suggested" Bronte's.

²Bronte subtitled "The Green Dwarf" "A Tale in the Perfect Tense" because, though it was written September 2nd 1833 and attributed to Lord Charles Wellesly, the story is actually told by Captain Bud, an older character who relates the events that occurred when he was a young man, when the Marquis of Douro was yet an infant.

³In "The Bridal" she is said to return to "that dazzling circle of which she was ever a distinguished ornament" (84).

⁴Though Elizabeth Hastings is the first of this type to appear in the juvenilia that has been published, her character echoes a previously created one. Bronte wrote about a governess named Miss West in composition that is in the Bonnell manuscript collection in the Bronte Parsonage Museum, Haworth, England. This manuscript is cited by Irene Tayler in *Holy Ghosts*.

Chapter 3

Brontë's Juvenilia: Patterns of Poetry and Prose

The body of work composed of poetry and prose commonly referred to as Charlotte Brontë's juvenilia was not all written in her childhood but over a period of thirteen years, beginning when Brontë was a child of ten in 1826 until she was a woman of twenty-three in 1839, though she continued to write poems through the mid-1840's. The importance of this work lies in its revelations of the Romantic themes that occupied Brontë, as well as the process of the author's progression, allowing women greater prominence and strength of character in later compositions than in the earlier ones. Karen Chase regards Brontë's juvenilia as "an *ur*-text in the sense that it stands on the margin between pre-literary and literary composition -- a body of imaginative labor which has not yet surrendered to the constraints of tradition or convention, but which remains *in process*, revising its bearings as it proceeds," as the author "make[s] choices about genre, mode, and character" (8). Brontë commences writing with a masculinist center, which is embodied in the Byronic character of Zamorna, surrounded by women who define themselves only in relation to him. However, as she comes to shift her allegiance from the male who holds power to the female who had been rendered utterly passive, Brontë introduces greater complexity and depth into their characters. The result of the developments of her juvenilia is the conception of the unique Brontë heroine that would form the center of the feminized Romantic novels she would write.

In "The History of the Year," dated March 12, 1829, the young Charlotte Brontë gives her account of the origin of the juvenilia, which dates back to June 1826 with the play *Young Men*. It all began when her father bought a set of twelve wooden soldiers for her brother Branwell which he showed to his sisters. As Charlotte recalls:

I snatched up one and exclaimed, "This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke!" When I said this Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came down she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him "Gravey." Anne's was a queer little thing, much like herself, and we called him "Waiting-boy." Branwell chose his and called him "Buonaparte." (Bentley 47-48)

This account is in itself telling, for Charlotte appears to take the most active role in creating this world that centers around the toy soldiers. She is the first one to take hold of a figure that she asserts is superior to the others and declares it to be her own personal hero, the Duke of Wellington. Though her sisters also choose soldiers for themselves, their selection is apparently only in imitation of hers. What is more striking is that Charlotte's account does not allow her sisters to individually name their chosen soldiers, saying "we named him." Only Branwell, apparently, names his own, as Charlotte does, and also chooses a nonfictionalized character, significantly, the rival of his sister's hero, as his namesake. This initial division sets the tone for Charlotte's and Branwell's continued collaboration in the development of the dramatically excessive Angrian saga that split off from the more subdued Gondal world that Emily and Anne created. Writing as her brother's equal and in control of a most powerful man, Charlotte takes her place as an author in a decidedly male realm. The world she created in her juvenilia centers around a primary autocratic male figures. In fact, female characters are noticeably absent from the very early works which revolve around the "Young Men" for whom the original composition is named. Even in the narrative that moves out of the

realm of the "Young Men," entitled, "The Search After Happiness [sic]," there are no female characters.

In "A Romantic Tale," (the adjective here refers to its fantastic elements rather than its affiliation with the literary movement of Romanticism) written April 15, 1829, Brontë sets up the establishment of her fictional realm, which commences as original twelve men from England. Though the narrator is not named, he (for so the gender must be) is one of the men on board the ship. When the crew, who become shipwrecked on an African land, are denied shelter by the inhabitants, they engage in battle. The Englishmen defeat the black natives and conquer the land for themselves. Recognizing the extraordinary success they have in conquering and building the marvelous city they call Glasstown as the result of supernatural agency, they conclude that the all-powerful Genii are on their side. Their conclusion proves warranted by the revelation of a Genius who helps them accomplish their desire to get more Englishmen on their conquered territory. In the revelation of the Genius, Brontë re-enacts the children's lighting on the toy soldiers in terms of her fiction:

The Genius led us into a hall of sapphire in which were thrones of gold. On the thrones sat the Princes of the Genii. . . . As soon as their chiefs saw us they sprang up from their thrones, and one of them seizing A.W. and exclaimed: "This is the Duke of Wellington!" (Bentley 55)

As this event is said to take place in the year 1793, the Genius's declaration that Arthur Wellesley is the Duke of Wellington is prophetic. Writing after that historical event, Brontë's prediction is not so remarkable as is her transformation of her own experience. Like Wordsworth, who recasts his experiences in accounts of poetic visions, Brontë

imposes an imaginative perspective on her own moment of discovery, contextualizing it into the fictional world she creates.

Though the Genius has the power to manipulate events in the world it creates, Brontë tended to avoid stepping into the action of her characters, allowing them to willfully act on their passions for good or, more often, for evil. For that reason, she often referred to her Angrian creation as an "infernal world." In the amoral world of Angria, Brontë gave her creations free reign, delighting in describing actions which her moral sense would have compelled her to censure. In this respect, she evokes Keats's concept of the chameleon poet:

[I]t is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. what shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. a Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulses are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. (Rollins I, 386-87)

In her juvenilia Brontë breathed life into poetical men and women, the creatures of impulse with the passionate figures of Zamorna and his numerous mistresses and indulged in depicting their shocking exploits.

The world of Angria is one of unbridled desire for both sexes. The essential difference between them is the power of agency. "Men take, while women must wait to

be given" (K. Chase 16). Men are able to act on their desires, to choose their wives or mistresses; the women must wait for men to notice them. Thus Mina Laury lives for the few minutes of attention that her lord bestows on her in a year and gladly sacrifices all for his sake. Living only for the men they love, the Angrian women lose their independent individuality. In much the same manner as female characters figure in Romantic poetry, the women in Brontë's juvenilia essentially embody qualities, such as vernal purity in Marian Hume, which locks them into a form of stasis. Though they are allowed to be intellectual, as Zenobia Ellrington is, women in Angria are considered inconsequential. The devaluation of women is revealed in an episode of "My Angria and the Angrians," written in 1834. In it Lord Charles relates the reception of the birth of the children of his brother, who is now the King of Angria. One man in the crowd tells him: "Ten salutes will be fired if it's a boy you know and only five if it be a girl -- if do I say? There's no if about the matter -- it must be a boy" (Bentley 127). As it turns out, in fact, the Angrians get two boys, for twins are born to the queen. What is more important, though, is the man's assurance that "it must be a boy" and that a girl would warrant "only five" salutes, a statement that is very telling of the perception of the inferior worth of a female. Therefore, Christine Alexander observes, "Charlotte automatically identifies in her saga with the power and privilege of the male world which allowed her independence of expression" (*Early Writings* 227). For Brontë, taking on the role of author entailed taking on the guise of the gender which wielded power. Although she did not always sign a man's name, she would often obscure her feminine identity by abbreviating her signature to "C. Brontë" or even "C.B." on the manuscripts of her juvenilia. Even though the Angrian writings were not intended for publication, Brontë consciously chose not to ascribe them to a woman's hand.

However, as Brontë's writing evolves, the very powerlessness of the women's situation is what makes them gather strength. As Karen Chase explains, the heroines of the juvenilia after "ceaseless victimage" become "obliged to develop habits -- self-denial,

self-restraint, self-division" in order to survive. Though "the controlling principle remains the assertion of heroic will," the domination of Zamorna, there are hints of shift in the paradigm that would allow for more female independence (49). Indeed, the story of Elizabeth Hastings who resists the temptation to become the mistress of the man she loves and successfully earns her own way offers an alternative path from the numerous women who willingly sacrificed their honor and even gave up their lives for when they fell prey to Zamorna's charms. It is appropriate that Elizabeth's moment of ascendancy occurs in the graveyard over the stone inscribed "Resurgam" that marks the place of burial of Rosamund Wellesly. The rising alluded to by the gravestone applies to the female victory of Elizabeth who chooses to live for herself rather than be swallowed up by her passion. Rosamund had submitted to the seduction of Zamorna, who was her guardian, and her death was her only escape from the shame and dishonor she had brought upon herself. Elizabeth refuses to commit the same mistake and leaves her would-be lover behind "where always before the women had been left, in the churchyard among graves" (Tayler 145).

The contrast between Zamorna's dead mistress and Elizabeth Hastings, who refuses to give up her life and independence for a lover, encapsulates the evolution of Brontë's heroines. As Karen Chase explains, "The *donee* from which the young Brontë begins, and against which the mature Brontë will set herself, is male strength and female weakness," as typified by the "early celebration of the love between Zamorna and Marian: an infinitely powerful man loves a perfectly submissive woman." Despite the fact that the two are, in fact, lawfully married, the potential danger of this situation is realized when the "powerful lover annihilates the woman," as Marian is destroyed when Zamorna loses interest in his wife and pursues Mary Percy (K. Chase 21). Mary, in her turn, dies according to her husband's plan for revenge on her father; Zamorna denies his wife access to him, causing her to die of longing for him. Only women who do not give in to their desires escape such self-annihilation, as Elizabeth Hastings does.

In her writing Brontë conveys an awareness of carrying on the poetic tradition. Indeed, the many poems that Brontë composed in her juvenilia, though usually attributed to a fictional character, express her engrossment with her role as a writer, joined in the literary tradition with the male poets she read and admired. The poems are usually attributed to Arthur Augustus Adrian Wellsley who becomes the Marquis of Douro and then the Duke of Zamorna, the name by which he is usually called, even though, he gains a crown as King of Angria. In "Characters of the Celebrated Men of the Present Time," written in December 1829 and ascribed to Captain Tree, Brontë offers a description of the twenty-two-year-old Marquis of Douro:

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. The Meditations of a lonely traveler in the wilderness or the mournful song of a solitary exile are the themes in which he most delights and which he chiefly indulges in, though often his songs consist of grand and vivid descriptions of storms and tempests -- of the wild roaring of the ocean mingling with the tremendous voice of thunder when the flashing lightning gleams in unison with the bright lamp of some wicked spirit striding over the face of the troubled waters, or sending forth his cry from the bosom of a black and terrible cloud (Bentley 61).

He embodies the sublime quality of poetry, though as his character evolves, he comes to resemble the Satanic villain who becomes his father-in-law, Alexander Percy. Brontë presents a foil to the marquis in the person of his brother, Lord Charles Albert Florian

Wellesly, the narrator who usually recounts his brother's exploits. In later works, he is called Charles Townshend. "He is still Zamorna's brother and therefore granted access to the royal palace"; nevertheless, he claims the freedom of a stranger due to a change in his appearance. Though he is less motivated by "vindictiveness" in his narratives as Charles Townshend, his tone retains its "ironic" peculiarity (Alexander, *Early Writings* 149).

At nineteen, Lord Charles is presented a writer, like his brother, though one of lighter taste:

His imagination is exceedingly vivid, as the graphic delineation of nature and character is. Some of his tales prove his genius and mind are naturally high and bright. His songs are exquisitely beautiful and mostly consist of light and airy visions of the supernatural objects, of wild though gentle reveries of the world of immortals; but his spirits are generally the mild and fair beings which haunt the pleasant green wood or the crystal spring, which drink the fragrant dew of Heaven from the lily's white blossom or the cowslip golden cup. . . (Bentley 62)

To sum up the essential difference between the two brothers, Brontë likens them to two different instruments. The elder brother's high Romanticism is compared to "the soft reverberations of an Eolian harp which, as its notes alternately die and swell, raise the soul to a pitch of wild sublimity or lead it to mournful and solemn thought." In contrast, the younger brother's compositions of fancy "resemble the glad sweet music of the dulcimer" (Bentley 62). Charles's character, like his brother's, changes, and the difference in their compositions becomes more marked as the former turns to prose, though, as a self-conscious narrator, he leaves the impression of Romantic irony on his narratives.

Lord Charles openly admits his manipulation of the narratives he writes. In the tale "Albion and Marina," written in October 1830, he presents a tragic ending for the love of the young couple meant to represent his brother and Marian Hume. When Albion attempts to return to his beloved, he is taken to her grave. Yet, this conclusion is undercut by the narrator's admission in the preface that though it has some basis in "fact," the tale is fictionalized; Lord Charles's motivation in writing was to avenge "the injuries that have lately been done me." He concedes that "[t]he conclusion is wholly destitute of any foundation in truth, and I did it out of revenge. Albion and Marina are both alive and well, for aught I know" ("Albion and Marina" 67). Conceding that he has altered the account because of his ulterior motives, he destabilizes the integrity of the narrative.

Another instance of Lord Charles's irony occurs in *The Spell*, written in 1834, with the intent, the narrator says, of proving Zamorna to be mad. The story reveals the existence of an identical twin brother to Zamorna, evoking the Romantic fascination with dark doubles. The twin's intermittent appearances explain the apparent inconsistency of Zamorna's behavior. However, after concluding his account, Lord Charles adds the following:

N.B. I think I have redeemed my pledge. I think I have proved the Duke of Zamorna to be partially insane by a circuitous and ambiguous road certainly, but still by one in which no traveler can be lost. Reader, if there is no Valdacella there out to be one. If the your King of Angria has no *alter-ego* he ought to have such a convenient representative, for no single man, having one corporeal and one spiritual nature if these were rightly compounded without any mixture of pestilential ingredients, should, in

right reason and in the ordinance of common sense and decency, speak and act in that capricious, double-dealing, unfathomable, incomprehensible, torturing, sphinx-like manner which he constantly assumes for reasons known only to himself.

Charles Wellsley continues by foreshadowing Zamorna's loss of his monarchy and an early death succeeding his frenzy of madness (144-46). That these predictions do not prove true is not so surprising, given the narrator's own undermining of his credibility.

Despite the fact that the juvenilia was never intended for the eyes of readers outside the Brontë circle, such narrative intrusions, in the form of "apostrophes to the reader," appear throughout, attesting to Brontë's "self-conscious[ness as an] author" (Alexander, *Early Writings* 23). It is in such addresses to the reader that she reveals her thoughts on the act of composition. For example, in *Passing Events*, the narrator, Charles Townshend, breaks into the narrative:

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 shade of some flower or bird or gem, I could picture before you. I feel I could. (*Five Novelettes* 38-39)

Without the forms, the narrator cannot compose, that is unify the prism into a coherent light. In Coleridgean terms, he lacks the capacity of the secondary imagination which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify" (*Biographia Literaria* 313; ch. 13).

Brontë reveals more of her Romantic connections in her poetry. Poems such as the one entitled "Pleasure" reflect her Romantic affinity for the Wordsworthian "wise passiveness" that is fostered by contemplating nature:

True pleasure breathes not city air,
 Nor in Arts temples dwells,
 In palaces and towers where
 The voice of Grandeur dwells.

No! Seek it where high Nature holds
 Her court 'mid stately grove,
 Where she her majesty unfolds,
 And in fresh beauty moves;
 (1-8)

.....

Then a calm, solemn pleasure steals
 Into your inmost mind;
 A quiet . . . your spirit feels,
 A softened stillness kind.
 (41-44)

The pleasures afforded in the freshness and majesty of nature, which ennoble the mind, are far more appealing than those of artifice and cultivation. Significantly, nature is distinctly female, offering an alternative court to the formal one of palaces dominated by males. The female space of nature and its ramifications for a gendered identity is something that Brontë would further explore in her novels. The heroines favor walks in

the outdoors but cannot surrender themselves to a complete identification with the female otherness of nature.

On the poem entitled "Vesper," Fannie Ratchford notes that it "echoes faintly of Keats, and more of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence,'" though she does not detail the points of similarity between the Romantic poems and Brontë's (*Web* 47). However, other than the general similitude of idyllic descriptions of nature and the suggestion of epiphany, which is far more pointed in Wordsworth's poem than it is in Brontë's, there is no significant correspondence between the two works.¹ On the other hand, the Keatsian echoes are notable. Brontë's "Vesper" functions as a prelude to a poem which is never realized. The poet-speaker questions, "What shall I sing?" He looks to the moon and wind for inspiration but decides that the sounds of nature surpass any he could produce:

I need not sing, the armies of the skies
 Night's empress and the dryad wood-nymphs fair
 Would rather list the tones that now arise
 And fill with harmony the twilight air;
 Sweet sounds for all the winds beneath the stars to bear.

Then I will sit and listen: not a voice
 Disturbs the unbroken silence of this hour;
 No nestling bird, with faintly rustling noise,
 Raises the leaflets of the vernal bower,
 Or bends the spray where blooms the fruit-betokening flower.

Even the choirster of night is still!
 Sweet Philomel restrains her 'customed song;
 Hushed are the murmurs of the unseen rill

Creeping through matted grass and weeds along'
 Silent I too will be, these silent shades among!

(ll. 26-40)

In "Vesper" Brontë celebrates the harmony inherent in silence; it is this harmony the poet in effect sings by choosing to remain quiet in its midst rather than compose words that would disturb it. The paradox of a silent song is evoked in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

(ll. 11-14)

The pipes depicted in the design on the urn play only to ear of imagination. It is that imaginative sensation, which intensifies the pleasure of musing on unheard melodies, that makes the song of silence preferable to the ordinary sweetness of hearing music through the physical sense of the ear.

Brontë's sense of her place among the poets is most patently revealed in "The Violet". In this poem which registers the relocation of the muses from Greece to England, the speaker addresses the eminent poets:

Hail! army of Immortals, hail!
 Oh, might I 'neath your banners march!
 Though faint my lustre, faint and pale, -
 Scarce seen amid the glorious arch, -
 Yet joy, deep joy, would fill my heart:
 Nature, unveil thy awful face!
 To me a poet's power impart,

Though humble be my destined place.'

(113-120)

Nature, described as a titanic woman, answers:

'Mortal! I grant that high request,
(But dim thy beam, and faint thy ray),
Partake the glory of the blest,
Son of Apollo, king of Day!

'Laurel thy temples may not bind:
In humbler sphere thy fate is set;
That for the more exalted mind;
But take yon lowly violet;'

(177-184)

The violet becomes the emblem of the "humble" position in the celebrated company of poets allowed to the speaker, for it is "Like modest worth, half seen, half hid" (196).

"The Violet" was composed in 1830, twenty years before Brontë read *The Prelude*. Yet, it offers a counterpart to a passage in the thirteenth book of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem. Wordsworth refers to the link among poets and calls himself the "humblest of this band." He (the use of the first person in the 1805 version points to a personal identification) wishes for the possession of:

A Privilege whereby a work of his,
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
Creative and enduring, may become
A Power like one of Nature's.

(300-311)

In Brontë's poem, though the male poet-aspirant also assigns himself a humble place, the power is granted to him and limited by the female authority of nature. The titanic female to whom the speaker appeals evokes the image of Moneta in Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*. As in "The Violet" Keats's speaker wishes to penetrate the mystery that veils the female figure, and she bestows the vision he desires, thus transforming him into a poet. Both poems depict an invocation of an immortal female on the part of the male speaker. The female power authorizes the male to become a poet

Similarly, in "Kubla Khan" the poetic persona is male, but the figure of inspiration is female. It is the Abyssinian maid who demonstrates the ability to evoke absence as presence through her song. Consequently, the poet feels capable of artistic construction only through the medium of her music.

A damsel with a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw:
 It was an Abyssinian maid,
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
 That with music loud and long,
 I would build that dome in air,
 (37-47).

The maid's song represents what Helene Cixous calls "[t]he Voice [that] sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation" (93). Kubla, representing male power which the poet wishes to possess, constructs his pleasure dome with the power of the word; he

decrees and his will is done. Yet, implicitly, he is equally subject to the power of the word, for "mid this tumult Kubla heard from far / Ancestral voices prophesying war!" (29-30). The words of war he hears emphasize the "authority of separation" of Kubla's language. Those words threaten to destroy what he has created. But the maid who plays on the dulcimer possesses the power of song, the expression of voice that transcends that language and remains inviolable.

The voice's power is central to Brontë's imaginative conception. The sensation of her visions were composed not so much of pictures as of sounds. Thus she described the unforgettable quality of one of her visions in auditory terms: "what a voice of wild and wailing music now came thrillingly to my mind's almost my body's ear" (qtd. in Ratchford, *Web* 111). Brontë registered the strength of the impression on her imagination as the power of a voice. In her narrative, as well as in her poetry, the voice is an essential medium of emotion. When Elizabeth Hastings thinks of William Percy it is "his remembered voice & look & language" that she lingers over, "with an intensity of romantic feeling that very few people in this world can form the remotest conception of - all he had said was treasured in her mind, she could distinctly tell over every word." When she meets him again, "The tone of Sir William's voice brought back again like a charm the feeling of confidence Miss Hastings had experienced before in conversing with him." His voice evokes "a throbbing of the heart & pulse, & a kindling of the veins" (*Five Novelles* 244, 247). It is the voice, rather than the image of the person, that kindles the initial spark of feeling. In the poem "Matin" in which the Marquis of Douro addresses his beloved Marian Hume who is separated from him by the distance of the sea, he tells her that she is with him in his dreams: "I hear thy voice, I see thy figure nightly; / Thou comest to me in midnight slumbers deep!" (ll. 45-46). He hears her before he sees her in his dreams.

Another key component for both imaginative composition and the release of feeling in Brontë's writing is walking. Thus walking marks critical junctures in episodes

of the juvenilia. In *Lily Hart* the title character's walk culminates in her union with her beloved Mr. Seymour (who, as it turns out, is actually John, Prince of Fidenia). It is on a shared walk, Sir William and Elizabeth reach "the climax of their relationship" (Alexander, *Early Writings* 187). In the juvenilia, as in the novels, the walk functions as a generator of erotic feeling and of imaginative contemplation. Speaking through Charles Townshend, she explains that the experience of writing without a predetermined plan is analogous to taking a spontaneous journey, and the description of such a journey is what takes the narrator into the story entitled *Julia* (*Five Novelettes* 87).

Brontë retains the trope of traveling through writing in discussing her experience as a writer in "Farewell to Angria": "I have now written a great many books" she says to an imagined sympathetic reader. She admits that she finds the familiarity of the world she has created solacing and would escape the dullness of her own life in flights of imagination to Angria. Yet, in the same manner as Keats does in "Sleep and Poetry," she resolves that she must renounce the fantasy and move on to more serious writing:

Still, I long to quit for awhile that burning clime where we have
sojourned too long – its skies aflame, 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. (Beer 367)

At this point Brontë relinquishes the excess of Romantic indulgence represented by Angria and moves on to introduce a restrained, sober realism in *The Professor*.

