Text and Gender in Charlotte Brontë's Novels

Consultant:

Resch Béláné, Ph.D.
Associate professor

Bajner Mária

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Preface

If human beings were not being divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it, either... It is not the life of sexuality that the novel cannot capture; it is literature that inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic for us speaking animals. Literature is not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible preparator of the problem of sexuality.
Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference* (1981)

It has become almost a practice for the authors of new studies on the Brontes to offer their readers an introductory apology for having produced yet more words on what is admittedly a much ventilated subject. The justification usually offered for this implied offense is that some new facet of the lives or works of the sisters has been perceived that has hitherto escaped notice. The same plea is made on behalf of this study, but no apology accompanies it, since it is held that sufficient justification for the continued appearance of studies about the Brontes lies within the Brontes themselves. The enigma of their lives and the phenomenon of their genius remain as engrossing as ever, constantly regenerating the supply and demand of literature in this field. The present study aims to make a new contribution to the discussion by demonstrating how gender complicates both the writing and the reading of Charlotte Bronte's texts, how her female talent grappling with a male tradition translates gender difference into literary differences of themes, motifs, and images.

The title, *Gender and Text in Charlotte Bronte's Novels* suggests some of the parameters of this study's goals. Feminist critics generally agree that the oppression of women is a fact of life, besides, gender leaves its traces in literary history and in literary texts. Accordingly, its purpose is threefold: Firstly, to argue the existence of a female aesthetic by focusing on the psychoanalytic themes of the double and the domestic while analyzing the texts of Charlotte Bronte from a gender-related aspect, 'otherwise', 'differently', as only women could write or interpret them. Secondly, to prove that Charlotte Bronte's novels are not merely enjoyable pieces of literature but her writing offers new ways of understanding patriarchal ideologies created by a patriarchal system which are especially hard on women who refuse to conform to patriarchally acceptable roles. Thirdly, to see Charlotte Bronte in terms of late twentieth -century feminisms (in the binding of Anglo-American and French feminist criticism) making her new by making her relevant to current ways of thinking about women.

I have divided my work into two parts: Writing and Reading. The analysis of Charlotte Bronte's writing is an expression of her personal experiences in a social context, while reading her texts makes it possible to get a deep insight into the unconscious, the 'textuality' of the text. The first part of the paper focuses on the woman writer and stresses woman's difference: What does it mean for a woman to write? How does a woman write *as* a woman? The second part that puts the reader into the limelight attempts to solve the puzzle articulated by P.P. Schweickart: 'What does it mean for a woman,

reading as a woman, to read literature written by a woman, writing as a woman?'[1]

In my analysis I relied on the two main schools of twentieth-century feminist criticism thus combining the French deconstructive, psychoanalytic, theoretic view with the Anglo-American socio-historical, content stressing approach. Whereas the emphasis within the two big trends falls somewhat differently, both are gynocentric being primarily concerned about the nature of female experience.

Starting with a female writer's anxiety that manifests itself in her writing through tension, ambiguity, and finally arrives at a balanced state of the writing experience the analysis is moving toward the female reader, who is also going through the same kind of experience as the female author, while adding her own struggle to the reading experience, thus creating a new model of analysis in gynocriticism. The introduction of the construction of the woman reader's subject (which parallels the woman writer's subject) in gynocriticism contributes to a further phase in reader response criticism, the argumentation of which is admittedly the purpose of my investigation.

Not all the questions raised in the thesis have answers. If they had, the purpose of my work would be questionable.

This study is selective. *Jane Eyre* will dominate being the most popular, the 'classic' novel of Charlotte Bronte, while *Villette* and *Shirley* will be used mostly from a comparative point of view, and *The Professor* will be referred to here and there, as it is the novel about which is less said or to say. Since I have used various editions of the

novels and because I assume that the same will be true for most readers, I have referred in my notes to chapters rather than page numbers, and include the dates of first publication in brackets.[2]

Introduction

Feminist literary criticism incorporates diverse ideas which share three major perceptions: that gender is a social construction which oppresses women more than men; that patriarchy shapes this construction; and that women's experimental knowledge is a basis for a future non-sexist society. Taking gender as a fundamental organizational category of experience will relate two further assumptions to the subject. One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither biological nor divine, but rather a cultural construct. The second is that a male perspective assumed to be universal has dominated fields of knowledge creating their patterns and methods. Feminist scholarship, then, has two concerns: it revises 'universal' male perspectives and it restores a 'female' perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and place in particular cultures. A feminist perspective will inevitably lead to a much disputed sex-gender system.

Some theorists use 'male' or 'female' as a matter of biological sex, while others use 'masculine 'or feminine' as a matter of culture. I share the views of those feminist critics (especially those whose works are originated in the French language , which uses 'feminine' to mean both 'female' and 'feminine') who resist the binary opposition of sex and gender. Their argument is, that the cultural differences are, after all, rooted in the biological ones. Gender, giving Sally McConnell Ginet's neat definition is 'the cultural meaning attached to sexual identity',[1] in my interpretation means simply biological sex in the world of culture.

If we want to change the way people think about women in a world dominated by men, we must refuse the habit of defining 'woman' as an essence whose 'nature' is determined biologically. For that is precisely the ideology which makes a woman feel it is somehow 'unnatural' of her to place any activity above her reproductive role.

Ideology - according to K.K. Ruthven - 'is manifest the ways we represent ourselves (and are represented) to one another; "sexual ideology" determines, for example, what is deemed to be socially acceptable behavior for men and women.'[2] Male criticism, claims Maggie Humm, is ideologically blind to the implications of gender.[3] The function of an ideology is to justify the status quo and to persuade the powerless that their powerlessness is inevitable. In order to change that situation 'woman' has to be conceived of as a category or construct produced by a society. It is not a question of deciding what a woman is by nature, but of examining what she is assumed to be in the culture she lives in.

Feminist scholars study diverse social constructions of femaleness and maleness in order to understand the universal phenomenon of male dominance. That 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature' is the thesis of Simone Beavouir's *The Second Sex* (1952), the most comprehensive study of the ideology of woman, in which she 'deconstructs' the social construction of gender and the cultural paradigms that support it.[4]

Since feminist criticism has been centered on female experience, the psychological aspect combined with socio-historical, cultural, and biological, 'gender studies' is necessary in order to get the true picture. Current trends in feminist literary criticism with their content-stressing, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, or language stressing approaches emphasise different aspects of the "female experience". English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression, French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression, American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however have become gynocentric.

Gynocentric criticism is associated with Elaine Showalter's name, who in her 1979 essay *Towards a feminist poetics* used the term 'gynocritics' which offers more theoretical approaches to the problem of gender difference than any other discourse. Showalter described four models of gender difference-biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural-and claimed that these would be best addressed by a gynocentric model of feminist criticism.

She divided feminist criticism into two areas: the first concerned the woman as reader, the way the hypothesis of the female reader changes the apprehension of a text. The second concerned the woman as writer and the problems of female creativity and language. By stressing difference in equality- in contrast to Beauvoir's view of equality in difference- Shawalter's gynocritics- which sees writing as an expression of personal experience in a social context- provides a link between the French theoretical and the Anglo-American empirical schools. Showalter' difference-centered, coherent approach serves as a guideline to this study in which I follow the development of

gynocritics with respect to its changes and place in feminist literary criticism.

The theory of early gynocritics, the 'feminist critique' is reflected in the first two chapters, where the question 'What does it mean to write as a woman' is explicitly raised. As it is stated in Showalter's 1977 essay *A Literature of their Own* 'feminist critique' during its early phases was not focused on the woman writer but, rather, included a kind of reading strategy which involved critical reading of male texts. Later, the emphasis fell on the critical reading of female texts, female themes, images, creativity, and female literary traditions. The hypothesis of the female reader can also change the apprehension of the text. The question 'What does it mean to write as a woman' raised in the first part of the paper dealing with the woman writer's anxiety, tension and ambiguity can neither be answered without a rough comparison of a woman writer with male tradition, nor without reference to the reader or the reading process. Since the central issues of early gynocritics were women's access to language and writing, 'feminist critique', the pluralism of comprehensive critical stances forms an active part in the process of my analysis.