¹There is a point of similarity between Wordsworth "Resolution and Independence" and another composition of Bronte's juvenia, "Reflections of the Fate of Neglected Genius"; This Bronte poem, dated November 13, 1830, mourns the untimely death of the title's subject who offers a resemblance to Chatterton, the subject of the seventh stanza of Wordsworth's poem.

Chapter 4

The Professor: The Signified Gender

Determined to follow through on the resolution she made in "Farewell to Angria" to eschew exotic fervor, Brontë composed a work she characterized as "plain and homely." This novel, *The Professor*, which she did not succeed in getting published during her lifetime, is still the least popular of her works. It lacks the dramatic quality and gothic overtones of her other novels, and, with its commitment to common day experience, it is ostensibly the least Romantic. Nevertheless, despite Brontë's determination to divorce herself from Angria in writing *The Professor*, Romanticism still held its grasp on her imagination. As the narrator of *The Professor* says, "There are impulses we can control; but there are others which control us, because they attain us with a tiger-leap, and are our masters ere we have seen them" (247; ch. 23). The statement is apt for Brontë's experience of her imagination as a force that would enter into her thoughts unconsciously, superseding everything else with its visions. In her early writing she yielded control to the influence of imagination and indulged in narrative excesses in her opulent descriptions and portrayals of characters who were incarnations of passionate emotion. In her first mature novel, Brontë essays to subordinate imagination to reason, in much the same manner as her hero does. Yet, just as he finds that the sway of certain impulses are inescapable, his author finds that the "tiger-leap" of imagination ultimately cannot be repressed.

Although *The Professor* is presented as a piece of straight realism, its realism is the product of Brontë's Romantic consciousness. In fact, the statement of her intent in the novel's preface echoes the primacy granted to "real living men" in Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads". As she writes: "I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs" (37). As a woman

writer, though, Bronte is also concerned with the situation of real living women; her heroines must also work their way through life. Though *The Professor's* protagonist and narrator, William Crimsworth, obviously is a man, the novel also tells the story of his female counterpart, Frances Henri. Unlike the heroines of traditional novels whose ultimate and defining end is marriage, Frances has her own ambitions and career goal, which she continues to pursue even after she becomes Mrs. Crimsworth. Consequently, the novel does not end with the marriage of the professor to his beloved pupil but depicts her continuing struggle to achieve a professional status that equals her husband's, an objective that she does ultimately achieve. Though she begins working out of economic necessity, Frances continues to pursue her career to prove her own self-worth. Thus, despite the novel's purportedly male-centered narrative, *The Professor* gives voice to Bronte's feminist concerns and is a crucial bridge between the Zamorna dominated world of the juvenilia and the centrality of the female protagonist developed in her later novels.

In her preface to *The Professor*, Bronte declares that her hero is to be served "throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment" while he struggles to earn his way. The idea of doling out such a mixture is picked up by the narrator. In the twenty-third chapter, he breaks into the narrative with a direct address: "Now, reader, during the last two pages I have been giving you honey fresh from flowers, but you must not live entirely on food so luscious; taste then a little gall - just a drop, by way of change" (252). Such intrusions into the flow of the text underscore the presence of the narrator who is not merely transcribing the narrative but selecting what he wishes to reveal and withholding what he does not choose to divulge to the reader. At the beginning of the seventh chapter, when the story line is about to move to Belgium, the narrator turns to address the reader in the present tense: "Three - nay four - pictures line the four-walled cell where are stored for me the records of the past." The first three are named, but the fourth remains open to question. Of it, he says, "a curtain covers it, which I may hereafter withdraw, or may not, as suits my convenience and capacity" (86). This overt

declaration of manipulation is a step outside of the narrative frame, which subverts the assumption of an integral textual construct, in the mode of Romantic irony. Like the narrators of Romantic poems, Bronte's narrator is a self-conscious presence in the text.

When the narrator presents his life divided into representational pictures, the first two, representing Eton and X- are described in terms of landscape details. However, the third picture, which features the Belgium landscape, is never detailed; instead, William dwells on the effect of the sound of the word: "Belgium! name unromantic and unpoetic, yet name that whenever uttered has in my ear a sound, in my heart an echo, such as no other assemblage of syllables, however sweet or classic, can produce." He continues, giving his responsiveness the emphasis of immediacy by referring to the present moment, "Belgium! I repeat the word, *now* [emphasis mine] as I sit alone near midnight." Sound kindles the imagination, so that "thoughts, feelings, memories that slept, are seen by me" (86; ch. 7).¹ Though the images of the past fade as the echo of the word dies down, it is at least temporarily capable of actually re-presenting the past, not just representing it from the distance of time as the pictures do. As Bronte privileges the aural over the visual imagination, *The Professor* evokes sound to register emotional impressions.

As the narrator presents his memories to the reader, in recounting the Belgium episode, sound, in particular the voice of Frances, is granted emotional primacy. When William hears Frances read English for the first time, he recalls, "I looked up in amazement; the voice was a voice of Albion; the accent was pure and silvery" (154; ch. 15). It is her voice, with its pure English accent, that first brings Frances to the professor's notice, for it is the quality of her pronunciation that distinguishes her from the other pupils. As his curiosity is piqued, he attempts to learn more about her and, subsequently, falls in love with her. Still her voice retains notability for him. When he finds her after his month long search, her voice again registers distinctly, as William recounts, "I loved the tones with which she uttered" her greeting to her master (195; ch.

19). At a subsequent reunion, following a ten week long absence, William pauses outside Frances's door to listen: "Fascinated, I stood, more fixedly fascinated when a voice rewarded the attention of my strained ear " (240; ch. 23). It is her voice rather than her appearance that he awaits. Thus the text privileges a woman's voice over her physical aspect, and the plain-looking Frances is granted a unique and passionate voice. As the woman's voice in *The Professor* is heard distinctly, Bronte grants her heroine the role of a speaking subject and thereby suggests the possibility of a female Romantic hero.

Glimmers of Bronte's Romantic imagination emerge throughout the novel. The narrator's counterpart, Hunsden, represents the rebellious aspect of Romanticism. In fact, alterations in Bronte's manuscript of *The Professor* indicate that she conceived of the character in Angrian terms, for she originally described him as having "long locks," a Byronic feature that would "accentuate the essential Romanticism of the character" (Brammer 164). Although this description is changed in the final version, Hunsden retains his Romantic individuality: Hunsden's intellectual pursuits match his disposition, as indicated by the French and German Romantic works in his library (65; ch. 4). Yet he is not merely an armchair Romantic but a revolutionary by nature. He boasts that he comes from a family of "reformers born, radical reformers" and that his "instinct" dictates his action of opposing tyranny and breaking chains (80; ch. 6). Hunsden's self-characterization reveals him as the counterpart of his ideal woman, the "individual-looking" Lucia, whose portrait he carries. As Frances observes, "Lucia once wore chains and broke them." Like Madame Laure in *Middlemarch*, "Lucia has trodden the stage," where "her originality, her fearlessness, her energy of body and mind" secures her admiration. Yet, these very same qualities render her unfit for marriage, just as Madame Laure found herself stifled by marriage and broke the chains of domesticity by murdering her husband. As Crimsworth admits, the "blaze" of Lucia's brilliance (her name actually means light) would be too much for his vision to sustain, and even Hunsden, Frances avers, could not seriously contemplate marrying her despite his

attraction to this blaze (284-85; ch. 25). Lucia cannot be chained, for she represents a blazing power that cannot be contained.

It is Hunsden's affinity with Lucia that renders his presence unsettling for William. From their first meeting, the two are linked in a peculiar relationship, at once supportive and hostile. Hunsden is the one who stimulates the rupture with William's brother, suggests the trip to Brussels, provides William with the contact for his first job, and buys him the portrait of his mother. Yet, though Hunsden acts as William's benefactor, the professor offers him no thanks, and their friendship, far from amicable, is distinguished by antagonism. The antagonism William feels for him is not the effect of Hunsden's mocking him so much as his aversion to an aspect of his own character that Hunsden represents. Hunsden reveals what William attempts to keep covered. Confronting Hunsden is tantamount to facing what Terry Eagleton calls a "mirror-image of his own covertly dissentient spirit." As various critics observe, Hunsden functions as William's "alter ego," his "unconstrained shadow" (Eagleton 35; Rodolff 82; Boumelha 23). In this sense, his role is similar to that of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein finds his creation so repugnant, not only on account of its deformity, but because it forces him to encounter the part of himself that he wishes to deny.

Hunsden's function as a double is alluded to by William's measuring his appearance against his own. He concludes that Hunsden's "soul had more of will and ambition than his body had of fibre and muscle" (67; ch. 4). By implication, William reveals his own soul's "will and ambition," the former quality is even suggested by his name. The correlation between them is further highlighted by Hunsden's taking William's place, quite literally, when he makes himself at home in William's lodgings. As the narrator relates, upon coming home he found "the chair I usually occupied near the hearth was already filled" (78; ch. 6). Much later in the novel, after William has introduced Hunsden to Frances, their walk together turns into a contest, as they tangle

together in the tradition of "literary doubles" (Rodolff 82) Hunsden begins by collaring him, and refuses to release William: "he swayed me to and fro; so I grappled him round the waist. It was dark; the street lonely and lampless. We had then a tug for it; and after we had both rolled on the pavement, and with difficulty picked ourselves up, we agreed to walk on more soberly" (267; ch. 24). This unexpected skirmish strikes a discordant note in the novel. Bronte strains the literal realism of the narrative in order to demonstrate the dynamics of the hero's psychology. The conflict that ensues between the two characters when William attempts to free himself from Hunsden's grasp is a physical manifestation of his struggle with the aspect of his personality that he wishes to deny, his own rebellious Romanticism. Yet, the struggle only brings him in closer contact with his rebelliousness. While grappling with Hunsden, as Ruth Johnston (370) observes, William is also embracing him, for he takes hold of his opponent by grabbing him "round the waist." Consequently, like the chase between the scientist and the monster, in which the pursued becomes the pursuer, in *Frankenstein*, this clash between Hunsden and William effectively highlights the association between the two characters.

William reveals his insubordination right at the start of the book by recounting his refusal to conform to his uncles' expectations of becoming a clergyman and marrying one of his cousins. As he tells Hunsden, "I must follow my own devices. I must till the day of my death; because I can neither comprehend, adopt, nor work out those of other people" (83; ch. 6). Hunsden, the self-styled insurrectionist, brings out the rebel in William by goading him to action and by reminding him of the rebellious spark in his nature. Even the gift of William's mother's portrait, ostensibly a sympathetic gesture of sentiment on Hunsden's part, is a significant hint. William's mother defied her family in her choice of marriage, and he, who bears a marked resemblance to her, has likewise cut himself off from his maternal relations. In sending him the portrait, Hunsden reminds William of the implication of his own assertion, "I am my mother's son" (82; ch. 6). In effect, Hunsden's recurring appearances in the novel and his intrusion into Crimsworth's

own home serve as reminders of the persistence of the Romantic spirit which continues to emerge despite attempts to suppress it.

At the close of the novel, the narrator reverts to the present tense, relating the occurrence at the moment of writing. He describes an idyllic relationship with Frances, but the novel does not end on the conventional note of living happily ever after with his wife and son. Hunsden intrudes, "bending through the lattice, from which he has thrust away the woodbine with unsparing hand, disturbing two bees and a butterfly" (290; ch. 25). It is interesting that William identifies three creatures, divided as one pair and a third that is different, corresponding to his own household. Like the bees and butterfly, the Crimsworths find the calm peacefulness of their home disrupted by Hunsden's bursting in upon them. Hunsden intensifies the disruption of his arrival by bringing up news directed at agitating William. Thus Hunsden, the Romantic rebel who is a constant presence in the Crimsworth household, is, in effect, given the last word, which marks the ascendancy of the Romantic spirit.

The spirit of the rebel is passed on to William's son, Victor. Hunsden, for whom Victor has marked partiality, maintains that this "spirit" should not be checked, encouraging it in the son as he brings it out in the father.² William, on the other hand, calls it "the leaven of the offending Adam." Still attempting to deny his own spirit, he deliberately distances himself by denying any comprehension of its nature, referring to it as "this *something*" in his son. That he finds its presence threatening is clear from his description, "a kind of electrical ardour and power - which emits, now and then, ominous sparks," sparks he prefers to see quelled (289; ch. 25). The professor cannot abide the threat of the uncontrollable. That becomes clear from his reaction when he is informed that his son's mastiff, Yorke, was bitten by a rabid dog; he shoots it instantly. Though he maintains that the killing was justified by the danger posed by a potentially rabid dog, the fact that Yorke is named for Hunsden, who gave him to Victor, suggests that William's ulterior motive was to exorcise Hunsden's influence. Sublimating his hostility

toward his own rebellious spirit, embodied by Hunsden and passed on to Victor, William attempts to negate it by destroying its incarnation in Yorke.

Yorke serves as an unpleasant reminder to William of its namesake whose influence on his son the professor finds threatening to his own sense of control. Victor's spirit is a manifestation of William's covert essence, which indicates that indeed the child is father of the man. Earlier on, William misquotes the famous Wordsworthian statement to justify his part as a harsh disciplinarian. "The boy is father to the Man," is the saying he evokes when contemplating the negative traits of his Belgian students (98 ; ch.7). Just as he does with his own son, he asserts that his students must be forced into submission while they are still children. Ironically, he "recalls Wordsworth's idealization of the child only to deny it" (Gezari 44). The inversion of Wordsworth's meaning would seem to indicate that, despite sharing his first name, William is very far from the poet's Romantic perspective.

Yet, William does indicate his Wordsworthian sympathies by another allusion to the poem he misquotes. "The Child is father of the Man," the line which Wordsworth made into the epigraph of *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* is part of the poem that begins "My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky". The sight of a rainbow makes an equally strong impression on William Crimsworth for whom it becomes a sign of hope:

I faced a vast bank of clouds, but also I had before me the arch of an evening rainbow; a perfect rainbow - high, wide, vivid. I looked long; my eye drank in the scene, and I suppose my brain must have absorbed it; for that night, . . . in a dream were reproduced the setting sun, the bank of clouds, the mighty rainbow. (205; ch. 19)

His mind's absorption of the rainbow evokes Wordsworth's internalization.

Wordsworth's poems tell of his appropriation of a scene by gazing at it. In "I Wandered

Lonely as a Cloud" the poet recalls the scene of dancing daffodils, which after seeing it once physically, has been incorporated into his mind: "For oft, when on my couch I lie / In vacant or in pensive mood, / They flash upon the inward eye. . ." Likewise, Crimsworth takes in the scene through his eye to the extent that he can unconsciously reconstruct it. This significant scene, like Wordsworth's, appears to him when he is walking.

Walking plays a prominent role in *The Professor*, for it registers crucial junctures in the plot. A most momentous walk is William's extended Sunday stroll that leads him to his reunion with Frances. Yet the action of walking has significance in the novel beyond its function as a means of transportation; it reflects the protagonist's state of mind. For instance, when William thinks about the poor economic prospects that hinder him from proposing to Frances, he paces: "I took several turns in my room, under the goading influence of most poignant remorse; I walked a quarter of an hour from the wall to the window; and at the window, self-reproach seemed to face me; at the wall, self-disdain" (221; ch. 22) William paces again as he impatiently awaits the hour that he can expect to find Frances at home: "I walked in the streets of Brussels, and I walked in my own room from two o'clock till six" (239; ch. 23).

Bronte uses walking to even greater effect in *The Professor*. Often, the motion of the walk itself effects a mental progression that leads to a definitive alteration in the protagonist's state of mind. For instance, when M. Pelet, who is soon to be married to Mdlle Reuter, offers him a raise if he continues his employment at his school, William recounts that he "set out on a long walk outside the Porte de Flandre, in order, as I thought to cool my blood, calm my nerves, and shake my disarranged ideas into some order." This walk, mental as well as physical, leads him to conclude that he must resign his post in order not to be tempted to engage in an immoral liaison, for he realizes, "I was not pope - I could not boast infallibility" (213, 214; ch. 20). It is through walking that William comes to make discoveries about himself and takes a decisive course toward his

future. Although he appreciates his surrounding scenery, it is not nature that inspires William but his own thoughts, which are stimulated by the walk either directly or indirectly, when the walk occasions an encounter.

Such a momentous encounter between the hero and Hunsden first occurs after William returns to his lodgings and contemplates his dissatisfaction with his life of enslavement as the employee of his tyrannical brother. Rather than entering his cheerless room with no fire, William chooses to continue walking under the star-filled sky. Such a choice of action represents the more consequential decision to leave the lonely and constricting existence he faces at X and venture in search of a more satisfying life, which, in his case, translates into a traveling to Belgium. Yet William does not arrive at the resolution to quit his position on his own. It is Hunsden who actually engineers William's breakaway by not only planting the idea in his mind but also contriving to instigate a confrontation between the Crimsworth brothers that makes their separation inevitable.

The simple act of taking a walk leads William to an uncomfortable confrontation with his discontent, represented to him by Hunsden. When Hunsden runs into William on his night time walk, he invites the clerk into his home and proceeds to tell him that in working for his brother he sentences himself to a dead end situation with no career or social opportunities. William leaves feeling the full extent of his dissatisfaction, though he returns to work as usual the following morning. At noon, however, the usual proceedings are disrupted by the arrival of his brother who accuses William of slandering him, threatens him with a whip, and orders him to leave. After clearing out his desk, William leaves without looking back. Then his "only thought [is] of walking," as he explains, "that the action of [his] muscles might harmonize with the action of [his] nerves." Here walking functions as a physical release which is necessitated by William's emotional upsurge. He walks "fast and far," propelled by his exultation in the fact that for him "Life was again open . . . no longer was its horizon limited by the high black wall surrounding Crimsworth's mill" (76; ch. 5). William can now go beyond the wall,

literally as well as figuratively. However, this is not yet the beginning of William's journey, for he returns again to his lodgings. There he finds Hunsden who reveals that his actions are responsible for Edward's sudden outburst, a maneuver intended to free William from his virtual enslavement. Hunsden's plan has its intended effect, and it serves as the impetus for William's quest, recounted in the novel.

Though the story of William Crimsworth's life and his success as a self-made man is the ostensible center of *The Professor*, the story of Frances's life is not merely incidental. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, "*The Professor* is as much about Frances Henri as it is about William Crimsworth" (325). That is not to say that she commands the same number of pages in the novel. Frances first appears in the fourteenth chapter, and she only gains prominence in subsequent chapters. However, as her character becomes more central to the story, the novel shifts its focus; she becomes the driving force of the narrative. Though she initially appears as a motivating force for the hero, as Frances's role in the novel develops, so does her character, so that by the final chapters she becomes "more central and more intensely realized than the narrator" (Rodolff 82).

William relates that his love for Frances made him realize "a strong desire to do more, earn more, be more, possess more" (201; ch. 19). These words are strikingly echoed in Peter Brooks's account of ambition: "Ambition is inherently totalizing, figuring the self's tendency to appropriation and aggrandizement, moving forward through the encompassment of more, striving to have, to do, and to be more." This description, Brooks acknowledges, "most obviously concerns male plots of ambition," and suggests that "[t]he female plot . . . takes a more complex stance toward ambition, the formation of an inner drive toward the assertion of selfhood in resistance to the overt and violating male plots of ambition, a counter-dynamic which . . . is only superficially passive" (39). The surface of *The Professor* is the male plot of ambition, but at its core is the female plot. Though Frances first appears to be submissive, as the novel unfolds, her own ambition to establish herself in her career on par with the position held by the

professor attests to her "inner drive toward the assertion of selfhood" in defiance of the social inequality of patriarchy. She is not merely William's passive object of desire but a subject unto herself with her own desires and goals.

In telling his own story, the narrator of *The Professor* also relates Frances's story, for the account of their lives reflect each other. That Frances is at one point in the novel called "Wilhelmina Crimsworth" underscores the point of shared identity between the hero and the heroine of the novel (255; ch. 24). The point becomes explicit in William's account of his reunion with Frances after his month long search for her. He finds her and his own likeness. He wanders into a cemetery and perceives "a woman, pacing slowly to and fro, and evidently deeming herself alone as [he] had deemed [him]self alone, and meditating as [he] had been meditating." He finds Frances his mirror image, meditating while solitarily pacing as he had been doing while walking. William carries on his self-projection, attributing to Frances the "thoughts" and "feelings" he holds himself (194, 195; ch. 19). Here, William adopts the masculinist stance of the Romantic poets who project themselves onto feminine counterparts as Shelley does in *Episychdion* and Wordsworth does in the poems that address his sister. Though Frances continues to regard William as her master even after their marriage, she is not merely his reflection, but an independent entity.

Individualism is the major theme of the novel. William tells Hunsden: "I must follow my own devices. I must till the day of my death; because I can neither comprehend, adopt, nor work out those of other people" (83; ch. 6). Thus William declares himself to be a nonconformist and proceeds to follow his own devices by traveling from England to Belgium. He takes on the Romantic role of an outsider embarking on a quest; his is to find a career and a home for himself. Frances, as individualistic as her male counterpart, also travels to Belgium from Switzerland and wishes to continue on to England. Using the metaphor of the walk, Frances reveals her wanderlust. She describes her life in Switzerland as "a circle" where she "walked the

same round every day." Admitting that in Brussels she "walk[s] in as narrow a limit," she explains that she finds relief in the change of scene, which she wishes now to change again for England. She emphasizes her determination by saying that she not only has "a wish to see England" but "an intention" (172, 170; ch. 17). Her perseverance, a trait William observes in her from the beginning of their acquaintance (159; ch. 16), is rewarded, and, ultimately, her goal is realized when she and her husband settle in England.

Like her husband, Frances begins her quest as an orphan alone who must work to attain financial independence, and she insists on maintaining her independence ever after her marriage. In fact, her ambition surpasses her husband's. It is her sense that "I *can* do better, and I *will*!" that impels her to open a school with her husband, for she is "not satisfied" that his income has risen while hers remains the same as it was when she commenced her career. Her dissatisfaction is revealed on a walk with William, which, like prior walks in the novel, proves to be consequential; Frances presents her "plan for progress" which changes the course of both her and her husband's career (271; ch. 25). Frances does not accept the disparity of pay between the sexes as inevitable and seeks to gain compensation for her work that equals her husband's.

Her feminist view also underlies her assertion that if she were married to a bad husband, she would leave him, flouting the law if necessary. Her rationale echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments for women's rights. Expressing her Romantic, revolutionary spirit, Frances explains:

[I]f a wife's nature loathes that of the man she is wedded to, marriage must be slavery. Against slavery all right thinkers revolt, and though torture be the price of resistance, torture must be dared: though the only road to freedom lie in the

gates of death, those gates must be passed; for freedom is indispensable. (279; ch. 25).³

Frances's words also evoke William's own equation of slavery with tyranny with respect to his own experience as his brother's employee. As a man, though, William was able to exercise his freedom to leave his intolerable situation. France's argument is that women should have the same right to freedom as men enjoy. Her insistence on individual liberty reveals her Romantic spirit.