The third chapter in which the woman writer is achieving a balanced state of existence and comes to grip with prejudices as much as with her own doubts is an example of a genuinely woman-centered, independent form of gynocritics. In part two there is a shift in emphasis from writer to reader in the light of texts. The question of *how* we read is tied to the question of *what* we read. This last part of the paper that outgrows gynocritics as Showalter does in *Speaking of Gender* (1989) attempts to decode wider gender theory isssues

concerning textuality, sexuality, and gender from producer to receiver.

Showalter's gynocritics, which sees both women's writing and reading in progress, concerns with the psychodynamics of female creativity, and the development of the individual and collective female career. Following her theoretical views the present paper based on the study of a 'woman as the producer of textual meaning'[5] shows three stages of development that lead from Charlotte Bronte's readers to feminist thinkers. Firstly, it shows Charlotte Bronte's transformation from woman to writer, secondly, the transformation of a woman reader into a feminist reader, and finally, the female reader succeeds in effecting a mediation between her perspective and that of the writer, thus creating a somewhat new reading paradigm with a new type of reader. These 'victories' are part of the project of producing women's culture and literary tradition.

In my analysis I do not rely on Showalter and the Anglo-American socio-historical method exclusively and do not wish to repeat what Showalter had already determined in gynocritics. Rather, I mix her theses with French deconstructive and psychoanalytical theory.[6] (While emphasizing the French and the American critical positions, I cannot and do not want to escape the Freudian influence which directs us to look for unconscious meanings).

The overlapping of the two theories- concerning the present study's goal- is inevitable in order to create a new concept of the relationship between women, culture, psychoanalysis, and language. This study is an attempt to prove that the two main trends not only complement

each other but also rely on each other in order to become an active force in feminist literary criticism.

Part I

Writing with a Difference

The advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words, a new element. Make what distinction you please in the social world, it still remains true that men and women have different organizations, consequently different experiences... But... the literature of women ... has been too much a literature of imitation. To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform

G. H. Lewes, ' The Lady Novelist,' 1852

Chapter 1. The 'Lady' Novelist: Anxiety of gender

It is a cliché that women have richly defined the ways in which imagination creates possibility is a possibility that society denies. As mentioned in E. Showalter's study *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) women wrote about 20 per cent of all books published in nineteenth century England. Literature was one of the few professions which granted equality to women, and female novelists and journalists were always paid on the same scale as men.

Although there were great opportunities for a woman writer there were also great problems. Novels known to be penned by women were unlikely to be taken seriously, and for this reason many of them felt it was wise to adopt a male pseudonym, i.e. George Eliot for Mary Ann Evans or Currer Bell for Charlotte Bronte. According to Showalter, 'like Eve's fig leaf, the male pseudonym signals the loss of innocence.'[1] Pseudonyms are also strong indicators of the historical shift caused by women's effort to participate in the mainstream of

literary culture. Critics often speculated about the sex of a novelist and felt free to rebuke her for being unfeminine. Charlotte Bronte, who also suffered from this accusation, wrote to one of her critics, G. H. Lewes:

I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know , keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful you will condemn me... Come, what will I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, and with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand; and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more.[2]

Women in the nineteenth cetnury are bound to write differently because their femaleness has meant that they will become wives, mothers, and daughters in a culture that separates the roles and needs of husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers, and daughters. What does it mean for a woman to write? From infancy women are trained to conform in all areas of behavior, while men are often admired for being rebellious. For women the act of writing is itself probably something of a rebellion in which writing is active, and self-expressive, whereas they have been told that they should be passive and keep their opinions to themselves.

Under these circumstances it is to be expected that they seem at times unsure that anyone believes them, and are reluctant to come to conclusions, consequently their style seem more moderate and more perceptive than that of the men. The reason for that is that women probably learn to rely on their perceptions and feelings because they

are denied access to 'big decisions' and authority. Thus they strive, often unsuccessfully, to see the world happily, but they also see the world as confusing, conflicting, and hostile.

Their range of emotions is far wider than those presented by men, for it encompasses love and anger. They are not nearly so exclusively preoccupied with action as are the men. They reason as men but they do intuit more often. In general women writers tend to be more holistic than men. While male writers seem more interested in definite closure, women writers often respond with open endings. Feminine logic in writing is often associational; male logic sequential. Male objectivity is challenged by feminie subjectivity. This list of contrasts could go on, but of course exceptions are everywhere.

The general difference, however, is a constant subject of study. When G.H.Lewes complained in 1852 that the literature of women was 'too much a literature of imitation' and demanded that women should express 'what they have already known, felt, and suffered' he was asking for something that Victorian society had made impossible.[3] Their model hero in most cases was the product of ignorance, the projection of women's fantasies about how they would act and feel if they were men. As Charlotte Bronte admitted to her friend, James Taylor: 'When I write about women, I am sure of my ground - in the other case I am not sure.'[4] As she explained, women had to build their heroes from imagination, since so many areas of masculine experience were impenetrable for them. Male writers - on the contrary - were thought to have most of the desirable qualities: experience, intelligence, humor, overall knowledge.

'The object of anonymity', wrote the author of *Adam Bede* (1859) - a woman who is known nowadays only by her pseudonym, George Eliot -' was to get the book judged on its own merits, and not prejudiced as the work of a woman.[5] But the point of choosing a male pseudonym as against publishing anonymously ('By a Lady', which is how Jane Austen's first published novel *Sense and Sensiblilty*, (presented in 1811) is to write from a position of power in a patriarchal society.

The necessary 'transformation' of the female writer into a male writer adds to the uncertainty and bewilderment reflected in their language, form, motifs, and style. The thing to do if you were a male reviewer was to scan the novel at hand for 'characteristics' which betrayed the gender of its author and, if the guess was on female, to review the book in those tones of more or less polite condescension - ' the mere twaddle of graciousness' - seemed appropriate when dealing with what George Eliot (writing anonymously this time) had called ' silly novels by lady novelists'.[6]

Woolf assigns the palpable tension in Charlotte Bronte's texts that mainfests itself in incomplete sentences to the isolation of writing women and a lack of cultural space.[7] Also responsible for tension, however, is the inverted syntax, since it creates a sense of strain in the mind of the reader.

The contrast between sentence structure and the language as a whole confirms the conflict in the author's mind between the restrained and the free. The result is a style that draws its force from its conflicting parts. When a reader comes across, five or six times

per page, words where he least expects them, the result must be a sense of restlessness. The tension of Bronte' s style undoubtedly reflects the tensions of its creator. Margot Peters in her book *Style in the Novel* (1973) gives the following figures of inversion: 'Chapter 2 in *Jane Eyre* contains 115 sentences, 65 containing inversion, over 50 per cent. Chapter 9 of *Shirley*: 160 sentences, 50 containing inversion. Chapter 7 of *Villette*: 178 sentences, 62 containing inversion.[8] Charlotte Bronte's use of antithesis-according to Margot Peters-'shapes not only her prose style, but provides a recurring, organizing principle for plot, setting, character, and action as well should call for pause and reconsideration of epithets like 'vehement' and 'unconscious'.[9]

Bronte's novels are not novels of passion even though they seem to be on superficial reading. Rather, they are novels concerned with the struggle of an individual to balance imagination and reason, passion and restraint, passivity and agression. Her use of antithesis dramatizes the conflicting claims upon one personality. In one brief scene in *Villette* Bronte created more than a dozen elements of contrast, (and I am using Peter's examples again): long/short, kind/cool, so little/so much, hoped/feared, the future/the present moment, every ill/one good,... and so forth. Peter claims that antithesis-that is responsible for tension in Charlotte Bronte' s novels-is an inevitable concomitant of all metaphoric language, which, by definition involves the linking of disparate elements.[10]

Showalter has reconstructed the criteria of double voiced discourse used in disdainful judgments on women writers' works. After

scrutinizing 18 th and 19 th century women writers' texts, she came to the conclusion that if a text manifested power, breadth, distinctness, clarity, learning, knowledge of life and so on, it was 'obviously' the work of a man. A woman writer, on the other hand, can be picked up easily by her refinement, tact, precision of observation, edifying manner and knowledge of domestic details, she maintained.