It is this Romantic spirit that Hunsden recognizes when he tells her, "you have a spark of spirit; cherish it" (266; ch. 24). He also, significantly, contrasts her "little lamp of a spirit" with the blazing Romantic energy of his object of admiration, Lucia (285; ch. 25). Unlike the overwhelming blaze of the woman whose very name means light, France's spark only sometimes reveals itself. Near the end of the novel, William observes "a strange kind of spirit in [Frances's] eye." However, shortly afterwards, it subsides, prompting him to ask "where all that vigour was gone which had transformed her erewhile and made her glance so thrilling and ardent - her action so rapid and strong." She assures him that though it is not visible at the moment, "whenever it is wanted, it will come back again" (279-80; ch. 25). Though her general appearance is one of passivity, her Romantic essence reveals itself in intermittent flashes of spirit that transform both her look and her action. Frances's powers of transformation are remarkable, for she does not only respond to emotional arousal but summons the character she deems appropriate to the situation.

After ten years of marriage, William reflects on the compounded character of his wife:

As to this same Mrs. Crimsworth, in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different

circumstances, I seemed to possess two wives. . . . In the daytime my house and establishment were conducted by Madame the directress . . . : immediately after breakfast I used to part with this lady; I went to my college, she to her schoolroom At six o'clock p.m. my daily labours ceased. . . . as I entered our private sitting-room, the lady-directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms; much disappointment she would have been if her master had not been as constant to the tryst as herself, and if his truthful kiss had not been prompt to answer her soft "Bon soir, monsieur." (273-74, 276; ch. 25)

Unlike her husband who finds an externalized double in the character of Hunsden, Frances is split within herself, playing two roles. As the successful school "directress" she is confidently poised; as the wife of the professor, though, she maintains the submissive stance she held as his pupil, calling him "monsieur." William marvels at her apparent conversion from one character to another. Though there are no ominous hints in his account of her transformation, it is evocative of the divided female characters in Romantic poetry. Like Keats's *Lamia* and Coleridge's *Geraldine*, Frances is a different person in public than she is in private. However, whereas this division distinguishes the female's quality of otherness and threatening powers from the masculinist point of view of the poetry, for Brontë's heroine it is the only expedient available for her to succeed in her two roles as a wife and a school directress. As her career calls for an assertive personality and her husband desires a submissive wife, the incompatible demands of the two, inevitably result in a split within the self. Frances does manage to sustain "both her sexuality and her intellectual ambition," but it comes at the price of "a

compartmentalization that verges on dissolution" (Tayler 166). Thus Bronte allows her first novel's heroine to "have it all," though not completely on her own terms.

In addition to their parallel experience as teachers, Frances and William share the experience of writing. In this area Frances actually surpasses her husband, for his only literary production is the account of his life recorded in the novel, whereas Frances writes spirited compositions and emotionally charged poems that express her Romantic imagination. Although Crimsworth in his role as master criticizes her devoirs, he actually promotes her talent for writing. When he returns her composition about King Arthur, he first points out all the errors but continues by admitting his surprise and pleasure in reading it. He encourages Frances to "cultivate the faculties that God and nature have bestowed on [her], and . . . to derive free and full consolation from the consciousness of their strength and rarity" (165; ch. 16). Though Frances is conscious of her talent even before it is noticed by the professor, the fact that William is identified with the master in Frances's poem indicates that his attention to her work, which makes him stricter with her than with others, arouses her to greater ambition. In the poem, her ambition culminates in her receiving the award of the "laurel wreath," (246; ch. 23) an image that subverts Southey's warning Bronte about pursuing literature. That Bronte identifies with Frances's experience as a writer is indicated by her depiction of Frances composing while pacing (240; ch. 23) in the same manner as her author.

Despite Frances's pivotal part in *The Professor*, her story is told in the voice of a man in the process of giving an account of himself. In her first novel, Bronte did not break away from the habit of using male narrators that she established in her juvenilia. The key to her reason for adhering to this practice is found in the novel itself. Echoing Southey's harsh advice to Bronte, Middle Reuter contends that Frances Henri should be suppressed because "ambition, *literary* ambition especially, is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of a woman," who should not be encouraged "to aspire after applause and publicity" (178; ch. 17). Though this point of view is advanced only to be

rejected, for it is put into the mouth of the unscrupulous, self-serving school directress, it still registers the reality that women writers, like Bronte herself, confront. Though Bronte persisted in her pursuit of a writing career in the face of the same type of criticism leveled at Frances Henri, she grants the heroine success only as a school directress, not as an author.

Despite her husband's appreciation of her literary talents, Frances cannot approach the level of men in literature. That she is to an extent debarred from that realm is illustrated by the disconcerting effect Wordsworth's poetry has on her. It is significant that when Frances is confronted with the Romantic poet's strong sense of self, she must look to her husband to interpret his meaning for her. William relates that he would "dose" her with Wordsworth in order to subdue her:

Wordsworth steadied her soon; she had a difficulty in comprehending his deep, serene, and sober mind; his language, too, was not facile to her; she had to ask questions, to sue for explanation, to be like a child and a novice, and to acknowledge me as her senior and director Byron excited her; Scott she loved; Wordsworth only she puzzled at, wondered over, and hesitated to pronounce an opinion upon. (277; ch. 25).

Although Frances's Romantic spirit is kindled by other authors, Wordsworth's inaccessibility to her suggests the exclusive, masculine character of Romanticism. Frances's exclusion from the insider understanding of the poetry of Wordsworth represents her author's sense of the exclusively male character of the literary tradition. It is interesting that a few pages earlier in the novel, Frances declines to call her husband by his first name, William, for, she explains, she "cannot pronounce your W," and so she

continues to call her husband "Monsieur" (272; ch. 25). That she does not call her husband by name points to some distance in their relationship; he still maintains the superiority of position of being her master as he was when she was her pupil. She finds herself unable to pronounce his "W," though what she literally means is that as someone whose first language is not English, she is at a disadvantage when speaking in a tongue that is foreign to her, Bronte appears to be suggesting something more. Frances's words carry the implication that as woman she cannot adequately express herself in her husband's language, the terms of male experience. Consequently, she is at a positional disadvantage in their relationship, as indicated by his calling her by name and Frances calling William Monsieur. This difference between them parallels Frances's distance from the other William -- Wordsworth. That "his language . . . was not facile to her" indicates the gendered quality of the language of experience. France's difficulty in approaching Wordsworth's poetry points to Bronte's perception of Romanticism as a male domain, exclusive of female experience. As Bronte wished to write as a Romantic, she felt compelled to write as a man. Thus, in writing her first novel, she attempted to veil her female identity behind male narrators and masculine pseudonyms, a practice she had established from her earliest writing.

In the famous account of the Bronte sisters' pseudonyms, Charlotte explains her reason for choosing a pseudonym:

the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because - without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine." - we had a vague impression that

authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice.

(Gaskell 286)

Though Bronte consistently referred to Currer Bell as "he," it is telling that she insists on the androgynous quality of her pseudonym. As an author she felt she must present herself as a male, yet she could not completely divest herself of her feminine identity when writing.

The Professor, despite its purportedly male author and narrator, does reveal the gender of its writer at points when Bronte indicates that she identifies with her protagonist. William Crimsworth reflects his author's plain appearance and near-sightedness, though, more significantly, he shares her experience of feeling like an outsider. In relating those feelings, Bronte slips out of the male mask. For instance, in the third chapter, where William describes how dejected he felt at his brother's party: "I looked weary, solitary, kept down like some desolate tutor or governess" (56). The inappropriateness of the feminine reference to a governess in this context is jarring. Yet, it is even more striking in the manuscript of the novel, which originally only referred to a "desolate governess" (MS. p. 28, qtd. in Brammer 161). The blurring of gender boundaries with respect to writing is brought up in the novel. Hunsden's handwriting is described as "neither masculine nor exactly feminine," (218; ch. 21) mirroring the androgynous quality of Bronte's chosen pseudonym.

Although it is not written in the epistolary convention, *The Professor* opens with William's letter to a friend. That Bronte chose to name the recipient of the letter Charles is significant, for it is that name, the masculine approximation of her own, that she favored for the narrator of her juvenilia, Charles Wellsley, who later became Charles Townshend. The latter habitually corresponded with Sir William Percy. Thus the two names clearly refer back to the characters of Bronte's early writings. Despite her declaration to bid Angria farewell, it appears that Bronte perceived that there was a

connection between the exotic world of *Zamorna* and the apparently ordinary experience of *The Professor*. In fact, Brontë's first mature novel functions as the essential link between the fantasy world she created in childhood and the feminized Romanticism she develops in the novels that follow. Frances offers a prototype of the Romantic heroine Brontë envisions, an independent woman who possesses a passionate spirit. Though Frances's husband still holds the dominant position in their marriage, as he does in the novel, she paves the literary way for Brontë's stronger heroines who follow. Karen Chase notes the central "transformations in Brontë's work -- the displacement of dramatic emphasis from men to women and the establishing of a dominant narrative voice" only in *Jane Eyre* (51). The fact is, though, that those movements in Brontë's writing actually begin in *The Professor*.

¹Ruth D. Johnston remarks on this "sound-picture" on pp. 362-63 of her article on *The Professor*.

²The prototype of the relationship of the Romantic outsider with a couple and their son appears in *Lily Hart* in which the Marquis of Douro, operating under the alias of Colonel Percival, indulges the Seymours' son, increasing his tendency to be "willful and unmanageable." As he tells the boy's mother, "I have no desire to see him otherwise. If he could unite a little of my impetuosity with his father's wisdom, he would be perfect, you know" (76-77).

³Here Bronte seems to allude to the theme of her sister Anne's work, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Chapter 5

Jane Eyre: A Woman's Voice

It is only with her second mature novel that Charlotte Brontë places a woman at the center of the Romantic experience. Allen distinguishes *Jane Eyre* as "the first romantic novel in English" (181). Equating Brontë's novel's subjectivity with that of Byron's *Childe Harold*, Allen notes that the influence of the Romantic poets is evidenced not only by the presence of Byronic heroes but in the distinctly Romantic consciousness of the heroine. Blending the transcendent with the quotidian, what the heroine strives for is the incarnation of Romanticism in real human relationships. Her triumph is the achievement of her vision in corporeal terms. Her narrative is the celebration not only of her personal triumph but of her act of self-expression, the act of a woman telling her own story. *Jane Eyre* is Brontë's first novel to emancipate the female voice.

In this novel, presented as an "autobiography," the only trace of a male persona is the appearance of the name Currer Bell as "editor" of the protagonist's writings; the voice of the narrative, the perspective, and the authorization of the writing all stem from Jane Eyre. Yet, the innovation of *Jane Eyre* is not that it allows a woman to tell her story. At the time that Brontë wrote her famous novel, she had the precedent of several female autobiographies told as "governess tales". Nineteenth century writers such as Mary Brunton, Mary Martha Sherwood, and Charlotte's own sister Anne wrote novels narrated by women who advance from dependency to happy security. However, the female narrators of these novels do not justify their self-expression on the basis of their unique perspective; rather they invoke the authority of moral lessons. In contrast, Brontë originates "an 'egoistic' if not 'Byronic' narrative subject" in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's innovation is to appropriate "the self-authorizing and totalizing" property of male Romantic expression and give it a distinctly female voice" (Lanser 177).

As Joyce Carol Oates notes, what is "remarkable" about this work "is simply Jane's voice," (45). Brontë's use of an undisguised female voice is remarkable, for it allows a woman to be heard as a Romantic subject. Jane appropriates the subjectivity of the Romantic male poets. Speaking out as a woman, in conversation as well as in writing, she transgresses the conventional norms of self-expression. Thus Sydney Dobell observed, "every word . . . in *Jane Eyre* is female, not feminine, but female" (qtd. in Ratchford 182). Instead of telling the story of the conventionally feminine heroine, the distinctly female voice of *Jane Eyre* expresses the reality of a woman's experience. Significantly, the novel opens up with the stated expectations of appropriate speech and the mandate of silence for Jane. Her aunt Reed tells her, "until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent" (1; ch. 1). Yet, for Jane speech is not merely a means of pleasing others but a necessary outlet for her feelings. "Speak I must," she exclaims to herself before openly confronting her aunt about her mistreatment (29; ch. 4). Thus, as a child, she transgresses the adult ordinance of silence. As a grown woman, she transgresses the conventions of speech by speaking frankly rather than in ladylike terms. When she tells St. John that she could never marry, for it would kill her, he castigates her: "Your words are such as ought not to be used: violent, *unfeminine*, and untrue" [emphasis mine] (394; ch. 35). It is her unconventionally blunt utterance that St. John considers inappropriate for a woman, though the violence of her words is in fact true to her perspective and an accurate reflection of her feelings.

The voice itself plays a central role in Jane and Rochester's relationship. When he masquerades as a gypsy, Jane recognizes him before he removes the disguise when he speaks in his own familiar voice (190; ch. 19). Aural perception is more reliable than vision in *Jane Eyre*. The intensity of emotion is concentrated in the voice which becomes empowered to overcome physical barriers. When Jane feels herself about to succumb to St. John's influence, she breaks away when she hears Rochester's voice call her name. She answers, "I am coming!" and firmly decides to reunite with her lover

(401; ch. 35). Later, Rochester recounts that his longing for Jane induced him to actually call out her name and that he heard her response: "a voice - I cannot tell whence the voice came, but I know whose voice it was - replied." When Jane first approaches the blind Rochester, taking the place of Mary by bringing his water, he recognizes her by voice and reaches out to feel her bodily presence. Jane then emphasizes the essential quality of her voice, for in response to his exclaiming upon finding Jane's "shape" and "size," she adds, "And this is her voice" (428, 415; ch. 37). For Jane herself, her voice is what distinguishes her more than her physical outlines. As it was in their initial courtship, the intercourse between Jane and her husband remains centered around speech, as she says: "We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and audible thinking" (432; ch.38). Though this statement indicates the sameness between them, the very act of conversation is predicated on the difference between two individuals who come together through shared communication. If indeed two meld into a single entity with exactly the same thoughts, there is no need to talk. Jane and Rochester's relationship is speech-centered, for they maintain their separate thoughts to be exchanged; though closely linked, one partner's identity is not subsumed into another's. As the act of writing her autobiography indicates, Jane does not relinquish autonomy over her life.

In *Jane Eyre* the female protagonist's role is not just that of a Romantic heroine but of a hero. Jane, like the Romantic heroes, challenges the externally imposed "definitions of the self" and establishes her own (Noble 199). Throughout the novel, Jane struggles to withstand displacement. She rejects the labels imposed on her by the Reeds and Brocklehurst, refuses to conform to the image of Helen Burns, and resists complying with the expectations of Rochester and St. John. Her flight from Rochester, like her earlier departure from the Reed household and from Lowood, as well as her later escape from the domination of St. John Rivers, are her negations of what others would make of her. Jane resists accepting externally imposed perception of her character by

maintaining "the authority of her own perceptions, feelings, and experiences . . . , an essentially Romantic authority" (Lanser 183). Thus it is Romanticism that authorizes her to write and assert her own sense of self.

Like Wordsworth, who locates his identity in the continuity of his experiences which forms the unity of his selfhood, Jane authorizes herself through the story of her life. She clings to her sense of self by holding on to her name throughout. Her initials even when she offers a false last name to disguise her identity at Marsh End remain J.E., the French word for I (Hennelly 703). Jane expresses her uneasiness about altering her name from the first, when Rochester first tells her that she will soon be called "Jane Rochester" (245; ch. 24). Her reluctance to change her name is explicitly stated when she contemplates the trunks packed for the wedding trip she was to take with Rochester: "to-morrow, at this time, they would be rather far on their road to London: and so should I (D.V.) -- or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. . . . Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o'clock a.m.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property" (261; ch. 25). Conscious of her "I" as Jane Eyre, she cannot conceive herself as someone bearing another name. This holds true even after her marriage, when she is legally Mrs. Rochester. Thus Jane emphasizes her independence even in her marriage announcement. Rather than saying "we were married," Jane signals her autonomy by making herself the active subject of the statement, "Reader, I married him." As Rachel Brownstein points out, Jane's "marriage . . . affirms not the heroine's transformation but her remaining herself" (156). In composing her story, Jane does not relinquish the initials that signal her independent "I" and, accordingly, titles her story with the name of Jane Eyre (Lanser 187). The totality of her identity is inherent in the name she holds from birth. Thus the name Jane Eyre, which marks the continuity of her experience, is the one that she chooses to chronicle

her story under and to entitle the text that it forms, for the progression of the text is synonymous with Jane's self-formulation.

In order to establish her own sense of selfhood, Jane must overcome the labels assigned by those surrounding her. From her childhood onwards, she must resist accepting imposed classification. As a child in the Reed household, she is denigrated as dependent, called "less than a servant," and a wicked child (6; ch. 1). In retrospect, Jane realizes what accounts for her alienation and reflects on her position as an outsider.

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. 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 propensity; 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. (9; ch. 1)

She realizes that in the view of the Reed household, she was not a person but a *thing*, judged solely on the basis of the effect her presence has on them. Lacking social status, beauty, and charm, she also is bereft of sympathy. Her difference from those around her effectively cuts her off from society, in much the same manner as the monster in *Frankenstein* is rejected by people who refuse to accept a deformed creature into their circle. When Bessie makes the claim for pitying Jane, her fellow servant affirms, "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forelornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (19; ch. 4). No one cares to come to the rescue of "a little toad" who finds that she is forced to fend for herself.

The subsequent events prove that, though she appears defenseless, Jane is thoroughly capable of asserting herself. When Mrs. Reed orders her children not to associate with Jane, she retorts, "They are not fit to associate with me" (20; ch. 4). Jane upholds her own standard of judgment against that of her aunt's and recognizes her own superiority over her spoiled cousins. In the same manner, after Mrs. Reed introduces her to Mr. Brocklehurst as a deceitful child, Jane disowns the label and flings it back at her aunt. Jane asserts that it is not she but her cousin who tells lies and charges Mrs. Reed herself with being deceitful in pretending to be "a good woman" (30; ch. 4). Jane demonstrates an awareness of worldly reputation, but she knows her own perspective to be more accurate than what others tell her. Rather than being persuaded that she is in the wrong, she infuses her own meaning into the terms thrust on her. In this manner, she redefines the apposite she always hears associated with her aunt's name. After hearing Mr. Brocklehurst's sanctimonious exhortation to her to be duly grateful, she thinks to herself, "they all call Mrs. Reed my benefactress; if so, a benefactress is a disagreeable thing" (26; ch. 4).

Though Jane's situation changes once she is enrolled in the Lowood school, she is again falsely labeled a liar by Mr. Brocklehurst. However, Jane gets the opportunity to exonerate herself in telling Miss Temple the truth about her predicament in Gateshead. Jane also comes literally to tear off a false label. When Helen Burns is forced to wear the word "Slatern" on her forehead, Jane is greatly pained by the unjust humiliation of her friend. As soon as Miss Scatcherd, the teacher who imposes the punishment on Helen, leaves, Jane tears off the sign and destroys it in flames, dramatically illustrating her aversion to such mendacious branding (66; ch. 8). Miss Scatcherd misrepresents Helen by magnifying her minor shortcomings because she seeks to find fault with her. In this respect, Helen in Lowood is in a situation analogous to Jane's in Gateshead. It follows that Jane is impelled to actively reject the incriminating misrepresentation of her friend, just as she was forced to repel her own misrepresentation in the Reed household.

Even when her situation changes, Jane must continue to assert her own knowledge of herself against the image of her presented by others. The morning after they become engaged, Rochester greets her with a compliment on her appearance and remarks on her "radiant hazel eyes." Jane parenthetically tells the reader that in fact her eyes are green, though she adds, "you must excuse the mistake; for him they were new-dyed, I suppose." Though she excuses him, Jane does not let a mistake about her, even with respect to the exact tint of her eyes, pass uncorrected. She does not admit to be anything other than what she is. Thus she answers his playful query "Is this my pale little elf? Is this my mustard-seed?" not with an affirmative but with the matter of fact statement, "It is Jane Eyre, sir." Thus she does not agree to either of Rochester's presumptions; neither is she a creature of fairy land, nor is she his. Her identity remains simply Jane Eyre. In the same manner, when he calls her "a very angel," she laughs, "I am not an angel,' I asserted; 'and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself.'" She explains further, "I had rather be a *thing* than an angel." The term she emphasizes, *thing*, alludes to her description of how she was perceived at Gateshead; the suggestion is that she finds the misrepresentation of the Reeds preferable to an assumption that she is a divine being. She does not let any denial of her individuality pass without protest. When Rochester tells her that not only is she "a beauty in my eyes," but he would also "make the world acknowledge" that she is, Jane feels that "he was either deluding himself or trying to delude [her]" (245-46, 249; ch. 24). She thwarts his attempt to dress her up as a doll, for the expensive clothes and jewelry he wishes to lavish on her remind her of his treatment of his mistress. "I will not be your English Celine Varens," Jane asserts (256; ch. 24). She refuses to be arrayed like the fine lady she is not and insists on maintaining her governess status in fact as well as in appearance, furnishing her own wardrobe out of her earnings.

However, Jane loses her social status when circumstances force her to beg for the barest necessities, and she once again must contradict false assumptions about what she

is. When she approaches Moor House in the rain, the servant, Hannah refuses to let her in. "You are not what you ought to be," Hannah tells her and suspects her of "ill plans." Though Jane does not reveal her identity, even after she is taken in by St. John, she corrects Hannah's misimpression: "You are mistaken in supposing me a beggar." She explains: "The want of house or brass (by which I suppose you mean money) does not make a beggar in your sense of the word" (319; ch. 28; 325; ch. 29). Here Jane gets not only to combat the servant's prejudice but her own. As a child, she harbored a negative stereotype of indigent people and therefore refused to go to her "poor, low relations," on the grounds that she "should not like to go a-begging" (17, 18; ch. 3). As it turns out though, the Eyres are her connection to the Rivers as well as the fortune that she shares with them. Far from being a beggar, Jane becomes an heiress and a benefactor.

However, the good will she shows to her cousins is not accepted as sufficient by St. John. He is satisfied with nothing less than her complete submission of self. He demands that she join him as a missionary in India and become his wife. He begins to implement his plan by asking her to give up her German lessons and allow him to teach her the Hindi language instead, claiming that he wishes to review the rudiments by instructing another. By making her his pupil, though, he becomes her master, establishing a relationship which allows him to dominate. Instructing her in a foreign language that he has mastered already, he puts her in a subordinate position. As he conducts her language lessons, he tries to direct her thoughts to conform to his own plans. Oblivious to Jane's existence as an independent entity, St. John engages in the masculinist self-projection exhibited in Romantic poetry. He makes Jane into his own image by telling her what she is, which is what he would like her to be. As Rochester does when he first becomes engaged to Jane, St. John threatens to obliterate Jane's selfhood. Thus he shares the quality of the hero of Brontë's juvenilia, Zamorna, who effectively annihilates the women who fall victim to his attractions (Tayler 175). Yet, unlike the passive Angrian heroines, Jane successfully resists the masculine force.

St. John's proposal of marriage is equated with Rochester's proposition that she become his mistress. As Jane says: "I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment" (400; ch. 35). In resisting the threat of the influence of these two men Jane escapes "the usual categorization of woman -- whore or angel -- she understands that the two proposals offer exactly the same outcome: the prostitution of Jane Eyre, the fragmentation of self in the parts -- body and soul -- that meet each man's demand" (Betsinger 84). Indeed, Jane realizes that joining St. John means "abandon[ing] half myself," being compelled to "disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties" (386, 381; ch. 34). Ironically, both men who try to force her into mold of their own making appreciate her originality. St. John tells her, "You *are* original . . . and not timid. There is something brave in your spirit," (358; ch. 32) echoing Rochester's remark, "Is she original? Is she piquant?" (255; ch. 24). Yet, they fail to recognize that it is just that original spirit that empowers Jane to counter their influence over her.

Though Brontë's Romanticism is commonly associated with the Byronic variety, the masculine force the heroine must resist is not restricted to the magnetism of Byronic heroes. St. John's domination is that of a "Shelleyan" character, for he is so immersed in his transcendent ambition that he completely disregards Jane's individuality (Stone 118-19). As Jane says of him: "he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views" (398; ch. 35). He admits that in pursuing his "insatiable" ambition, he is guided by reason alone and not affected by feeling (358; ch. 32). In this respect, St. John's behavior is analogous to Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein's who, out of scientific ambition, neglects Elizabeth, devoting himself completely to penetrating the secret of creation, just as St. John passes over Rosamund Oliver and worldly love in order to pursue his aspirations as a missionary.¹ Not only does

St. John suppress his own erotic desires, he denies Jane's sexuality: "you are formed for labour, not for love," he tells her in his attempt to persuade her to marry him. He invokes the charge of religion: "It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance" (384, 388; ch. 34). Yet, Jane knows that she cannot do what St. John asks of her, for marrying him would not only translate into physical death from the hostile climate of India, but the obliteration of her individuality which would be forced to conform to his will.

Remaining true to herself, Jane fashions her own Romanticism which combines transcendent ideals with the domestic reality of a woman's life. She repudiates the male-centered Romanticism that only allows woman a place as a reflection of the male ego. She rejects the religious form of transcendence offered to her by St. John, just as she refuses to accept Helen's self-renunciation for herself. As a child she ratifies the "impulses of fury" she feels against those who had wronged her, declaring, "I was no Helen Burns" (58; ch. 7). As an adult she openly expresses her opposition. Cutting short St. John's directive that she "look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys," Jane exclaims, "The best thing the world has!" (373; ch. 34). Thus she counters St. John's ideology of aspiration and extols "the value of the quotidian, of daily domestic and social involvements," which, according to Mellor, characterizes female Romanticism (*Romanticism & Gender* 210). That is not to say that Jane renounces transcendence altogether. Rather, she achieves a synthesis of masculine and feminine Romanticism by centering her domestic relationship on an affinity of spirit. The form of transcendence that Jane chooses for herself is that which surpasses "custom, conventionalities, . . . even . . . mortal flesh," in a pure communication of "spirit," which allows her "equal" footing with Rochester despite his status as her "master" (240; ch. 23)² Rochester also wishes for a spiritual union. As he says, he could easily overpower her physically, but that would not achieve his object: "it is you, spirit -- with will and energy, and virtue and purity -- that I want: not alone your brittle frame" (303; ch. 27).

Jane evokes the convictions of the female Romantic, Mary Wollstonecraft, in her expressions of revolutionary sentiment, such as the declaration of women's equal worth and reasoning ability. When Rochester demands that Jane admit his superiority over her because of his advantage of experience, referring to himself as "old enough to be [Jane's] father," he alludes to the paternalistic social framework which would bar Jane from the opportunities allowed him. He boasts: "I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house." But Jane does not acquiesce to this purported superiority. She unequivocally responds, "I don't think, sir, you have the right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience" (124-25; ch. 14). Jane's argument parallels Wollstonecraft's in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft asserts that man's "scepter, real or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man" (50; ch. 2).

Jane wishes to maintain a position of equality vis-à-vis Rochester. Rejecting Rochester's attempt to dress her up once they become engaged, Jane maintains her own individuality and resists becoming a mere doll. "If you have a fancy for anything in that line," she tells Rochester, then he had better purchase a harem for himself. Jane's objections register her refusal to become what Wollstonecraft calls one of those "weak beings who are only fit for a seraglio" (*Vindication* 19). Yet Jane goes beyond that. Not only would she remain free herself, but she avers that she would "preach liberty to them that are enslaved -- [Rochester's] harem inmates amongst the rest" (255-56; ch. 24). Rather than preaching Christianity as the missionary St. John would later try to pressure her to become, Jane's message would be that of emancipation for women, a demand for equal status. Following the mode of thought of female Romanticism, Jane contemplates a social structure that would supplant the prevailing patriarchal order. This social

revolution would be pursued not in a cataclysmic way but by the extension of sympathy to other women and the appeal to their reason.³

The counterbalance of reason to passion is crucial for women's survival. Like Wollstonecraft, Brontë was aware of the dangers that self-consuming love posed to women, as the Angrian heroines who completely subordinate themselves to Zamorna illustrate. In the novels, Brontë's heroines must struggle against being engulfed by passionate feelings in order to maintain their independent identity. In retrospect Jane perceives that the excessive attachment she felt for Rochester threatened the survival of her own essence even before the entanglement with Bertha comes to light: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven I could not in those days see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol" (260-61; ch. 24). When all a woman's aspirations are concentrated in the object of her love, she loses her individuality. This sentiment reflects Wollstonecraft's statement:

Yet, if love be the supreme good, let women be only educated to inspire it, and let every charm be polished to intoxicate the senses; but if they be moral beings, let them have a chance to become intelligent and let love to man be only a part of that glowing flame of universal love, which, after encircling humanity, mounts in grateful incense to God. (*Vindication* 87; ch. 4)

If women are to be full individuals, they cannot surrender all to love. As beings who possess the capacity of a soul, they have an obligation to aspire to higher goals.

The revolutionary aspects of the novel are not confined to feminist issues. Brontë's Preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* indicates that many readers took offense at her apparent iconoclasm; she vindicates herself with Blakean assertions: "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion." The judgements of these statements

condemn the hypocritical Brocklehurst who embodies the false piety that Blake satirizes in his "Songs of Innocence and Experience". Among the Songs, "The Chimney Sweeper" offers a correspondence to Brontë's novel: the curls of "little Tom Dacre" are shorn off by adult order, just as Brocklehurst has the girls of Lowood's hair cut, claiming that he has their spiritual welfare at heart, enveloping his sadistic mandate with sanctimonious slogans. As in Blake's Song, the corrupt establishment insists that it disfigures the children for their own good. The children who accept their mistreatment without complaint in "Songs of Innocence" are like Helen Burns who looks forward to beatitude in the next world. However, such acquiescence is not for the Romantic protagonist. Like Prometheus, Jane's spirit refuses to comply even when she must bodily submit to oppression.

Following the course of the traditionally male quest, Jane proceeds toward self definition while progressing on the goal to determine her own version of transcendence. The heart of the novel is Jane's struggle to realize herself, and her travels mark the progression of her consciousness. As in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, the narrator travels not only to explore new places but to find herself. Like Wollstonecraft's, Jane's state of mind is expressed through "the romantic imagery of landscape" and images of nature (Lodge 110). Therefore, in the earlier part of the book most of the scenes are indoors to reflect the emotional constraint Jane experiences at Gateshead and Lowood. The outdoor scenes are also limiting, offering only confined spaces and no real respite from constraint. As Cynthia Linder points out, "the horizon" unfolds, "both metaphorically and literally," when Jane finally gets beyond the perimeters of Lowood and sets out on the journey to Thornfield (62). In the tradition of the Romantic quest, Jane's journey serves as reflection of her psyche.

Jane's journey is anticipated in Bessie's song. "A hopeless pilgrimage, Jane's seems, like the sad journey of Wordsworth's Lucy Gray, seen this time from the inside, by the child herself rather than by the sagacious poet. . . . now she imagines herself wandering in a moonless twilight that foreshadows her desperate flight across the moors after leaving Thornfield." (Gilbert and Gubar 342). Gilbert and Gubar note the significance of the name Marsh End for the Rivers' home, Moor House; marsh sounds almost like march, for it signals "the end of [Jane Eyre's] march toward selfhood" (364). It is there that she establishes family ties and gains independence as a result of inheriting her uncle's fortune. But the word marsh also evokes Bessie's song in which "the poor orphan child" looks for divine protection even if it should "stray in the marshes, by false lights beguiled" (15; ch. 1). Interestingly, it is a light, which she at first mistakes for an "*ignis fatuus*," that first draws her to the house, though, in this case, following the light is what leads the "poor orphan child" to discover both family and fortune (315; ch. 28).⁴ Thus the song Jane records in the account of her childhood gains meaning as it is enacted as part of Jane's self-defining quest.

Brontë conveys her consciousness of the construction of her narrative through her narrator's direct address to the reader in the opening of the tenth chapter:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connexion. (75)

The narrative goal is not to thoroughly reconstruct the events of a life but the formulation of a personality. It is presented, as Bahti says of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, "as a narrative in which the self coheres over time and arrives at the condition of meaningful existence through the power of retrospective understanding" (86). Although Brontë could not have been influenced by Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for it was only released a few years after the publication of *Jane Eyre*,⁵ the Bildungsroman quality of her novel is analogous to Wordsworth's autobiographical poem. *The Prelude* is not presented as a history "but as the present remembrance of things past," what M.H. Abrams calls the "I now" reflecting on and coexisting with the "I then" in a state that Wordsworth terms "two consciousnesses" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 75). Dual consciousness is the condition of the narrator of *Jane Eyre*, whose story is told, like Wordsworth's, as "emotion recollected in tranquillity." The presence of the two Janes, the one involved in the action and the narrator with the retrospective vision, is emphasized by the narrator's commentary which reveals her present, more mature perspective as she critiques her younger self. In the course of the story Jane's "I" grows, and she reflects on the progression of her own character.⁶ Already at age ten, Jane evidences "the savagery and reserve, sensitiveness and sharp-wittedness" that attract Rochester (Tillotson 303). Like Wordsworth, she traces the development of her character to the roots of her childhood. Her imprisonment in the red room is as frightening and formative for her as Wordsworth's terror during the boat stealing episode.⁷ Jane too is fostered by fear as well as beauty.

However, the paradigm of the Romantic quest, according to Abrams's explication, is gender specific:

The beginning and end of the journey is man's ancestral home, which is often linked with a female contrary from whom he has, upon setting out, been disparted. The goal . . . is to be reached by a gradual ascent, or else by a sudden breakthrough of imagination

or cognition; in either case, however, the achievement of the goal is pictured as a scene of recognition and reconciliation, and is often signalized by a loving union with the feminine other, upon which man finds himself thoroughly at home with himself, his milieu, and his family of fellow men. (*Natural Supernaturalism* 255)

Jane's story fits this pattern, though, in her case, the active role is the woman's. Jane is the subject of the story, not the passive female other. Therefore, what Brontë's novel presents is a transmutation of the quest into feminine terms.⁸ The gender inversion is strikingly alluded to in the novel at the point of Jane's discovery of the ruined Thornfield. She offers "an illustration" of her experience: a lover approaches his mistress, thinking she is asleep, and finds that she is dead (405-406; ch. 36).⁹ To illustrate the experience of her quest, she resorts to parable featuring traditional gender roles; the questing protagonist is male, and the female is rendered utterly passive by death. Though Jane is clearly the questing figure, as a woman she faces the challenge of emerging from a designation imposed by gender.

In order to realize her own identity, Jane must overcome the masculinist Romantic view of women as other that comes through the correlation of the feminine with nature. The morning after she becomes engaged to Rochester, she is "not surprised . . . to see that a brilliant June morning" welcomes her. "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" she asserts (244; ch. 24). Though she reverts to it again, this naive belief in a sympathetic nature cannot be sustained. When Jane flees Rochester and finds herself cut off from human society, she anticipates sympathy and looks for solace in "the universal mother, Nature," which "seemed to [her] benign and good," even loving. However, in equating herself with Nature or embracing it as her "mother," Jane imperils not only her perception of her identity but even her physical survival (Homans, *Bearing* 94). Jane

soon comes to acknowledge that she is "a human being and ha[s] a human being's wants" (308-310; ch. 28). She cannot, like Wordsworth's Lucy, simply be absorbed into "earth's diurnal course, / With Rocks and stones, and trees," for Jane proves to be more like Wordsworth himself than his female subject. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, Wordsworth comes into his own as a poet when his imagination burgeons independently of nature (599). Similarly, Jane learns that Wordsworth's assurance to his sister that nature would not betray the heart that loved her is not true. Nature is not always benign, and Jane realizes that she cannot rely on it but must establish her own identity.

That is not to say that Jane alienates herself from nature; rather, like Wordsworth, she learns that though she cannot correlate herself with nature, she can still appreciate its beauty. Thus she shares Wordsworth propensity for walking outside to take in the delights nature offers. In this respect the contrast between Jane and her cousin St. John is striking. Unlike Jane and the Rivers girls who favor walks that allow them to contemplate nature, St. John appears to reject the beauties of the physical world just as he feels compelled to reject a worldly love in the person of Rosamund Oliver. As Jane observes:

nature was not to him that treasury of delight it was to his sisters. He expressed once, and but once in my hearing, a strong sense of the rugged charm of the hills, and an inborn affection for the dark and hoary walls he called his home; but there was more of gloom than pleasure in the tone and words in which the sentiment was manifested; and never did he seem to roam the moors for the sake of their soothing silence -- never seek out or dwell upon the thousand peaceful delights they could yield. (335; ch. 29)

Just as St. John wishes to contain Jane's spirit, he wishes to contain her physically. When Jane is excited by the news that she has inherited her uncle's fortune and is able to benefit her cousins, "she walked fast through the room." St. John attempts to make her sit, but Jane disdains his "insinuation of helplessness and distraction" and recommences walking (368; ch. 33). Appropriately, St. John, whose aspirations deny the body, wishes to prevent Jane's physical self-expression. Yet Jane does not allow him to bar her from walking, asserting her own will to move freely, just as she, ultimately, prevents him from repressing her spirit when he attempts to subsume her identity into his aspirations..

Walking takes on special significance in this novel. "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day" is the statement that opens the autobiography of Jane Eyre. Although this statement of fact appears restrictive, the narrator does not at all regret her confinement. On the contrary: "I was glad of it; I never like long walks, especially on chilly afternoons," for the walks result in feeling cold, sad, and physically inferior. At Gateshead a walk is not a liberation of body and mind which culminates in a welcome return to home but a reminder of Jane's exclusion from society, her alienation from her environment. Instead of outdoor strolls, Jane prefers perusing books whose subjects and pictures allow her escape her unhappy situation with an excursion into a fantasy world.

Such remains her preference at Lowood, where the students' routine includes time to be spent in the garden, "a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect." The flower beds offer no attraction on this cold January day - "all was wintry blight and brown decay," dark and wet. Instead of advancing outward, Jane clings to the verandah and immerses herself in "the employment of watching and thinking" (41; ch. 5). The wasteland of the garden immures Jane within its limiting vista and, as Barbara Timm Gates observes, "replicates her dead-ended sense of self at this point" (37). The walks beyond the garden walls prove even more agonizing. On Sundays the girls, inadequately clothed and shod for the cold winds and wet snow, are forced to march the two miles to church. As Jane describes the trip, "We set out cold, we

arrived at church colder: during the morning service we became almost paralyzed" (53; ch. 7). Ironically, movement results in paralysis, for it is externally imposed movement intended to suppress rather than a manifestation of the individual will.

Yet Jane's situation does not remain thus. She works out a place for herself in the school as she progresses in her studies. She relates that she begins to learn French and masters "the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*" (67; ch. 9). It is significant that Jane marks her progress with her command over the verb "to be" which resonates with her own surname, Eyre (Betsinger 84; Yaeger 13). The acquisition of language here signifies Jane's coming into being herself. This marks a turning point for Jane. It is no coincidence that in the proceeding chapter she relates that with the advent of warmer weather she takes leisurely strolls and discovers "that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling edges" (68; ch. 10).

Yet, eventually, the boundaries marked by the horizon become too confining for Jane, and, like the aspiring Romantic poet who feels compelled to journey on, she longs for a new prospect. After eight years of the routine at Lowood, once the calming influence of Miss Temple has departed, Jane chafes at her confined life and yearns for "liberty":

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks. It was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile

limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two. How I longed to follow it farther! (77; ch. 10)

Feeling constrained by the narrow limits of her existence, she can only express her wanderlust by looking outside her window, for her physical travel is curtailed. Jane longs for a break in her confinement, to expand the restriction of her horizon, yet she can only trace the road as far as she can follow it with her eyes. She realizes that her prayer for liberty or stimulus cannot be granted and, accordingly, resigns herself to the request of "at least a new servitude."

Her new servitude is attained, and Jane arrives at Thornfield. Yet a new place does not bring contentment. Jane experiences the same pent up feelings she had at Lowood. Walking as far as the gates of the grounds of Thornfield, Jane confronts the limits placed on her; she can only look beyond but is immured within. The expanded vision allowed her by the prospect available from the top of the houses only increases her desire to see more. As she relates:

when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and I looked through them along the road; or when . . . I climbed the three staircases, raised the trapdoor of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline -- that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen; that then I desired more . . . than was here within my reach. (101; ch. 12)

As in *The Professor*, walking brings home the feeling of frustration for the protagonist who is constantly confined to orbit the same round. Far from content, as women were supposed to be, Jane shares the desire of the male Romantic poets to overpass limits and pursue more.

Walking itself, in the form of pacing, itself becomes an expression of Jane's discontent. As she explains:

restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it . . . , to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended -- a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (101; ch. 12)

Jane's pacing indicates her affiliation with Bertha who is described as running "backwards and forewards" in the room that imprisons her (278; ch. 26). The fact that Jane juxtaposes her the account of her agitated feelings with hearing the mad laughter (which she ascribes to Grace Poole) indicates the fundamental link between her and Bertha. As Bertha is physically confined, locked up in a room, Jane feels restricted by the stifling limitations of her life. Both women's restless spirit forces them to find a release. The difference, of course, is that Bertha's release only comes in violent acts of madness, the outcome of uncontrolled and unchanneled fiery energy, whereas Jane, like a Romantic poet, is able to find an outlet for her passionate intensity in imaginative composition. Though Jane is not able to go beyond bounds in actuality, her imagination can carry her beyond physical constraints and provide the sensation she seeks.

Ultimately, when she sets out on a walk toward town, Jane finds what she desires not in the busy world of the town itself, but in the lonely woods on the way. It is there that the monotony of her life is broken when she first meets Rochester. The initial encounter between them proceeds from Rochester's requiring her assistance after falling from his horse. Helping out this stranger gives her some satisfaction, for "it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive." Afterwards she feels loathe to return to Thornfield: "To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation; . . . to quell wholly the faint excitement wakened by my walk" (107; ch. 12). However, as it turns out, that excitement has entered the house in the person of Rochester. That he incarnates the prospect Jane sought by looking through windows is suggested by the dismissal of the outdoor view subsequent to his arrival at Thornfield. Jane "walked to the window; but nothing was to be seen thence" (110; ch. 13). Physically, the view is obscured by snow and darkness, but it also points Jane's shift in interest from outside to inside.

Rochester's presence redirects Jane's interest, as her walks indicate. On her return from Gateshead to Thornfield, Jane's thoughts are all directed toward the house. She opts to walk the final distance of the trip, though she does not concentrate so much on the beauty of the summer evening as on the joy of coming home to Rochester. As she tells him, "I am strangely glad to get back again to you; and wherever you are is my home -- my only home" (233; ch. 22). Likewise, when she returns from Moor House to Thornfield, she chooses to advance the final two miles of the journey on foot and feels "like the messenger-pigeon flying home" (404; ch. 36). As home is not determined by place so much as by Rochester's presence, when he is absent from Thornfield, Jane is not content in the house. On a stormy night, impatient for his return, Jane sets out to meet Rochester, reasoning "better tire my limbs than strain my heart" (264; ch. 25). She starts out a fast pace then runs when she sees him; once she encounters him, she jumps up to join him on his horse. She recalls: "It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind, delivering my trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering

through space" (262; ch. 25). She finds release for her storming feelings in running outside where her rush of emotions correspond to the rush of the torrential winds.

Walks in the garden take on new significance when they are shared with Rochester. The one who suggests the walk utilizes it as an occasion for self-revelation. All the Thornfield walks together are initiated by Rochester. On their first one, he reveals his history with Celine (131-35; ch. 15). Their second walk together takes place in the early morning following Jane's vigil over the wounded Mason. Rochester asks Jane to picture herself in his situation and to answer if he is not "justified in overleaping an obstacle of custom" in order to be linked with one who will secure "his own peace of mind and regeneration of life" (206; ch. 20). He alludes to his attachment to Jane but stops short of the disclosure, shifting to talking of Blanche Ingram as his intended. Rochester reverses this order on another walk. He begins by talking about his supposedly imminent marriage to Blanche and the necessity of sending Jane off to another position in Ireland; he only admits his love for her once Jane expresses her own passionate feelings (236-43 ch. 23). St. John also utilizes the walk to gain control over Jane. "Now, Jane, you shall take a walk; and with me," he tells her, allowing no other company, for he uses the opportunity of talking with her alone to ask her to marry him so that she could accompany him to India (382; ch. 34).

However, once Jane is able to finally overcome St. John and decidedly refuse him, she comes into her own. As she says, "It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force" (401; ch. 35). Confident of the decision she makes, she is the one in control. Consequently, after the year of separation, when Jane returns to the blind and maimed Rochester, now living in Fernden, the tables are turned. Now she is the one with the story to tell, and it is her turn to propose and lead a walk. She assures him, "The rain is over and gone, and there is a tender shining after it: you shall have a walk soon" (420; ch. 37). As the word "tender" indicates, the assurance is not just of the calm weather but of the resolution of their relationship. While they are seated outside, Jane

recounts her story of the events that befell her since her flight from him. Just as he had provoked her jealousy by hinting at admiration for Blanche Ingram, she lets him grow anxious about her relationship with St. John. Ultimately, though, she reassures him of her love and her desire to marry him.

After recording their marriage, Jane devotes several paragraphs to the highlights of the ensuing ten years. As in *The Professor*, the conclusion appears to be devoted to depicting the successful marriage of the central couple but ends on the note of the outsider. In *The Professor* Hunsden intrudes, and in the closing paragraphs of *Jane Eyre* St. John's words in his final letter are recorded. The apparent oddness of the latter shift in focus stimulates critical remark.¹⁰ However, this ending becomes comprehensible in light of this device in *The Professor*. Though their characters are dissimilar, both St. John and Hunsden represent Romantic extremes. Hunsden remains a presence in the Crimsworth household as a reminder of their own covert Romantic spirit which they seek to suppress. On the other hand, Jane and Rochester acknowledge the Romantic spirit within themselves, though it is of the domesticated variety. Their marriage weds male and female Romanticism, and they realize a transcendent love in an earthly relationship, a union of spirit as well as body. The description of St. John approaching his death, the ultimate eventuality of religious transcendence, as a joyous event serves as a contrast to Jane's own life affirming story. Though she does not invalidate St. John's chosen destiny in itself, for Jane, who as a child responded to Helen's announcement that she is "going to God" by questioning the nature of God and the existence of heaven, the vague promise for the future is inadequate (74; ch. 9). Jane seeks to achieve Romantic transcendence not in the realm of religious aspiration but in the physical world, and she triumphs in that achievement.

¹ For a study comparing the two novels, which focuses on the parallels between Jane's experiences and the monster's, see the article by Arlene Young, "The Monster Within: The Alien Self in *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein*," *Studies in the Novel* 23.3 (1991): 325-38.

² Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990) 228-29, 208.

³For a critical view on the nonviolent revolutionary ideals of female Romanticism, see Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism & Gender*, pp. 66,210.

⁴The *ignis fatuus* is a recurring image. Jane tells herself, "it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead *ignis-fatuus*-like into miry wilds whence there is no extrication" (150; ch. 16). Rochester evokes the image. When Jane returns from paying respects to her dying aunt in the Reed household, her master greets her teasingly, saying, he would touch her to test if she is indeed real, "but I'd as soon offer to take hold of a blue *ignis fatuus* light in a marsh" (232; ch. 22).

⁵When *The Prelude* was released, Brontë not only read it herself but recommended it to others.

⁶ Karen Chase, *Eros and Psyche* (New York and London: Methuen, 1984) 51 and Igor Webb, *From Custom to Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 77,83.

⁷Gilbert and Gubar note that the significance of the red-room is marked "not only from its position in the narrative but also from Jane's own recollection of the experience at crucial moments throughout the book" and that it represents the "central . . . motif of enclosure and escape" (341).

⁸ Melodie Monahan "Heading Out is not Going Home: Jane Eyre," *SEL* 28.4 (Autumn 1988): 589-608.
Also see Bellis and Simons.

⁹This parable is very close to what occurs in an early Angrian romance, "Albion and Marina."

¹⁰See Joyce Carol Oates, "Romance and Anti-Romance: From Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 61 (1985): 44-58 and John Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 143.

Chapter 6

Shirley: Convention and Subversion

After *Jane Eyre*, Brontë essayed a different type of novel, one which brings to light some of the tensions inherent in her previous work. With her third novel, Brontë explores the contradictions inherent in a woman's espousal of a male dominated Romanticism. This work, which shares the bleak outlook of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, manifests Brontë's reservations about Romanticism. Though her concern with a woman's self-expression in the male literary realm is manifested in her earlier works, in *Shirley* she actively interrogates the differences between male and female Romanticism, revealing her ambivalence about Romanticism. Brontë alternatively validates and retracts her Romantic sympathies throughout the novel without resolving the questions she raises. Yet, that very act of raising questions that defy resolution is an outgrowth of Romanticism which, through irony and fragmented works, challenges the notion of fixity. The shifts in plot, perspective, and focal points in Brontë's third novel points to the realization that the ideal of resolving unity is unattainable. Therefore, *Shirley* marks a crucial step in the evolution of Brontë's writing.

One of the Romantic themes explored in *Shirley*, which Brontë touches on in *Jane Eyre*, is the inadequacy of expression; imaginative vision cannot be realized in the material world, for its actualization falls short of its ideal essence. Shelley alludes to the inevitable failure of representation in *Prometheus Unbound*, asserting, "the deep truth is imageless" (2.116). The concept of the faded vision that occurs in transcription underlies Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," the preface of which attributes its fragmentary state to the disruption between transcription and subconscious composition. As a Romantic artist, Jane Eyre is aware of the shortcoming of her expression and relates that her paintings could not completely actualize the visions of her imagination; in *Shirley* Brontë

emphasizes the gap between visions and their realizations. In addition, as a third-person narrator, who demonstrates herself to be clearly in control of the presentation of the text, she "reveals what [the supposedly autobiographical account of] *Jane Eyre* successfully effaces, the fictionality of novelistic mythmaking" (Gilead 312). By pointing to herself as creator of the text, the narrator reveals the mythmaking and destabilizes the integrity of the narrative. As Mellor writes in *English Romantic Irony*, "the narrator who hovers about yet within the poem, [or novel, in this case,] simultaneously creates and de-creates its fictional plot" (60). Highlighting the fictionality of her writing by revealing her narrative control, Brontë employs Romantic irony to destabilize the myths she contrives in *Shirley*.

Mythmaking in *Jane Eyre* is what allows for the ultimate triumph of the heroine whose marriage reconciles the force of Romanticism and domestic stability. Though Jane took issue with male Romanticism by rejecting the transcendence that disdains human relationships offered by St. John Rivers, she does not negate its value altogether. In contrast, in *Shirley* male Romanticism is stripped of any laudably higher purpose; its quality of domination reduced to the mundane. In *Shirley* the role of aspiring Romantic hero is played by a tradesman whose ambitions are strictly material. His defining mission in life is to acquire wealth, and he disavows any inclination that will interfere with his pursuing his ultimate objective. Just as St John passed over Rosamund for the sake of pursuing his religious goals, Robert essays to overcome his feelings for Caroline, not wishing to hamper his career goals by marriage to someone who cannot increase his wealth. As St. John proposes marriage to Jane to acquire her help in his missionary work, Robert proposes to Shirley to gain her fortune. The fundamental difference between them is that Robert's aspirations are limited to commercial enterprise; therefore, he represents the extreme of ambition unredeemed by transcendent ideals. Though Robert marries Caroline, who represents the feminine values of Romanticism, their

marriage does not seem to reconcile the two as Jane's marriage does, for Caroline is ultimately silenced and Robert's visions prevail.

As a third-person narrative, *Shirley* does not seem to fit into Brontë's sequence of novels which are written as autobiographies.¹ Despite its title, it is not devoted to the story of Shirley² who only enters the novel in the middle of the eleventh chapter. Up until that point the novel seems to be telling the story of Caroline Helstone, who remains the central focus and the primary directive of the narrative's perspective. However, the omniscient narrator also dwells on scenes that do not relate to Caroline and frequently breaks the integrity of the narrative fiction by intruding into the text. Consequently, most critics have followed in the path of George Lewes who complained of the lack of "artistic fusion" in *Shirley* (Allott 164).³ Judith Mitchell calls *Shirley* "the weakest of Brontë's mature novels";⁴ she attributes its "weakness" to the discrepancy "between the tone and the polemic," which arouses doubts about marriage as a guarantee of happiness, "and the events and their outcomes," which lead up to the conventional conclusion of the happy union of the hero and heroine (58). Brontë is further charged with inept handling of the genre she adopts by Inga Stina Ewbank. The novel's shift "from natural dialogue to stiff generalising comment" is taken as an indication "that Charlotte Brontë is not altogether happy with her role as omniscient narrator, and that the novel lacks a narrative focus" (187-88). Moreover, the interpolations of myth and romance are found to be "mere interludes of imaginative relief" that are incongruous with "a work of fiction meant to be realistic" (Eagleton 85; Hunt 111).

The problem with these critical readings of *Shirley* is that they seek to impose what Peter Garrett calls "a false unity" on a novel "in which different, incompatible principles of coherence are in play" (8). Brontë's intention in writing *Shirley* is not merely to compose a realistic historical novel. Though, like *Jane Eyre*, it is set in the Romantic period, what is registered in *Shirley* is not the triumph of Romanticism but the gap between Romantic vision and the reality that the novel portrays.⁵ The apparent disunity

of the novel is the result of Brontë's "refusal to accede to any of the romantic fantasies that emerge in the narrative as potential havens of harmony, or stores of resolution" (Bodenheimer 39). Brontë highlights her contrivance in the construction of this novel. Such "fictional devices" as the discovery of the missing mother and the conventional wrap-up in marriage are introduced as admittedly improbable solutions to a story which could not be resolved "by its own internal logic" (Eagleton 91). Indeed, the living happily ever after ending appears to be externally imposed. As indicated by Brontë's declaration in *The Spell*, one of the productions of her juvenilia, her nod to novelistic conventions effectively subverts them: "A novel can scarcely be called a novel unless it ends in a marriage, therefore I herewith tack to, add, and communicate the following *postscriptum*" (143). The author does not attempt to make the tacked on marriage ending appear to be the natural outcome of the novel. On the contrary, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, the self-reflexive title of the last chapter, "The Winding-Up," and the authorial proclamation, "I think the varnish has been put on very nicely," (588; ch. 37) emphasize the fabricated nature of the novel and "qualify the happy ending" (397). Brontë is not merely varnishing but directly pointing to the gloss and the disparity between the ideal of romance and reality. Playing on "what Barthes calls the *deja-lu*, the already read (and the already written), in the writer's and the reader's experience of other literature, in a whole set of intertextual interlockings," (Brooks 19) Brontë subverts them in *Shirley*.

As in *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor*, *Shirley* features walks that mark significant advances in the novel and lead to imaginative visions. The climactic battle that occurs at the mill is seen through the eyes of the heroines who steal out at night and walk across the Hollow to get there. In general, Shirley and Caroline share a love for walking in the open air and an admiration for the sublimity of the heath (219; ch. 12). Their discussion of going on a walk to Nunnley wood echoes the sense of walking depicted in Shelley's poem "To Jane. The Invitation":

Away, away from men and towns
 To the wild wood and the downs,
 To the silent wilderness
 where the soul need not repress
 Its music lest it should not find
 An echo in another's mind
 While the touch of Nature's art
 Harmonizes heart to heart. -

(ll. 21-28)

They plan to take the walk without any other company, "away from men." The exclusion by gender is deliberate, for they agree that "[a]n excursion becomes quite a different thing when there are gentlemen of the party" (221; ch. 12). When men are a part of the group, the walk is altered from a tour of nature to an excursion into sexual relationships. For the walks intensify attraction. The conduciveness of a walk to advancing amatory relationships is evidenced by the strolls shared by Caroline and Robert. At the end of their first shared walk in the novel, Caroline feels elated, and Robert worries about succumbing to his feelings. Another walk occasions intimate conversation and arouses Robert's desire to stay with Caroline, though he is forced to leave to avoid a hostile confrontation with her uncle. Given the romantic significance with which walking together becomes infused, it is little wonder that Caroline assumes that Robert and Shirley are in love with each other when she sees them walking together (120; ch. 6; 255-60, 239; ch. 13).

Walking also contributes to imaginative activity. As Shirley composes in her imagination, she "walks through the room"; she does not speak "while the trance is upon her," but keeps pacing (373-74; ch. 22). Caroline also walks about when her imagination is active. As she envisions her mother, she "pace[s] to and fro beneath the garden-wall,

dreaming" (316; ch. 18). A walk also links the events of the novel with the narrator's time frame. The novel telescopes forward to the present of the narrator. As Romantic irony functions in poetry to undermine the "stability" of the text by situating it in a "context" that is clearly set "outside or beyond the poem," (Simpson 140) Brontë subverts the stability of her novel by moving outside its present; the frame highlights the fact that what it surrounds is merely a picture. As in Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," the narrator abruptly shifts to the present moment of writing, putting the events of the novel into the distant past. She writes, "The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes" (599; ch. 37).

The final scene of the novel is not the view of the double wedding but of the "mighty mill" forty years later (599; ch. 37). The mill in *Shirley* functions as it does in the writings of William Blake, as a symbol of the relentlessly mechanical world. Urizen, Blake's embodiment of limitation, is linked with the concept of the mill. "The mill also represents the dissolving of 'living form,' and the 'dark Satanic mills'" signify "unimaginative mechanism" Thus in *Samson Agonistes*, Blake describes Samson: "Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves." (Frye 289-90; Weiskel 65). Blake also invokes the image of the mill in "And Did These Feet" and "A Vision for the Last Judgment," as well as in his personal correspondence. In a letter to William Hayley on October 23, 1804, Blake rejoices over his emancipation: "I was a slave bound in a mill among beasts and devils; these beasts and these devils are now, together with myself, become children of light and liberty." The mill obstructs light and liberty from those under its dominion. As the center of existence, it "offers the individual almost no way to assert his/her inner life in creative sustaining work, and offers few landscapes for the imagination to work upon" (Qualls 49). The shadow cast by the towering mill in *Shirley* dims the light of imagination.

Although the novel extols the virtues of poetry, the power of poetic imagination does not hold sway in the world of *Shirley*. The narrator of *Jane Eyre* could assert: "I know poetry is not dead, nor genius lost; nor has Mammon gained power over either, to bind or slay; they will both assert their existence, their presence, their liberty and strength again one day . . . they not only live, but reign and redeem" (354; ch. 32). However, in *Shirley* poetry has no power to redeem, for it is overshadowed by the forces embodied in the "mighty mill" whose ashes cover the "once green, and lone, and wild" Hollow (599; ch. 37). The landscape that once invited a poetic perspective is now barren. The diminished prospect for imagination forebodes the decline of poetry. It would follow that the narrator's prediction that "[p]oetry will not exist for[one of the characters], either in literature or in life; its best effusions will sound to him mere rant and jargon" (169; ch. 9) would apply to people in general. Imagination is blocked off by the towering mill; the only light that penetrates is the light of common day. Though *Shirley* prophesizes that her cousin Henry will grow to be a poet, his lameness indicates the present weakness of poetic authority. The only writer present in the novel is Sir Philip, whose inane doggerel is certainly not in the category of "real poetry" (438; ch. 26; 119; ch. 6).

The qualities of genuine poetry are distinguished by the heroines. With echoes of Wordsworth's remarks on eighteenth-century poets, *Shirley* views what others admire as "cant, flourish, and tinsel, . . . as different from real poetry as the gorgeous and massy vase of mosaic is from the little cup of pure metal; or, to give the reader a choice of similes, as the milliner's artificial wreath is from the fresh-gathered lily of the field." The touchstone for poetry is the purity that stems from organic integrity. Caroline likewise alludes to the Wordsworthian definition, "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," in her declaration "that nobody should write poetry to exhibit intellect or attainment . . . Who cares for learning - who cares for fine words in poetry? And who does not care for feeling - real feeling - however simply, even rudely

expressed?" Privileging feeling over craft, Caroline expresses a Romantic understanding of the celebration of poetry. She pronounces the "gift of poetry [to be] the most divine bestowed on man" (231,233, 232; ch. 12). The true poet's purpose is not to flaunt his proficiency but to effect the "connection between man and the divine power" (Miller 14). Poetry bridges the gap between the transcendent and mundane, offering a glimpse of divinity, the spark of which is in humanity. As Shelley asserts: "Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them or in language or in form sends them forth among mankind. . . . Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" (*Defence* 505). It is in that sense that Shirley tells her uncle, "there is nothing really valuable in this world, there is nothing glorious in the world to come, that is not poetry!" (514; ch. 31). Though the novel validates that belief, it indicates that the ideal of poetry is no longer realizable.

The reality portrayed in *Shirley* offers a marked contrast with the ideals found in poetry. Though the poetic epitome may still be admired, the everyday reality renders it unattainable. Caroline reflects on "Solomon's virtuous woman" and esteems it "a worthy model." Yet, she questions if it is now possible for women to "reach this royal standard" (378; ch. 23). Even if they should aspire to do so, the circumstances do not permit women to realize such ideals in themselves. The failure of poetry is manifested by Shirley herself. Though she has the ability to "borrow of imagination what reality" does not proffer and thus possesses the potential to be a poet, she remains only an unwritten one. She does not overcome her indolence and transcribe her glorious visions, for "she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of" her gift (299; ch. 17; 374; ch. 23). Therefore, in Keats's terms, she is not a poet who "pours out a balm upon the world" but a mere "dreamer" (*Fall of Hyperion* 1.199,201). Though the power of poetry exists in potential, it is not actualized, and compositions of imagination remain unwritten poems.

The one example of Shirley's imaginative composition that we do see in written form is "La Premier Femme Savante," the *devoir* she wrote as a pupil. Echoing the beginning of *Shirley*, the *devoir* opens with a reference to "the dawn of time" and, also like the novel, it culminates in marriage. The union in this case is not that of any mere mortals but the joining of Genius to Humanity (455-60; ch. 27). As Ewbank remarks, this union of the divine intimates "Blakean allegory" (200). Blake's Zoas originate as an androgynous whole and separate out into male and female parts, called emanations, which ultimately come to reunite into wholeness. Likewise, in Shirley's myth, the male representative of Genius is coupled with the female representative of Humanity and returns her "again into the heaven" (459). Humanity is represented by a woman named Eva. As her name indicates, she represents an alternative rendering of the first woman. Taking the central role in the quest for love, she offers a gender inversion of Keats's *Endymion* as well as Shelley's *Alastor*. It is she who is the Romantic solitary figure, a mortal in search of a mate from the divine realm. Thus Shirley's *devoir* follows what Brownstein presents as the heroine-centered novel's "rewriting of romance" in which "a conscious female protagonist takes the quester's place." That "the representative of searching humanity" (Brownstein xxi.) is recast as a female is made explicit in *Shirely*, for Eva is presented as the embodiment of humanity.

Eva's story enacts the Romantic quest in which "a dialectic of love" is consummated "by uniting the Imagination with its Bride" (Bloom 17). Brontë's Genius is synonymous with Imagination. For Brontë, as for the Romantic poets, the import of love extends beyond its association with an emotion related to eroticism. As Shelley asserts: "The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exist in thought, action, or person, not our own. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause" (*Defence* 487-88). This, of course, is the theme of *Prometheus Unbound*. The direct result of Prometheus's repudiation of

hatred is his reunion with Asia. Abrams gives the rationale for this conception: "If essential evil is equated with the aggregate of what drives things apart, then essential good will be equated with the aggregate of what pulls the sundered parts together; and for this centripetal force the most eligible general name is 'love'" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 294). In this sense, Caroline declares that "love is a divine virtue" (313; ch. 17).

The story of Eva culminates in a relationship of love. This would appear to parallel the marriage plot of the novel. However, in the world of this novel, love does not conquer all. Mrs. Pryor, whose own marriage made her miserable, warns Caroline: "Two people can never literally be as one" (366; ch. 21). The truth of reality contradicts ideal vision. In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley attempts to win over the woman he loves with a promise of transcendent consummation:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! Wherefore two?
 One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
 'Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
 Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
 Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
 Burning, yet ever inconsumable:

(ll. 573-79)

However, *Shirley* proves the Romantic concept of perfect spiritual union to be unfeasible. The novel's historical contextualization reveals a violent reality that undermines the possibility of true harmony. The novel is set in a period of war, the import of which extends beyond the battle abroad with the forces of Napoleon; England is beset by internal wars in which workers threatened with displacement by machines launch attacks against their employers. Though *Shirley* ends with the promise of harmony, signaled by the trumpet that announces the restoration of peace that merges with chime of wedding

bells, it is subverted by the cacophony of the background of unhappy marriages and violent clashes, and the ultimate prospect of the novel is one of discord.

In the divided world of *Shirley* it is appropriate that the principle hero is a Robert Moore, the prototypical "divided man" (Shapiro 226). Brontë had touched on the concept of the divided self in her prior works, exploring the idea of external and internal selves already in the Angrian tales and describing William Crimsworth's surprise at his wife's apparent ability to be the quintessentially professional school directress one moment and his docile wife the next in *The Professor*. Yet, it is only in *Shirley* that personality division becomes key to the novel's theme. The theme of doubles and divisions within the self is a major motif of Romanticism. It is actually a female Romantic, Mary Shelley, who created the most famous illustration of the self divided in her creation of the monster as the scientist's alter ego in *Frankenstein*. The monster, whose definitive desire is to find companionship, is the complement of the strictly rational scientist who shuns human contact and the two function as doubles. The theme of the double is also contemplated by Coleridge in *Christabel* in which the title character confronts her "psychological double" in the person of Geraldine (Magnuson 102). Such reverse mirror images of character subvert assumptions about essential identity and the integrity of the self. Divisions within the self are presented by Keats in his depiction of the serpent-woman Lamia and the goddess Cynthia, who takes on the form of an Indian maid in *Endymion*. Even the poet-speaker is presented with a split identity; one part transcends physical being in poetic visions, and the other, called "sole-self," is inextricably tied to mundane reality in "Ode to a Nightingale". These poems do not offer a resolution to the question of identity; one does not prove to be more genuine than the other. Consequently, there is no definitive self but a composite identity that remains indeterminate.

In *Shirley* the concept of divided self is physically manifested at the point that Louis is first introduced. He appears as Robert's double, manifesting the actuality of a

"Robert, and no Robert" (196; ch. 23) that is inherent in the character of Robert Moore. However, unlike the split of personality that occurs in two doubles that Brontë presents in the correspondence between Hunsden and Crimsworth in *The Professor* or Bertha and Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Robert Moore is divided within himself. Even his national classification as an "Anglo-Belgian" (213; ch. 11) indicates a split identity. Robert Moore's divided identity is not externally imposed but the outcome of self-differentiation. There is a marked difference between the "Robert" who is Caroline's cousin and "Mr. Moore," the "tradesman" (145; ch. 7). As he admits to Caroline, "I find in myself, Lina, two natures; one for the world and business, and one for home and leisure. Gerard Moore is a hard dog, brought up to mill and market: the person you call your cousin Robert is sometimes a dreamer, who lives elsewhere than in Cloth-hall and counting-house" (258; ch. 13). The "kind in private" Robert is true to his heart, affectionately involved, unlike the "stern" Mr. Moore (112; ch. 6). The division of Robert's character is due to his commitment to the mechanized realm of his mill, which, like Victor Frankenstein's commitment to scientific pursuit, alienates him from the natural world. Thus Robert represents the extreme ambition of male Romanticism reduced to commercial enterprise. Indeed, Robert's "mill is [his] castle," which, along with his trade and machinery, constitutes the trinity that he devotes himself to (56-57; ch. 2). Thus Robert comes to speak of himself in terms of the equipment familiar to him: "The machinery of all my nature; the whole engine of this human mill: the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst" (496; ch. 30). His identity becomes subjugated to his occupation.

Robert's brother, Louis, also is constrained by his position. As a man who must work as a paid subordinate to survive, he accepts that he will be subject to insolence and disrespect. Rather than attempting to escape his lot, he takes as his motto, "Look Life in its iron face: stare Reality out of its brassy countenance" (464; ch. 27). Yet, he becomes "a rapt, romantic lunatic" when he gives free reign to his feelings in the private record of his journal (488; ch. 29). It is in this journal that he records the break in his habitual

reserve that culminates in an open declaration to Shirley. At that point, he reveals the difference between the inner and outer man. Shirley, surprised at his ardor, tells him, "you are not like yourself." Louis responds that, on the contrary, "I stand before you *myself*. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man" (577; ch. 36). Louis declares that his appearance as the restrained tutor is only an external manifestation; it is the passionate man who is concealed from the world's view that is his essential self. Like his brother he has both a public and a private self.

The theme of division is emphasized by the bifurcated focus of the novel, which presents two heroines. Shirley and Caroline are contrasted in terms of social and economic situation, as well as appearance and character; yet, as counterparts, they complement each other. As critics note, Shirley is Caroline's "double," and together they make up two sides of a single coin (Gilbert and Gubar 382). The two are linked as sisters by their affinity of feelings and by their relationship to Mrs. Pryor, the mother figure for Shirley and Caroline's biological mother. Indeed, Caroline asserts that her relationship with Shirley is equal to that of "sisters" (265; ch. 14). Shirley and Caroline do in fact become sister-in-law when they are married to the two heroes, Robert and Louis Moore.

Though Shirley appears as the stronger character, she presents an apparent paradox that is inherent in Louis' address to her as "my pupil, my sovereign." On the one hand, she plays the part of the autonomous "Captain Keeldar" who feels suffocated by the idea of losing her independence to marriage, after which she would "never be [her] own mistress more." On the other hand, she is a woman who desires a "master" who could "control" and "punish" her. The contradiction is the result of the conflict between alliance to masculinist Romanticism and her identity as a woman. Shirley, who delights in her "man's name" and "man's position" claims the prerogative of men in her class. As a mill-owner, she holds the authoritative position of a man and boasts of "read[ing] just what gentlemen read" in the newspapers (213; ch. 11; 578; ch. 35; 223; ch. 12). As her reading is the same as men's, so are her aspirations. She desires the quest and conquest

that is traditionally male.⁶ Thus her Romantic spirit is shaped by the male-centered perspective of Romanticism in which women are viewed as others. Consequently, even in her ostensibly feminist myth-making, Shirley adheres to the traditional gender divisions in reincarnating the biblical Eve as nature and representing Genius as male. As Tayler observes, "genius" is ascribed "to the male" character, suggesting that "men have it, women marry it" (181). Thus Shirley places herself in the subordinate position that women hold in the masculinist Romantic conception and declares that she would only marry a man who would be her "*master*" (514; ch. 31).

Like the male Romantics, Shirley takes Milton as her starting point for her own mythmaking, but her vision proves untenable. Though Shirley admits that "Milton was great," she questions if he was "good," if "his heart" equaled his mind. Thus she holds the same sentiments as Keats who asserted that Milton "did not think into the human heart as Wordsworth has done" (Rollins I.281). Shirley's critique, however, takes on a feminist twist. She admits that Milton succeeded in seeing angels and devils, but when he "tried to see the first woman," she insists that he failed. She repudiates his vision of Eve, concurring with Wollstonecraft who inferred from his description that women "were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wings of contemplation," (*Vindication* 31; ch. 2). Quoting from *Paradise Lost* the lines, "what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes," Shirley asserts that Milton's conception of woman extended only as far as his cook (314-15; ch. 18). In her place, Shirley presents an Eve who possesses "the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, - the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, - . . . a woman - Titan" (315; ch. 18). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Shirley's version is more akin "to Milton's Satan than to his Eve." She not only bears Prometheus but upholds the qualities he represents. Moreover, her titanic size aligns her with Satan himself, who is described by Milton as

"huge" and "of monstrous size" (196). Thus Shirley infuses the sublime quality of Milton's Satan into her Eve, creating a Romantic vision that would have met with the approval of Wollstonecraft who took exception to "Milton's pleasing picture of paradisaical happiness," for she could not envy the happy couple and confessed that "with conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, [she] turned to hell for sublimer objects" *Vindication* 37; ch.2). Shirley brings that Romantic aspect of hell into her conception of the primordial couple.

However, in sketching her vision of the primordial woman, Shirley falls into the trap of male Romanticism. She correlates the feminine with the other, as the force of nature rather than a human subject. By saying that she wishes to stay in the company of her "mother Eve, in these days called Nature," Shirley errs in linking herself to the conception of the feminine as nature and in assuming that her love for it is reciprocated. Thus she puts herself in the position of Wordsworth's Lucy who is, in effect, adopted by nature in "Three Years She Grew". Though Wordsworth wrote in "Tintern Abbey," "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (ll. 121-22) he projected this naive assumption onto his sister. For himself, he realized that a divorce from nature is inevitable for coming into oneself as an independent subject. This is the realization Jane arrives at during her flight from Rochester, when she find that "mother nature" cannot be depended on for nurturance.

Picturing maternal love in a more "gentle human form," Caroline casts aside Shirley's mythical vision of woman as too "vague and visionary," (316; ch. 18). Caroline, whose main desire is to complete her domestic circle, as manifested by her deep longing for her mother, represents the values of feminine Romanticism. In accordance with Romantic thought, her primary purpose is to attain love, and it is feeling the lack of it that causes her decline. However, though she does ultimately marry Robert, her longing for a loving relationship is actually first fulfilled by her reunion with her mother. Therefore, though her life is contingent on interpersonal connections, in accordance with

feminine Romanticism, it is not defined only in terms of her relation to a man as his reflection or projection. It is the woman's dependency on a man that she protest against. As she tells Shirley:

"[M]en and women are so different: they are in such a different position. Women have so few things to think about -- men so many: you may have a friendship for a man, while he is almost indifferent to you. Much of what cheers your life may be dependent on him, while not a feeling or interest of moment in his eyes may have reference to you." (234; ch. 12)

The contrast between the experience of men and women in their relationships to each other that Caroline draws is strikingly similar to that presented by Byron through the voice of Julia in *Don Juan*. In her letter to Don, she writes:

"Man's love is of man's life a thing a part,
 'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
 The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;
 Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
 Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
 And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
 Men have all the resources, we but one,
 To love again, and be again undone.

(l.194)

Though Don Juan does move on to his next conquest, and the narrator of the poem breezily continues, the issue Julia raises is one of serious concern for women trapped by their situations. If women are only equipped with the capacity to love and have no other resources, the question arises, what is there for them to do in the absence of a person to devote themselves to? Challenging this issue, Caroline searches for the answer as she contemplates her own purpose in life: "What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my

place in the world?" (190; ch. 10)⁷ It is as a woman aware of the limitations imposed on her gender that she expresses her Romantic spirit in protest. This spirit that is usually veiled by her "quiet" appearance is the "force and depth somewhere within" that Shirley observes. (265; ch. 14).

Like Jane Eyre at Lowood, Caroline longs to break the monotony of her life and find some new servitude if not liberty. But Jane is a free agent, unhampered by family ties, whereas Caroline is her uncle's ward and thus subject to his authority. Her uncle epitomizes patriarchal oppression, for his attitude toward his wife is blamed for her early death. Declaring that all there is to being a "clever woman" is "shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making," he has no comprehension of his niece's state of mind. Sure that he can easily solve her discontent, he offers her "two guineas to buy a new frock" and enjoins her to "run away and amuse yourself." Caroline mentally retorts, "What with? My doll?" (122; ch. 7; 205; ch. 11). Unable to actually change her life, Caroline can only register her protest in words with which she expresses her frustration. Her apostrophe, "Men of England!" (378; ch. 22) is actually a feminist rendition of Shelley's song by the same name. Both demand social change; whereas the poet decries the servitude of England's workingmen, Caroline calls out for the emancipation of women across class lines who are denied education and independence. The rage she feels at feeling constrained as a woman is belied by her generally quiet demeanor. In this respect, her correspondent is Mrs. Yorke's daughter Rose who ardently burst out only "once in a twelvemonth," though she generally appears docile (390; 386; ch. 23). Both have a latent spiritedness, and its force cannot be completely suppressed.

The parallelism that exists between Rose Yorke and Caroline Helstone's accounts for the younger girl's understanding of the stultifying situation of the rector's niece. Rose, who desires travel and the opportunity to exercise her talents, tells Caroline that she would be better off as "enchanted lady in a fairy tale" than in her present stagnant state (385; ch. 23). Though the fairy tale paradigm, complete with dragons, prisoners,

and spells, does take over the novel in the thirty-second and thirty-third chapters, Caroline does not play the part of the "enchanted lady" but of the rescuing knight. The gender roles are reversed, and it is hero, Robert Moore, who is rendered a passive prisoner, guarded over by the formidable Mrs. Horsefall, "a sort of giantess," termed "not woman, but a dragon" (526; ch. 32). With the help of Martin Yorke, who keeps the household "under a spell," Caroline is able to gain access to the imprisoned Moore (529; ch. 33). However, the real enchantment lies in the effect of Robert's experience. As Elizabeth Langland explains, Robert is humbled and softened as a result of undergoing "enforced privation, seclusion isolation, and helplessness characteristic of women's experience." His illness gives him a taste of what Caroline has had to endure and makes him realize that he too must depend on the kindness of others (31). Caroline refers to this shared experience of illness when she tells him, "I understand your feelings: I experienced something like it" (542; ch. 33). This is Caroline's moment of ascendancy, for it is at this point that Robert's situation forces him to validate her feminine Romantic values and accept the primacy of domestic affections.

Yet the novel does not conclude with Caroline's triumph, far from it. Though she does gain what she wants in marrying Robert, her opposition to his plans go unheeded. Ultimately, it is "the manufacturer's day-dreams [that are] embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes," and the pristine woods cherished by Caroline are gone. As he is planning out his industrialized transformation of the landscape, Robert does not even respond to Caroline's protesting that he "will change out blue hill-country air into the Stillbro' smoke atmosphere." Perceiving that her protests are ignored, Caroline resigns herself to silence; she can only "mutely" offer him a kiss. Her silence persists, according to the narrator's housekeeper, who describes Shirley's looks, manner, and style, but about Caroline all she says is that she "was quieter-like." (598-99; ch. 37). This "double silence surrounding Caroline" is especially significant in light of Brontë's emphasis on the essentiality of voice (Rabine 132).

Seeing in the novel leads to misapprehensions rather than an accurate perception of character, which results only from the intimacy established by talking. The superficial discernment of vision is devalued in relation to more intimate knowledge which leads to feeling. As Louis says of Shirley, once they have declared their feelings for each other, "Once I only *saw* her beauty, now I *feel* it" (568; ch. 36). The limits of one-sided vision are transcended by the mutual interchange of conversation. The exchange of words effects the exchange of feelings, and erotic moments are marked by conversation. Such a moment occurs when Caroline, sensing that Robert has softened, tells him, "Oh! you are different now: at present, I dare speak to you." Their talk culminates in three kisses at parting (144-45; ch. 7). Another significant moment takes place when she comes to visit the bed-ridden Robert; their conversation arouses his tenderness, and he tells her, "while you speak, I *do* feel" (542; ch. 33). In the parallel situation, between Louis and Shirley, the tutor, believing still that his feelings for the heiress are not returned, prevents the possibility of an erotic encounter by refusing Shirley's offer to read at his bedside (452; ch. 27). Conversely, their closeness is indicated by his quotation of her composition and her recitation of the poetry from her lessons with him.

As Louis instructs Shirley in French, Caroline instructs Robert in English by reading *Coriolanus* with him. They communicate through the act of reading together, and by tacking her own moral onto the play, Caroline "transforms a historical text into one that speaks subjective truths" (Armstrong 218). Caroline infuses her values into the text, making it speak for her. In the same manner, when Joe Scott quotes the doctrine of woman's subordination to man's authority from St. Paul's Epistle, Caroline brings up "the right of private judgment" to interpret the text. When her "reading" is demanded, she suggests "that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether." She offers "to give the passage quite a contrary turn" by restating it as: "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection;" - 'it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be . . .'" (321-23; ch. 18). By

her very act of reading, Caroline fulfills her own interpretation of the text, objecting to Joe Scott's rendering and exercising authority by teaching it in light of her own perspective just as she teaches Robert the Shakespearean play.

However, the novel itself appears to validate Joe Scott's assertion that women are enjoined to yield all authority to their husbands. Though Caroline voices her objections to Robert's plans for industrialized expansion, she is not heard. Likewise, once she agrees to marry Louis, the fiercely independent Shirley becomes "a bondswoman" (562; ch. 35). She leaves all decisions up to him, so that "he was virtually master of Fieldhead, weeks before he became so nominally." Despite her apparent incapacity once she becomes engaged to Louis, Shirley is not helpless but acting according to her own plan to relinquish her authority.. In reality she is in control not only of herself but of Louis, appearing passive so that he would be forced to take command. A year later she explains that her husband "'would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier" (592; ch. 36). Though he appears to be her master, she is the one who bestows power on him.

Shirley's "act[ing] on system" in giving over her authority to Louis recalls the "system" evoked in the context of Shirley's acting as though she yields all authority to men in the plan to help the poor. That her show of yielding is a bit of artifice meant to mollify them is indicated by her "significant smile." Such female manipulation is highlighted by the authorial statement that follows: "It is good for women, especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness: to have mild, dim eyes, that never penetrate below the surface of things - that take all for what it seems: thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped, on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel-survey of life" (272; ch. 14). This ironic statement highlights the issue of the falsified view men have of women that Shirley refers to later on. "If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read

them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend," she tells Caroline (343; ch. 20). Such a misreading of women occurs in *Jane Eyre*; the good woman, Jane, is in fact called an angel by one man and denied her bodily existence by another, and the bad woman, Bertha, is rejected as a fiend by Rochester. Such categorizations inscribe the woman as other and negate her human reality. Shirley's denunciation may express Brontë's own dissatisfaction with the treatment of women in Romantic poetry, for the female subjects do not have human individuality but are objectified into representations of some other force, whether that of nature, as in Wordsworth's Lucy poems, or evil, as in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" or *Christabel*.

Shirley also refers to reading "in a true light" when she is misunderstood. Shirley tells Robert that they would be reconciled "when you have had time to read my actions and motives in a true light, and no so horribly to misinterpret them" (501; ch. 30). Throughout the novel, characters are said to attempt to read on the basis of appearance, but such readings prove false. As Rabine points out, "according the novel's own system of meaning, 'seeing with one's eyes' leads to destructive illusion." (130). The central illusion is, of course, the misperception of Shirley and Robert's relationship. Seeing Shirley's reaction to the name of Moore as well as her apparent intimacy with her tenant, Caroline arrives at the conclusion that they are lovers and despairs of ever marrying. Robert, too, interprets Shirley's attention as a sign of her infatuation with him and therefore confidently proposes marriage to her, only to get a verbal slap in the face. Shirley also is fooled by what she sees, for she does not perceive that Louis is in love with her until he admits it. Not all misinterpretations are established in the present of the novel. Caroline's abandonment by her mother is due to misjudgment on the basis of appearances as well. As Mrs. Pryor tells her, she was taken in by Caroline's father's good looks and charm and so she feared her daughter, who inherited those looks, would

display his negative characteristics as well:⁸ "I let you go as a babe, because you were pretty, and I feared your loveliness; deeming it the stamp of perversity" (413; ch. 24).⁹

It is not only the characters who are duped by appearances, the reader is likely to arrive at the wrong conclusions as well. After Caroline leaves the scene of Robert and Shirley walking out together, the narrator intrudes with the following statement: "The reader is privileged to remain, and try what he can make of the discourse"(240; ch. 13). However, the discourse does not reveal anything more about the nature of Shirley and Robert's relationship than what was perceived by Caroline, and the reader is led to the same trap of misinterpretation. Thus the narrator's remarks emphasize the manipulation of what is revealed to the reader. Such an instance occurs again near the end of the novel: "[H]ere was a fine opening to lead my willing readers a dance You might have liked it, reader, but / should not: I and my subject would presently have quarreled, and then I should have broken down" (589; ch. 37). The repetition of the narrator's "I" indicates her control over the subject and deliberate manipulation of the text.

The narrator's teasing tone is heightened by the conclusion: "The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!" (599; ch. 37). Brontë communicates that it is her intention "to unsettle the habits of mind which are accustomed to find meaning" neatly packaged into the text. She is telling the reader that "what is really 'meant' cannot be discovered from the text alone; the reader must intrude" to draw out the moral that matches his perspective (Simpson 27, 98). The indeterminate moral of Brontë's novel leaves its interpretation open for the reader. Its refusal to yield closure is a distinctive characteristic of Romantic poetry which highlights "the degree to which interpretation cannot consist simply of deciphering hidden patterns of meaning or discovering causal sequences, but must become an active seeking and generating of meaning" (Wolfson 23). Thus Brontë tells the reader that the search for meaning is up to him; it is the quest he must pursue. Brontë's authorial

address to the reader resembles Wordsworth's in his poem "Simon Lee": "It is no tale; but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it" (ll. 79-80). Fully aware of "what he is doing (or, more precisely, what he is refusing to do)," Wordsworth withholds determinate meaning, the construction of which is left up to the reader (Swingle 100). Brontë employs the same strategy in *Shirley*, which is also called "a tale" on its original title page; she refuses to put the pieces together, insisting that they remain in the fragmented state without a coherent frame.

Denying the reader "a secure and comprehensive vision," *Shirley* instead offers "a dramatization of the process and problems of making sense" of a world of "incompatible meanings" (Garrett 22). Though ostensibly, Brontë resolves the novel harmoniously by giving the reader the expected novelistic ending of marriage, the resolution is clearly contrived by the narrator who reflects on the varnish on her work, and she exposes its doubtful probability. The assumption that underlies the conventions of the novel genre, that the heroines' happiness is assured by their marriage, is called into question by the unhappy marriages featured in the novel. The failed marriages of the two Helstone brothers casts a shadow over the marriage of the Moore brothers with which the novel ends. Shirley's marriage to Louis, though based on love, is also a product of manipulation, for she acts the part of the passive heroine to make Louis the master she envisions in her Romantic fantasies. The union of Caroline and Robert, apparently the synthesis of male and female Romanticism, does not, in fact, promise a harmoniously equal union, for Caroline's female Romanticism proves ineffectual against Robert's expansive dominion and his desecration of the virgin woods she cherishes. Consequently, the ending, rather than resolving the complications addressed in the novel, underscores the reality of irresolution. Such a questionable ending comes up again in *Villette*. Though Brontë returns to the first-person narrator in her final novel, its ironic tone and shifting perspective is derived from *Shirley*. *Villette*, like *Shirley*, destabilizes the reader's expectations and demands participation in the construction of meaning.

¹Following Bronte's writings from her juvenilia through *Villette*, Carol A. Bock omits *Shirley* altogether in her article "Subjective Impulses and the Poetry of Charlotte Bronte's Narratives."

²It seems to me that she is the title character because she embodies the contradictions inherent in a woman's espousal of male Romanticism.

³Carol T. Christ attributes the failure of this novel to the inhibition of the author's "imaginative energy" that results from "her sense of appropriate options for women," options that do not include the expressions of imagination but are limited to realistic narrative. "Her ambivalence toward feminine imaginative energy lead her to evasions and inconsistencies which limit the novel's achievement" (62,65).

⁴Fannie Ratchford, likewise, gives *Shirley* the apposite "the poorest of Charlotte Bronte's novels" (214).

⁵An interesting feminist interpretation of the "dialogic" quality of *Shirley* is offered by Elizabeth Langland in her article that draws on Bakhtin's idea of "multi-voicedness".

⁶As she says on the march of the school-feast, "I almost long for danger; for a faith - a land - or, at least, a lover to defend" (299; ch. 17).

⁷As Christ observes, the wedding effectively "evades the feminist issue of the plight of the single woman much of the novel has explored" (65).

⁸Bronte here alludes to Crimsworth's observation on the "softened and refined likeness" that "fathers regard with complacency [in] the lineaments of their daughters' faces" (*The Professor*, 57; ch. 3). However, Caroline's mother mistakenly imputes the external resemblance to an affinity of character.

⁹Caroline's mother's linking beauty to perversity, though in itself illogical, does apply to the threat posed by the mermaid, with whom Caroline is linked twice in the text (123; ch. 7; 249; ch. 13).

Chapter 7

Villette: Irresolution and Independence

In *Villette* Brontë once again depicts a questing heroine whose subjective vision forms the center of her narrative. However, the outcome of Lucy snowe's quest is not the positive triumph signaled by Jane's "Reader, I married him." Following *Shirley's* precedent of Romantic irony in the depiction of a reality that contrasts with the ideals of poetry, the life of *Villette's* protagonist notably deviates from the expectations of a heroine's experience. The irony inherent in her self-presentation, as well as the compounded nature of her multi-faceted, seemingly paradoxical character, emphasizes the elusiveness of determinancy in a complex world. Brontë breaks the novelistic convention of living happily ever after and grants her heroine success in her career rather than in love. To emphasize the point, the closing lines relate the success of Madame Beck, Pere Silas, and Madame Walvers who formed the "junta" dedicated to thwarting Lucy's union with Paul

What is expected in a novel is brought up in the narrator's ironic addresses to the reader. The novel emphasizes the gap between the ideal and the real through the narrator's repeated invitations to the reader to "picture" a pleasant scene to account for the unrecorded events of Lucy's life. As this novel undermines the truth of visual perception, the pictures of pleasing scenes are invalidated by the voice of the narrator as the text unfolds. The first instance of Lucy's ironic invitation anticipates the novel's ending. In the fourth chapter, Lucy tells the reader to imagine her sailing comfortably on calm and sunny seas. "However," she continues, "it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must have fallen overboard. or that there must have been a wreck at last" (31) The description of capsizing foreshadows the shipwreck of Paul at the close of the novel. However, immediately after describing the wreckage, Lucy shifts to tell the reader to

summon up the pleasant picture that one would expect to find at the end of a novel.. She refuses to provide the anticipated closure.

As Jacobus notes, the novel's Romantic disruptions transgress the "narrative and representational conventions of Victorian realism," (42) though it might equally be said that the insistence on realism in the novel disrupts the expectations of the fantastic. The frequent appearance of the nun leads the reader to expect some Gothic turns in the novel. Lucy builds up the reader's anticipation only to abruptly undercut it. For instance, when she hears that Justine-Marie will arrive on the night of the fete in the park, Lucy awaits the appearance of a ghostly apparition. She addresses the reader directly, saying, "There are so many masks in the park tonight, and as the hour wears later, so strange a feeling of revelry and mystery begins to spread abroad, that scarce would you discredit me, reader, were I to say that she is like the nun of the attic, that she wears black skirts and white head clothes, that she looks the resurrection of the flesh, and that she is a risen ghost." Yet, in the paragraph that follows, she shifts unexpectedly: "All falsities— all figments! We will not deal in this gear. Let us be honest, and cut, as heretofore, from the homely web of truth"(435; ch. 39). The fact is, though, that Lucy is not honest in her narrative.

Like Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* which, as Raimonda Modiano explains (222), "draws its dramatic action not from the events" it recounts, but from the protagonist's "reconstruct[ion]" of his experience, *Villette* is not intended as an objective account of Lucy Snowe's life. It is, rather, an account of perspective. "The shifting narrative with its intercutting of different judgments and different styles, its reverse dramatic irony (Lucy knows things we don't), and its own reflection of change and development within the central narrator, suggests the complexity of the world and the complexity of judgment upon it" (Minogue 101). Lucy's narrative gaps and shifting perspective denies the reader the reliably consistent point of view that is usually present in a first-person narrative. She withholds key information from the reader, including any details about her childhood and family. The one mention of Lucy's relatives occurs

when, in order to gain more civil treatment, she drops the names of her uncles, Charles and Wilmot, to the waiter of the London inn where they had been frequent customers. The strategy works and leads the waiter to draw his own connection as he comments on her resemblance to her uncle Charles (43; ch. 6). Brontë mentions this apparently unimportant point not just to comment on familial appearances but to signal Lucy's literary antecedent. Charles --the first name remained the same, though the last name switched from Wellesly to Townshend -- was Brontë's favored pseudonym for her Angrian narrator who served as a an observer and critic of the romantic lives of those around him, particularly his brother Zamorna. Lucy resembles Charles the narrator in professing detached objectivity while presenting an ironic perspective.

Charles Wellesly proved his unreliability as a narrator in his preface to "Albion and Marina," in which he admitted to falsifying the facts of the episode in order to take revenge. Lucy likewise audaciously fictionalizes events she relates in order to play with her audience's reaction. Thus she reflects on Graham's completely calm behavior as she presents Ginerva with a picture of him in a frenzy over her. Lucy considers, "There was pleasure in thinking of the contrast between the reality and my description" (224; ch. 21). Even when she takes the stance of the "faithful narrator" who gives an objective report, Lucy clearly regulates the extent of her self-revelation in her narrative. That she controls the text makes her an ironic narrator, in the Romantic sense, rather than a reliably naive chronicler.

"Genius is said to be self-conscious," the narrator of *Jane Eyre* informs us (161; ch. 17). The statement is apt for the narrator of *Villette* who protests too much that she has no artistic genius. The self-conscious presence of the ironic narrator is evidenced by Lucy's descriptions from which her own person is deliberately omitted. For instance, when she describes her night with the Brettons, she describes an encounter with another party of three who appear to be strangers: "A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son -- the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever

seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantel" (197; ch. 29). Then Lucy reveals that what she had seen was in reality the reflection of herself and the Brettons. However, her supposedly candid description reveals her merely as the "third person in a pink dress and black lace mantel." There is no indication of her age or station as there is in her description of the rest of the party. Lucy's evasion of presenting a too revealing self-portrait is accentuated by the confrontation with her reflection just prior to that one, from which she turned away with "more fear and trembling" than with which she approached it, though there too, she does not delineate her appearance (196; ch. 20). The fact that she was so painfully aware of her looks at that point casts doubt on her claim that she did not know that she was viewing her own reflection in the hall, not to mention the unconvincingness of her failure to recognize the familiar faces of the Brettons. Rather than a faithful account of events, Lucy's description of her encounter with her own reflection highlights the fact that she never does grant the reader a comprehensive view of her reflection.

Lucy deliberately leaves out the details from her picture of herself. She glosses over her childhood, the events that led up to her becoming Miss Marchmont's companion, the fact that she recognized Dr. John as Graham Bretton, the words of Paul's satisfying answer to her questioning her attractiveness in his eyes, and the details of her life after Paul's death. She never makes a full confession, and the one told to Pere Silas is not disclosed (Tromly 63). Though Graham's correspondence with her marks a major turning point in her life, she reveals neither his words nor the ones she composed in reply, neither the "Feeling" version meant for her "own relief," nor the "Reason" version that she actually sends (238; ch. 23). Likewise, the letters she receives from Paul are described, but their specific contents are not communicated. Although she does divulge the contents of Colonel de Hamal's letter to Ginerva, she refrains from translating the depreciating description of herself, so that it would "retain the slight veil of the original tongue" (103; ch. 12). In Lucy's narrative, each revelation leads to another veiling.

Veiling herself, Lucy reveals her personality through the characters who serve as reflections of aspects of her character (Carlisle 271). Thus Brontë adds a new dimension to the theme of the divided identity she had explored through the doubled characters in *Shirley*. In *Villette*, there is one central character, though the totality of her being is fragmented into the manifold reflections of those surrounding her. Madame Beck, whom Lucy chooses to emulate in her resolve to be an independent schoolmistress, "is only a more competent practitioner of Lucy's own skills" of spying and deceiving (Tromly 75). Ginerva offers a definition for Lucy by contrast. The constant proximity of the two, and their being "so much on the same level, visiting in the same sphere; having the same connections" highlights their differences. The secretive Lucy recognizes Ginerva's "directness" as "her best point" (288-89; ch. 27). Though Vashti would seem to be worlds apart from the passive Lucy, the actress embodies her imaginative force and the passion for acting that Lucy manifests when playing the fop in the vaudeville.

However, Lucy's greatest vicarious identification is with that idealized version of herself, Paulina, whom she refers to as her "double" (261; ch. 24). Though she resembles Lucy in thought, Paulina is additionally endowed with the external advantage of beauty and the material benefit of wealth, allowing her to find her feelings for Graham answered and the happiness of a life of sunshine from which Lucy is barred. The similarity between Paulina and Lucy is stressed by the application of the label "monomaniac" to them both. Lucy perceives the young Polly's attachment to her father as a "monomaniac tendency" (10; ch. 2). At the point that Lucy discovers the absence of her letter from Graham, she describes herself as "the groveling, groping monomaniac" (232; ch. 22). As Martin points out, "the comparison can hardly be accidental" (165). Both Lucy and Paulina must learn to let go of their monomaniacal attachments in order to mature and form relationships with their appropriate matches.

Paulina embodies the state of perpetual childhood. As demonstrated by her diminutive size, her childish interaction with her father, as well as her own admission that "[t]he child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen," Paulina retains her grasp on childhood and therefore is the object of Lucy's emotional projection (261; ch. 24). Like Wordsworth in the boy of Winander episode of *The Prelude*, Lucy projects her own link with childhood onto another. She likewise emulates the Romantic poet in evoking her childhood as the time of feeling and essential identity: "Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I *could* feel" (101; ch. 12). It is the intensity of feeling, carried over from the days of childhood that distinguishes Lucy's artistic spirit. As Coleridge writes in the fourth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*: "To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day . . . has rendered familiar . . . this is the character and privilege of genius" (202). When Lucy feels joy, she senses "a sudden return of the golden shimmer of childhood" (228; ch. 21). This "golden" quality is possessed by Paulina who, blessed by fortunate circumstances, is able to retain her childhood. Paulina also resembles Lucy in her composite identity; like her more plebeian counterpart, the countess plays a variety of roles. Though for her father, she remains a child, with Lucy she is "womanly," and with Graham "shy" (281; ch. 26).

The question of identity is further complicated in *Villette* because the narrative does not ratify which view of a character captures his or her essential nature. For instance, Graham, who takes on a different persona as Dr. John, is presented in two "views" which offer "a seeming contradiction." Lucy Snowe tells the reader "to note" the differences between "the public and private" portraits of Graham Bretton. "In the first, the public, he is shown oblivious of self, as modest in the display of his energies, as earnest in their exercise. In the second, the fireside picture, there is expressed consciousness of what he has and what he is; pleasure in homage, . . . vanity." She does

not allege that "the indoor view" presents the more accurate reflection of his nature; rather, she insists, "Both portraits are correct" (186; ch. 19). However, in a shift of position, later Lucy indicates that she held only one view of Graham: "I have been told since that Dr. Bretton was not so nearly perfect as I thought him: that his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed." Yet, she continues, as he was "heroic" in her memory, she will continue to consider him so (232; ch. 22). It is the idealized, heroic portrait of Graham that she chooses to maintain in her memory, upholding Coleridge's judgment that a portrait "refers not so much to the senses, as to the ideal sense of the the friend not present" (*Lectures*, I: 225). Lucy knowingly wills her recollection of Graham to be the more flattering portrait despite the fact that in the course of the narrative her eyes are opened to his character, and she recognizes his shallow and self-centered nature on her own. However, as she shifts the perspective she presents to the reader, she accordingly alters her judgment.

As in *Shirley*, seeing something is contrasted with actually feeling its truth. Paulina remarks, "how strange it is that most people seem so slow to feel the truth -- not to see, but *feel!*" (260; ch. 24). Seeing alone does not translate into absolute knowledge, for when it is divorced from feeling, it does not yield a true picture. Consequently, Graham, who is unmoved by the passion of Vashti's performance, cannot appreciate her artistry. Oblivious to her as an artist, his "branding judgment" condemns her as a woman (244; ch. 23).. He takes the position of "mastery" allotted to the viewer, which denotes "a right to assess, to pass judgment" on the object in view (Coward 52). Graham likewise passes judgment on Ginerva. Judging only by appearance, he at first considers her a "[g]raceful angel," and declares that as "one cannot but be loving toward her," Lucy "must feel for such a ismple, innocent, girlish fairy, a sort of motherly or elder-sisterly fondness." Lucy very effectively mocks this perspective by applying it to Ginerva's male counterpart, Colonel de Hamal. Calling him a "sweet seraph," she declares, "You, Dr. John, and every man of a less refined mold than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring

affection, such as Mars and coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo" (140; ch. 14). Still fixed in his mindset, Graham fails to grasp Lucy's point and is only disabused when he sees Ginerva ridiculing his mother. Once his illusion of Ginerva as an angel is shattered, he takes the opposite extreme view of her. He casts aspersion on her virtue, claiming that the look she exchanged with de Hamal "was neither girlish nor innocent" (211; ch. 20). Thus he typifies the misguided view of women discussed in *Shirley*, fragmenting them into good angels and fiends, allowing nothing in between. With his superficial perspective, Graham misjudges Lucy as well. Seeing only her calm exterior, he remains oblivious to the passion that rages inside her and considers her merely an "inoffensive shadow" (297; ch. 27).

In contrast, Paul recognizes Lucy's passionate spirit, for it resonates with his own. He does not judge her on her appearance but on what she is. The transcendence of visual perception in their relationship is symbolized by Lucy's breaking his glasses. Paul's "lunettes," which bear "a blank and immutable terror," represent a distancing vision. As Lucy says, they were "useless" for an object close to Paul, and so when she gains "the advantage of proximity," he removes the glasses, allowing them to stand "on more equal terms" (307; ch. 28). On such terms, Paul can recognize that despite the differences of their external trappings, he shares an essential identification with Lucy that is manifested even in her echoing some of his "tones of voice" (345; ch. 31). The truth conveyed by voice over the falsification of vision becomes paramount in Paul's final visit to the school. When he comes to bid farewell to the students, Madame Beck stands before Lucy, who says, "she eclipsed me; I was hid" (417; ch. 38). But the second time Madame Beck tries to overshadow her presence, Lucy's feelings burst out in the expression of voice. It is her profoundly felt cry of, "My heart will break!" (450; ch. 41) that overcomes the shadow cast on her. Finding her voice is what releases Lucy's powers, both emotionally and artistically. She makes the point herself when she says of acting in the school's play, "When my tongue once got free, and my voice took its true pitch, and

found its natural tone," she felt "the right power come" (130; ch. 14). It is her true voice, which summons the depth of her feeling and imagination, that allows her to surpass the limits of visual perception.

A limited, and therefore false, perception is attributed to works of literature. Pictures are classed together with books, which Lucy finds to be "not a whit like nature," neither "original" nor "good" (188; ch. 19). She recalls that when she gave her first lesson, she realized "the wide difference that lies between the novelist's and the poet's ideal 'jeune fille,' and the said 'jeune fille' as she really is" (72; ch. 8). Lucy resists becoming a false type of woman who lives up to a stereotype. Her revulsion against such false appearances is emphasized by her reactions to the pictures presented as the series of a woman's life, ranging from "the image of a most villainous little precious she-hypocrite" as the young woman to the widow. "Insincere, ill-humored, bloodless, brainless nonentities!" Lucy calls them (190; ch. 19). Lucy recognizes the falseness of the pictures from her acquaintance with their real life versions. The young lady, Ginerva is very adept at manipulation. The mother figure in the novel, Madame Beck, is presented "as an actually masculine woman, who seems to lack all nurturance" (Susan Kavalier-Adler 41). The role of the widow is played by Miss Marchmont who, bereft of her lover, led an isolated existence. Lucy recognizes these roles and repudiates them, "defin[ing] herself in opposition to [the] constructs of womanhood" she finds "in art . . . as well as society" (Gordon 263). Ultimately, Lucy must reject all of the preset options for a woman's life and find her own.

By evading categories that would fix her to a specific classification, Lucy manages to maintain an independent identity. Whereas Frances in *The Professor* is limited to two modes of character, that of the directress and that of the demure lace-mender, Lucy takes on manifold personalities. On several occasions Lucy observes that she is viewed as a different character by various people. They all see only aspects of her, according to how she functions in relation to them. She remarks: "What contradictory

attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature -- adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all" (282; ch. 26). She laughs at their misapprehensions but refuses to correct them, taking pleasure in eluding a categorical classification. Like Keats's chameleon poet, Lucy manipulates her appearance of having "no self" to be "every thing and nothing." By appearing to be nothing, a virtual nonentity, Lucy succeeds in being everything; she is, in effect, "a blank screen on which others project their view of her" (Jacobus 44). Her deliberate effacement of herself allows her the advantage of being many selves. As Denise Degrois explains in her discussion of Coleridge, "the sense of vacancy can become the foil of its positive counterpart, i.e. a rare and peculiar state of grace, not unlike Keats's 'negative capability'" (32). Indeed, Lucy, whose passivity belies her intensity, epitomizes negative capability.

Lucy Snowe is not the "nobody" Ginerva thinks her to be, but rather "a personage in disguise" (289; ch. 27). Indeed, her disguise is what allows her to be a personage. It is the anonymity that Lucy espouses which gives her the autonomy to secure her own sense of self. As Jacobus observes, Lucy Snowe's "invisibility is more than evasive; it is devious, duplicitous" (43). Lucy refuses to give a direct answer to the question asked by Ginerva, "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?" Her teasingly evasive reply typifies her equivocal self-presentation in the novel, "Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don't look the character" (288; ch. 27). Ginerva, of course, would take Lucy's response as an allusion to her social standing. However, as Annette Tromly points out, the word "personage" also denotes a "fictionalized character," (64) the meaning Lucy hints at by the second

sentence of her reply. By concealing information about herself, Lucy disguises, not only her status, but her character, as well. Lucy overtly veils her own sketch of her character in manipulating what she reveals to the reader's view. The shifting views and inconsistent perspectives that she presents manipulates the reader into misreading the text and misperceiving Lucy's character just as the characters in *Villette* do. Thus Lucy remains essentially unknowable, eluding categories as well as visual perception and destabilizing meaning through her ironic self-presentation.

Even Paul is mistaken in his estimate of Lucy Snowe. Recognizing her intelligence and capacity for learning, he meets with her for private lessons. Yet without any grounds, and despite Lucy's protests to the contrary, he clings to his presupposition that she secretly hordes knowledge of Greek and Latin. Lucy wishes to possess such erudition just for the satisfaction of being able to exult over his "mocking spirit." But it is not a familiarity with the classics, the traditional property of male masters, that is the source of Lucy's sagacity. As she tells Paul, "I am ignorant, monsieur, in the knowledge you ascribe to me, but I *sometimes*, not *always*, feel a knowledge of my own" (334; ch. 30). The professor fails to grasp her meaning, and she evades explaining it. Effectively, Lucy "subverts M. Paul's efforts to classify her knowledge," (Gezari 164) for the type of knowledge she possesses is not that of definable academic subjects but something more intangible, almost ineffable, that she feels at intervals. It would appear that she refers to the knowledge of imagination. In accordance with Romantic thought, Lucy says she finds imaginative inspiration comes to her at intervals, as though it emanates from an external source. "Here, Lucy alludes to her awareness of her artistic capabilities, though she habitually suppresses it.

Protesting too much by priding herself on being free "of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination," (10; ch. 2) Lucy reveals her imaginative capacity while attempting to deny it. As she says: "Of an artistic temperament I deny that I am: yet I must possess something of the artist's faculty of making the most of present pleasure"

(54; ch.7). Like Jane who composes an imaginary alternate existence for herself, Lucy also exists outside her dull materiality: "I seemed to hold two lives -- the life of thought, and that of reality" (70; ch. 8). Living as a passive shadow in her day to day existence, her spirit is vitalized by her imagination. It is in "the life of thought" that realizes her unique being. This concept is voiced by the speaker in Byron's *Childe Harold* who expresses the power of imaginative creation:

'Tis to create, and in creativing live
 A being more intense, that we endow
 With form our fancy, gaining as we give
 The Life we image, even as I do now.
 What am I? Northing; but not so art thou,
 Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
 Invisible but gazing, as I glow
 Mix'd with my spirit, blended with thy birth
 And feeling still with thee in my crushed feelings' dearth.

(Canto 3, St. 6. ll 46-54)

Lucy gives her imaginative powers physical form when she acts, animating the character as she imagines him under the concealment of playing a part. She recalls that before the play, Paul gave instructions to the performers: "he recommended each to penetrate herself well with a sense of her personal insignificance. God knows, I thought this advice superfluous for some of us." In acting Lucy, released from self-consciousness through the ultimate experience of self-negation, is able to give voice to her artistic expression. She says, "I thought of nothing but the personage I represented." Becoming acclimated to her part, she gives herself over to her inner power of imagination, "feeling the right power come -- the spring demanded gush and rise inwardly" (130; ch. 14). She finds the release of artistic expression exhilarating. Recognizing her feelings, Paul tells her, "I watched you, and saw a passionate ardor for

triumph in your physiognomy. What fire shot into the glance! Not mere light, but flame" (144; ch. 15)..Acting releases the fire buried within Lucy, in much the same manner as it releases the blaze of passion within Vashti that literally sets the theater on fire .

Her own attraction to acting accounts for Lucy's fascination with the actress she calls Vashti. Vashti, who is utterly transformed through her acting, presents the ultimate personification of imagination's power. Lucy describes her as a "being" of another category: "I thought it was only a woman By and by I recognized my mistake. Behold! I found upon her neither something of woman nor or man: in each of her eyes sat a devil." Mary Jacobus observes that Vashti, as "a female version of the central Romantic protagonist, the satanic rebel and fallen angel" transcends the confines of gender (46). Lucy's fascination with this "spirit out of Tophet" is a mixture of admiration and horror, which she captures in two parallel sentences. "It was a marvelous sight: a mighty revelation" is followed by "It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral." Though she feels compelled to condemn the immorality of Vashti, Lucy is irresistibly drawn to "[t]he strong magnetism of genius" emanating from the actress (242-43; ch. 23).

Though Lucy typifies herself as a stoic, contrasting herself with those she sees overwrought by emotion with her emblematic statement, "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm," she reveals a capacity for passion as fiery as that of Vashti's (19; ch.3). She relates her stormy reaction to Ginerva's unfounded vituperation agaomst Graham: "after listening for a while with assumed stoicism, my outraged sense of justice at last and suddenly caught fire. An explosion ensued: for *I* could be passionate, too" (301; ch. 27). Passionate feeling endows her with eloquence, as she demonstrates when she is put to the test to compose on the spot. She is given the theme of "Human Justice," a theme she finds most ironic for her situation: Recognizing her interrogators, Messieurs Boissec and Rochemorte, as the two men who pursued her the night she arrived in Villette, she thinks, "If 'Human Justice' were what she ought to be," they would not hold their honored positions. This idea inspires her to sketch the portrait of Human Justice "in novel guise, a

red, random beldame with arms akimbo" who disregards the "confusion" surrounding her as she indulges in her own comfort. Like her outburst with Ginerva, the "explosion" of her composition is the result of passions stirred by her sense of injustice. She protests her situation of patriarchal oppression by subverting the female image they present as a "[b]lank, cold abstraction" and rendering her into the reality stripped of illusory ideals. Stirred by "emotion" which she cannot quell, Lucy breaks her habitual silence. Her "anger" leads to expressiveness as she allows her imagination to take over (377, 376; ch. 35).

The key to Lucy's composite identity lies in the meaning of her name, which Brontë explained in a letter to her publisher:

I can hardly express what subtlety of thought made me decide upon giving her a cold name; but, at first, I called her "Lucy Snowe" (Spelt with an "e"); which Snowe I afterward changed to "Frost." Subsequently, I rather regretted the change, and wished it "Snow" again . . . A *Cold* name she must have; partly perhaps, on the "*lucus a non lucendo*" principle – partly on that of the "fitness of things," for she has about her an external coldness. (Gaskell 361)

Both alternatives suggest coldness, but Brontë probably ultimately opted for the evocation of snow over frost because it is more suggestive of covering than the scattered frost. The coldness is an external layer that Lucy uses to veil her hidden light. Although Brontë only discusses her choice of surname, Dunbar points out that use of the root "luc," which means light, indicates that significance of Lucy's first name is intended as well (79). Lucy's composite identity of light and coldness is imaged in that "moving mystery - the aurora borealis," the bands of light in the cold northern regions that she sees when

she resolves to move on (39; ch. 5). Lucy Snowe's identity lies in the paradox of the interior flame that Paul sees and the cold exterior shadow that others perceive. The "real" Lucy Snowe is the composite of these contradictory portraits: she is the coexistence of light and snow that remains a mystery like the aurora borealis. Priding herself on the mystery of her nature, she says: "There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known we take pleasure, I think in being consummately ignored" (91; ch. 10). Left on her own, Lucy is free to follow the road less traveled by to find her own direction for life. As in Brontë's previous writings, the journey of self-discovery is traversed on foot.

In the chapter tellingly entitled "Turning a New Leaf," Lucy's first consequential walk occurs. After the death of Miss Marchmont, whose name hints at the march Lucy must undertake to find her destiny, Lucy embarks on "her psychic as well as physical journey." Her first step on that journey is to break out of the stultifying "false mode of female existence" represented by Miss Marchmont (Kavaler-Adler 39-40).¹ Not knowing where to turn, Lucy initially seeks advice from her former nurse. But for Lucy there is no external source of guidance. Recognizing her aloneness, as her alienation is emphasized by her solitary walk, Lucy draws on the strength of her own spirit:

Still all inward darkness, I left her about twilight; a walk of two miles lay before me; it was a clear, frosty night. In spite of my solitude, my poverty, and my perplexity, my heart, nourished and nerved with the vigor of a youth that had not yet counted twenty-three summers, beat light and not feebly. Not feebly, I am sure, or I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields, and passed neither village nor farmhouse, nor cottage; I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight, for it was by the leading of stars only I traced the

dim paths; I should have quailed still more in the unwonted presence of that which tonight shone in the north, a moving mystery -- the aurora borealis. But this solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path.

Instead of feeling daunted by the awesome sight of the aurora borealis, Lucy feels energized by its power; for her it functions as a symbol of hope as the rainbow does for William Crimsworth in *The Professor*. She feels her mind braced to accept the daring idea that comes to her, to venture out. The answer to where comes to her in a vision: "I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London: (38-39; ch. 5). Like Wordsworth, who regularly contrasts the view of the "bodily eye" with that of imagination, Lucy draws her inspiration from the latter.

However, upon approaching London, her confidence wanes, and she is overwhelmed by doubts: "All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood." Lucy wonders how she should continue on in a strange place, yet she does not retreat from her resolve to set out on her own: "A strong, vague persuasion that it was better to go forward than backward, and that I *could go* forward -- that a way, however narrow and difficult, would in time open -- predominated over other feelings . . ." (41; ch. 5). Beneath the shade of diffidence that has confined her up to this point is a transcendent confidence in the future and herself which carries her forward at this critical juncture. Once in London, Lucy draws inspiration from St. Paul's dome and experiences the sensation of spiritual emancipation: "While I looked [at the dome], my inner self moved; my spirit shook its always fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who had never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life: in that morning my soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd." Her spirit, set at liberty from its customary fetters, unfolds to admit the sensation of new experience. As she walks

unaccompanied through London, Lucy exults in her newfound freedom. Her physical movement reflects her emotional ascent; she proceeds to mount to the dome and view the surroundings of the city under a clear sky. For her, the scene becomes an emotional vehicle. Her London walk becomes an act of incorporation, for she not only sees but feels the city and its excitement (43-44; ch. 6). She effectively absorbs her surroundings, in much the same manner as Wordsworth does in his poetic accounts of walking

Once abroad, a walk brings Lucy to her fated destination and to a brief meeting with Graham, though she only reveals the identity of the Englishman she encounters that night much later in the novel. When Lucy arrives in Villette, she receives direction to an inn, but she loses her way when she nervously flees the pursuit of two men. She tries to retrace her way to the inn but finds herself instead in front of Madame Beck's *pensionnat*. Startled, Lucy obeys the pronouncement of "Providence" and accepts the school as her destined place (57-58; ch. 7). The school proves to be her destined place, not only because it affords her a job and a place to stay, but because it is where she advances herself, both professionally and emotionally. When Madame Beck challenges her to take on the job of teaching, she asks if Lucy will "go backward or forward." Lucy replies with the affirmative, "*En avant*" (71; ch. 8). Thus Lucy takes her walks forward toward her future career.

However, the *pensionnat* is also where she comes to experience love. Lucy favors evening walks in the old garden of the school, especially in the narrow, overgrown *allee defendue*. She feels drawn to "the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk." She tends to its flowers and clears away a hidden seat for herself there (100; ch. 12). It is in this garden that she buries Graham's letters to her, accepting the fact that her feelings for him must remain suppressed forever. Though she mourns the loss, it strengthens her, for it allows her to advance beyond a hopeless situation. The significance of this moment is marked by its similarity to her first significant walk. She again feels the sensation she experienced "a year ago in England -- on a night when the aurora borealis was streaming

and sweeping round heaven" (278; ch. 26). On another evening walk in the garden, Lucy lays a plan as she "pace[s] up and down" to economize with the goal of saving up enough to open her own school to enable her to secure independence and "make some advance in life." Included in her resolutions toward building a future is bidding a final farewell to the possibility of her love for Graham being returned. "Good night, Dr. John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine." As she says this, M. Paul echoes her good night with his own greeting to her (339-41; ch. 31). Thus Lucy's farewell to Graham turns into Paul's overture, for by dismissing the possibility of a relationship with the handsome doctor, she opens the possibility of establishing an attachment with Paul; by burying a love with no hope, she allows a new love to blossom.

Lucy enjoys her solitary walks not so much for the opportunity to see the sights of her surroundings but to grant an outlet to her charged emotions. As she says, "I rather liked the prospect of a long walk, deep into the old and grim Basse-Ville; and I liked it no worse because the evening sky, over the city, was settling into a mass of black-blue metal, heated at the rim, and inflaming slowly to heavy red." She would willingly surrender her clothes to be drenched for the sake of a downpour's transforming effects: "[I]t sweeps a great capital clean before you; it makes you a quiet path through broad, grand streets; it petrifies a living city, as if by eastern enchantment; it transforms a Villette into a Tadmor" (364; ch. 34). In the same vein, she says:

At that time, I well remember – whatever could excite – certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy. One night a thunderstorm broke; a sort of hurricane shook us in our beds the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to live. I got up and dressed myself, and creeping outside the casement close by my bed, sat

on its ledge, with my feet on the roof of a lower adjoining building. It was wet, it was wild, it was pitch-dark. . . . I could not go in: too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, peeling out such an ode as language never delivered to man – too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts. (101; ch. 12)

This passage's description of the darkness of the storm illuminated by lightning resembles a passage of Wordsworth's poetry quoted by Coleridge as "an emblem of the poem itself, and of the author's genius" (*Biographia Literaria* 200; ch. 4).² That is not to say that Brontë's passage is imitative. It is, rather, the expression of her own parallel Romantic experience that she translates into her novel. In her Roe Head journal she had described how the "wind pouring in impetuous current through the air, sounding wildly unremittingly from hour to hour, deepening its tone as the night advances, coming not in gusts, but with a rapid gathering stormy swell. . . . waken[s] a feeling that I cannot satisfy" (qtd. in Gerin 102). The unrestrained power of the storm corresponds to the powerful ardor she senses within herself; however, though the storm rages on unchecked, she cannot find a release for her feelings. Lucy's experience duplicates her author's: her suppressed passionate nature is roused by the sublime force of the storm, a force she wishes to be absorbed into. When walking in a harsh storm, assailed by rain, hail, cold, and wind, she declares, "My heart did not fail at all in this conflict; I only wished that I had wings and could ascend the gale, spread and repose my pinions on its strength, career in its course, sweep where it swept" (152; ch. 15).

However, Lucy's appreciation of nature is not limited to the sublime quality celebrated in the poetry of the Romantics. For her the force of nature is not only about powerful thunderstorms and towering mountains but about "the enduring ties that bind human beings to nature" that is a part of "the domesticated, feminine sublime" celebrated by writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth (Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* 206). William

Wordsworth, too, refers to such a reverence for nature. Expressing his regret for his rape of nature in the poem "Nutting," he concludes by adjoining his sister to approach the woods "In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch - for there is a spirit in the wood" (ll.55-56). Likewise, Lucy demonstrates an appreciation of the life cycle represented by nature. As she relates, "I like to see flowers growing, but when they are gathered, they cease to please. I look on them than as things rootless and perishable; their likeness to life makes me sad" (318; ch. 29). Recognizing the ephemerality of human life in that of the flower's, Lucy esteems even "the meanest flower that blows" as a living creature rather than as an ornamental object with only aesthetic value.

Though most of her walks take place in the midst of nature, out of doors, Lucy also walks about indoors when she is too agitated to remain still. When she anxiously waits to see M. Paul again she transgresses the "rules [she] had never forgotten or disregarded before" and remains alone in the classroom after everyone has retired for the night. She recalls that she cleared a way for a walk across its length by moving away the furniture and she "must have been afoot many hours." The physical outlet of walking leads to the emotional release of crying. No longer suppressing her feelings, Lucy refuses to be directed by another. When Madame Beck obstructs her path and tries to order her to bed, Lucy refuses to answer or to "check [her] walk" (418-19; ch. 38). Just as Jane did not allow St. John to curb her excitement by forcing her to sit down, Lucy expresses her independent will by walking.

When Lucy returns to her room she quaffs the drugged drink sent by Madame Beck. However, rather than working to induce sleep as it was intended to do, it induces another, more venturesome walk. "Instead of stupor, came excitement, . . . Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous" (422; ch. 38). This experience evokes Lucy's reference to flouting reason and granting "a truant hour to Imagination. . . . We shall and must break bounds at intervals" (216; ch. 21). Here, Lucy's imagination, released from the control of consciousness, gains ascendancy. In the

same manner described in the preface to "Kubla Khan" Lucy's unconscious imagination takes over through the psychedelic release of drugs (Robert Heilman 106; Robert Colby 417). Imagination draws Lucy out of "the narrow limits" of the dormitory for a the wider scope of Villette. Lucy steals out of the school for an extraordinary midnight walk to the park where, unobserved herself, she witnesses the surreal spectacle of exotic props and masques in honor of a fete as well as the "familiar and domestic group" of the Brettons and de Bassompierres who had come out for the event. "It gave me strange pleasure to follow these friends viewlessly," Lucy says (422, 427, 424; ch. 38). The pleasure she finds in her experience reflects Brontë's own preference for invisibility. In a letter to her publisher, William Smith Williams, Brontë wrote, "what author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible?" (Wise and Symington II, 174). As Lucy realized in her role in the school play, invisibility is actually empowering for artistic expression.

Remaining virtually invisible, Lucy gains a view of Paul's ward, Justine-Marie. However, the real object of her search is Paul himself whose appearance seems miraculous, for he was supposed to have already sailed away. As he reveals to her, he had intentionally deferred his scheduled voyage. Paul's deferral of his trip allows him the opportunity of a final walk with Lucy. "Our walk was long, yet seemed short; the path was pleasant, the day lovely" (452; ch. 41). On their walk, Paul brings up the subject of Lucy's independence and, on their return, leads her into the little house he had leased for her school. Paul's actions demonstrate his confidence in her ability and his appreciation of her potential.

In addition to literally setting her on the path to independence, Paul serves as Lucy's inspiration,³ which Brontë symbolizes by his association with violets. Although first only mentioned parenthetically without identifying the giver, Paul is the "stranger" who gives Lucy violets which she keeps for the sake of their fragrance, as she tells him when he reminds her of it (110; ch. 13; 343; ch. 31). He again gives her violets, literally

Paul is conducted in writing. In Paul's absence of three years, the relationship between Lucy and him grows through their correspondence. Lucy tells the reader how the relationship was sustained:

Do not think that this genial flame sustained itself, or lived wholly on abequeathed hope or a parting promise. A generous provider supplied bounteous fuel. I was spared all chill, all stint; I was not suffered to fear penury; I was not tried with suspense. By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude. (462; ch. 42).

Paul's letters represent himself, his actions and his love. Ironically, it is his absence that enables him to endow Lucy with more of himself through writing. For her part, Lucy writes too, and when Paul's absence is rendered permanent by his shipwreck, she sustains her feelings by composing the narrative of her life. Her writing is generated "by the absent lover who, in order to sustain the poise, must remain always absent and always a lover" (Karen Chase 84-85). The inspiration of *Villette* comes from a longing that is forever deferred.

Lucy's story portrays the poignant experience of isolation. Her declaration to Paulina, "I live solitary," is emblematic of her life (399; ch. 37). In Romantic poetry, isolation is accepted as the inevitable lot of the poet whose superior imagination and capacity for feeling separates him, even physically, from his fellow man. Thus Wordsworth begins one of his most famous poems with the assertion, "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (though Dorothy's journal indicates that in fact she accompanied him). Though the experience of such solitude is presented as exalted in works such as "Alastor" and heroic in *Cain*, the Romantics do acknowledge that humans cannot live alone and loveless. Therefore, the invincible Manfred ultimately cries out for the loss of his

beloved and of his capacity for affection, and the Ancient Mariner evangelizes the lesson of love. Sharing Coleridge's sensation of terror in isolation, Lucy describes her own "Pains of Sleep": "sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity." As Coleridge's poem ends with his longing for love, "To be beloved is all I need, / And whom I love, I love indeed," Lucy's thoughts turn to "the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life" (148; ch. 15).

The thoughts of "the well-loved dead" seem to be what impels Lucy to write her story which seemed directed toward the ultimate culmination of love in her marriage with Paul. Contrary to the reader's expectations, the anticipated ending of the marriage of Paul and Lucy is proven illusory by the storm that destroys his ship. The union of Lucy and Paul does not occur, remaining suspended as an idea, in much the same manner as the lovers depicted on the urn in Keats's ode remain forever frozen in a pursuit.

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal -- yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt though love, and she be fair!

(ll. 17-20)

Lucy closes her story with her "winning near the goal," yet falling just short of it. Yet, like the representation of the urn, her story resists closure, for Brontë retracts the ending by suggesting another possible conclusion. She "tease[s] us out of thought," offering those with "sunny imaginations" to "picture" their own denouement of "union and a happy succeeding life" (463-64; ch. 41). Thus "each ending cancels the other, and neither resolution transcends its own arbitrariness" (Wotipka 106). There is no ultimate resolution at the end of *Villette*, for as a composition of Romantic irony, its "meaning is not simply reversed" and determined on the basis of reversal but "is unsettled" and

detached from any authorial ratification so that it is up to the reader to "assume the ultimate responsibility" for any determination of meaning (Simpson 193). As the narrative controverts its own purported closure, it is left up to the reader to fill in the ending. Brontë's shift to the present tense at the end of *Villette* offers, as it does in *Shirley*, a challenge to the reader to construct the novel's meaning. "Like Keats at the end of 'The Eve of St Agnes' and 'Ode to a Nightingale', she signals her awareness of her fiction, releases us from all tenses into the reality of our present" (Minogue 106). The shift to the present tense does not only signal the present of the writing of the text but of its reading and the construction of its meaning.

¹That she succeeds in that regard is proven by her refusal to again become a lady's companion when she is offered such a position by Paulina.

² The quoted passage begins:

'Tis storm; and hid in mist from hour to hour,
All day the floods a deepening murmur pour;
The sky is veiled, and every cheerful sight:
Dark is the region as with coming night;
And yet what frequent bursts of overpowering light!

³In fact, Tayler regards him as Lucy's male muse.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Charlotte Brontë's Poetry Through Prose

Brontë recognized the poet in her personality. She enthusiastically conceded that her likeness was captured not so well in a drawing as in a "phrenological estimate of the talents and dispositions of a lady": "She is endowed with an exalted sense of the beautiful and ideal, and longs for perfection. If not a poet, her sentiments are poetical, or at least imbued with that enthusiastic glow which is characteristic of poetical feeling" (Wise and Symington III, 257). It is that "enthusiastic glow" associated with poetry that Brontë translates into her novels. The poetic quality of Brontë's novels is striking. "We read Charlotte Brontë . . . for her poetry," asserted Virginia Woolf. This poetic presence is the result of Brontë's "overpowering personality" which carries her beyond the "restrictions" of the novel's genre. Instead of presenting an objective picture, Brontë "forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees," for she is constantly "writ[ing] of herself" (*Common Reader* 158,157; *Room* 73).

Woolf's observation pinpoints precisely what Brontë believed was the goal of the novelist. In a letter to her publisher, she said of George H. Lewes's novel *Rose, Blanche and Violet*, "The author's character is seen in every page, which makes the book interesting -- far more interesting than any story could do," and she pronounces the author himself to be "decidedly the most original character in the book" (Gaskell 339). By the same token, she appreciated George Sand's *Lettres d'un voyageur* because she found it to be "full of the writer's self" (qtd. in Gordon 177). That is not to say that Brontë believed all writing should be autobiographical. Though the tendency of critics has been to read Brontë's novels autobiographically, in fact, the novelist countered Lewes's assertion that "real experience is perennially interesting, and to all men" by pointing out that restricting writing to "real experience" is limiting and that the "strong, restless faculty" of

imagination demands "to be heard and exercised" (Gaskell 330). Thus Brontë "writes of herself" in the sense of expressing the subjective point of view dictated by her imagination. This essentially Romantic self-expression is what distinguishes her novels. Her prose is permeated by the effect of Romantic poetry.

For Brontë poetry was integral to any composition that could be considered art and she refused to be restricted by the limitations set on novels. Consequently her writing was often criticized for its lack of ladylike restraint. In one such critique, George Lewes advanced Jane Austen as a model for Brontë to follow. However, Brontë rejected this paragon of female writing, declaring that she found *Pride and Prejudice* "a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden" and that she "should hardly like to live with [Austen's] ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses." For Brontë such proper writing presented a claustrophobic environment that stifles the spirit and extinguishes passion. She could not accept Jane Austen, who Lewes admitted "'is not a poetess,'" as a great artist, questioning, "Can there be a great artist without poetry?" Brontë found Austen's writing "more real than true," lacking the truth of poetry (Gaskell 330, 337-38). As an advocate of poetic truth, Brontë allied herself with Shelley, who declared "A poem [as opposed to a story] is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" ("Defence" 485). A woman's novel was expected to devote itself to the real and represent an accurate picture. But Brontë had her own authorial concerns. What she pursued was "imaginative truth -- reality recreated by the imagination," and she insisted on "the freedom of the individual, of whatever sex, to write what his or her imagination prompts" (Ewbank 165).

Brontë's poetic vision reshaped the Romanticism of the male poets into her own expression of the woman's experience in her novels. In effect, she assailed the literary restrictions of gender through her authorial cross dressing. She transgressed the tradition of women writers whose "fear of crossing over the line" kept them within the restricted sphere allowed women in the literary realm (Ross 190). Unlike the women writers who

wrote in the appropriately ladylike manner. Brontë wished to have the freedom of artistic expression that in her time was only allowed men and so took on the name Currer Bell. Her adoption of the trappings of the masculine gender along with a masculine name is enacted by Shirley, who, calling herself "Captain Keeldar," revels in the autonomy she holds in her man's position. In addition, perhaps inspired by Byron's *Don Juan*, Brontë presents characters who literally cross dress: In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester masquerades as a gypsy woman and tells Jane toward the end of the novel that he wore her necklace as a reminder of her. Such reminders, which destabilize gendered identity, occur again in *Villette*. In a lottery Lucy takes the prize of a cigar case and Graham a woman's turban. Though he wished to switch with her, Lucy "could not be brought to hear reason" and insists on holding on to the cigar case as a memento of the evening (209; ch. 20). Colonel de Hamal capitalizes on the rumor of the ghost of a nun and dons a habit to gain access to Ginerva, offering a gendered inversion of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke's disguising herself as the phantom friar in order to approach Don Juan (canto 16). Brontë also shows women masquerading as men. Lucy takes on the colonel's appearance when she plays the fop in the vaudeville. Though Lucy plays a man's part, she does not completely assume a man's dress, only enough to suggest a man's appearance, not enough to disguise her woman's identity completely. This partial disguise corresponds to her author's taking on her androgynous pseudonym to suggest that the authorial persona is male, though, her self-expression reflects her female identity.

Lucy Snowe, who epitomizes ambiguity, boasting of her elusiveness and the remarkable range of personality types ascribed to her, embodies the character of the chameleon poet who resists fixity. Thus she resembles the title character of Keats's *Lamia*, a snake who appears to her beloved as a woman. Lamia's modulation corresponds to the poet of the undefined self in the uncertainty of her identity. She is exactly "what shocks the virtuous philosopher [and] delights the cameleion poet." She has no set identity: "She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's

mistress, or the demon's self" (1.55-56). Even in the snake state, she is not wholly a serpent but retains womanly features, "Her head was a serpent," although "She had a woman's mouth" (1.59-60); for, as she tells Hermes when requesting her human form, "I was a woman" (1.117). After she has metamorphosized into a woman, the narrator, in an obvious contradiction asserts: "Ha, the serpent! certes, she / Was none" (2.80). As a woman she is paradoxical: "A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore / Of love deep learned to the red heart's core: / Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain" (1.289.91). She is called "the cruel lady," (1.290). and then "gentle Lamia" (1.334). Her identity shifts as she adopts another role, so that it is impossible to pin her down as anything definite.

The indeterminacy of Lamia's identity typifies Romantic irony, the mode of writing that resists determinate meanings. Such irony is employed by Brontë, most notably through the narrator's intrusions and teasing ending in *Shirley*. However, the first-person narratives also feature Romantic irony. Though the narrator of *The Professor* presents his story as an objective account, he admits his manipulation of what he reveals, and he equivocates to the reader, denying his infatuation with Mlle. Reuter and the titillation implicit in the sensual appraisal of his female students. Even Jane Eyre offers ironic inversions in the narrative. The full forgiveness that Jane offers Mrs. Reed on her deathbed is subverted by the lingering bitterness she reveals as narrator. Recalling the wrongs done to her in childhood, she remarks, "Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering. But I ought to forgive you" (13; ch. 3). As Randall Craig observes, the word "ought" clearly indicates that she has not forgiven her aunt, whatever impression she wishes to convey by dramatizing their last conversation" (105). Such contradictions occur throughout *Villette* with its duplicitous narrator who refuses to be pinned down herself and offers shifting perspectives on the other characters. Aware that the narrative she presents is her own construction, not merely a chronicle of her life, Lucy is a self-conscious narrator whose self-presentation is intended to reveal her artistry more than herself.

Though an advocate of the power of imagination, in her novels, Brontë distinguished between viable visions and versions of Romantic transcendence that disregard human bonds. Aware of the reality with which women have to contend, Brontë infused the individualistic spirit of Romanticism into a social context. In her novels she translated the distinctly male voice at the center of the Romantic poets' texts to female experience to articulate Romanticism in a woman's voice. Thus she developed a feminized Romanticism that incorporates transcendence into domestic relationships. Brontë's novels convey her view of herself, not only as an author with a Romantic perspective, but as a woman writer with a sense of responsibility to represent her sex. Her successful achievement is the synthesis of her Romanticism with her feminism through her creation of Romantic heroines that are not the passive counterparts of males, as female figures are in Romantic poetry, but independent characters who express their own subjectivity. For the heroines of her novels, as for Brontë herself, walking is an assertive act that defies the passiveness imposed on women. It follows that Brontë associated the exercise of walking with her writing, for it served as an outlet for her otherwise suppressed wild spirit and as means to imaginative contemplation.

Brontë's writings reflect a preoccupation with artistic genius, ranging from the genii of the juvenilia to the allegory of the union of Genius and Humanity in *Shirley* and the incarnation of imaginative genius represented by Vashti in *Villette*. Like the Romantic poets, she possessed a sense of her own powers and recognized that she was gifted with genius. "A female 'genius' is a woman who is judged to occupy a strategic position in the matrilineal and patrilineal patterns of tradition that make up culture" (Battersby 157). She does not only effect changes in the patterns associated with her own gender, but brings about a shift in the very conception of the cultural tradition. Charlotte Brontë's creative genius led her to go beyond the province allotted to the woman writer up until the early nineteenth century and set a precedent for all the novelists who followed her, men as well as women. By infusing the Romantic thought which had shaped her

imagination into her own prose writing she "demonstrated that the novel could do much that had before been considered the province only of poetry" (Tayler 1). Brontë's poetic vision reshaped the Romanticism of the male poets into her own expression of the woman's experience in her novels. In tracing the pattern of Brontë's development throughout her career as a writer, what emerges is a Romanticism that is a synthesis of the transcendence, subjectivity, irony and artistic consciousness of the male Romantics with Brontë's sense of social responsibility as a woman. Her vision not only changed the course of her own writing, which realized the possibility of poetry in prose, it engendered a new range for the genre of the novel and the spirit of Romanticism.

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