Showalter concludes that, significantly, many of the characteristics of women writers were negative ones: they lacked originality and education, for instance, and were unable to handle abstract thought; they were humorless, prejudiced, excessively emotional and ('unpardonably') unable to create male characters convincingly.[11]

1.1 The Novelist : 'Anxiety of female authorship'

What brings feminist critics together is a common belief that gender is constructed through language and that writing style must articulate, consciously or unconsciously, gender constructions. The writings of the poststructuralists, Derrida and French feminists were refiguring the powerful and sexually expressive relations between men and women's psyches and language. These critics argued that the universalism of binaries such as man / woman, culture / nature, in which 'woman' was the inferior term, led to women's language (*l'écriture feminine*) lying mute in patriarchy. [12]

Luce Irigaray, one of the most prolific French feminist critics, focuses on a sexually specific relationship between women and language. Her conception of feminine subjectivity leads to a set of stylistic and formal tendencies widely recognized in *l'écruture féminine*: double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear structure, open endings.[13]

Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980) described the ways in which the growing number of research on women and language had broadened knowledge about women's literary representation. Spender identified two key areas of research: first, the study of sex differences - do women and men use language differently, and if so, what does this mean? Second, the study of sexism of language. Instead of simply 'celebrating' women's writing, and speaking about separate languages for men and women ('genderlects') Spender suggests we should describe potentially new relationships between gender, language and literature.[14]

The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution. Women's literature is still haunted by the ghosts of repressed literature. The difference of women's writing lies in troubled relationship with female identity; the woman writer experiences her own gender as a 'painful obstacle' or even a debilitating inadequacy.

John Stuart Mill writing about female creativity in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) argued that women would have a hard struggle to

overcome the influence of male literary tradition and to create an independent, original art. 'The greater part of what women write about women is mere sycophancy to men', claimed Mill.[15] According to him, women would only have had a literature of their own if they had lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings. 'All women who write are pupils of the great male writers', he said. [16] But as Elaine Showalter in *The Female Tradition* (1977) points out: ' Mill would never have raised this point had women not already claimed a very important literary place.'[17]

As it has been claimed by literary scholars the nineteenth century was 'The Age of the Female Novelists'. Thinking of Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte and George Eliot the question of women's aptitude for fiction had been answered. The remaining question for fiction is whether women had, in defining their literary culture in the novel, simply appropriated another masculine genre. Critics and spokesmen for women's rights George Henry Lewes and Stuart Mill were of the opinion that : 'If women's literature is destined to have a different collective character from that of men, much longer time is necessary than has yet elapsed, before it can emancipate itself from the influence of accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses.'[18]

And here comes the question: How do women write? They write otherwise. They write with a difference. Elaine Showalter in *The Literature of Their Own* (1977) argues that the women's tradition is 'the product of a delicate network of influences operating in time,' and that it 'comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society.'[19] She concentrates on British women

writers of the 19th century and she finds in their work a 'recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images from generation to generation'.[20]

She attributes this to the 'female subculture' which, especially in Victorian England, ensured that women's experience of living and writing would be pointedly distinct from that of men. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*_(1979) analyze women's tradition through texts by women authors who have been more or less accepted as 'great' writers. Gilbert and Gubar in their study raise the often quoted question: 'Is a pen a metaphorical penis?'[21] to start their argument for the existence of the female tradition as standing in opposition to the male tradition.

They take an existing Freudian model- the androcentric paradigm described by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973- that literary sons suffer an anxiety of authorship and Oedipal struggle with male precursors-to show that women write in confrontation with culture and with themselves by creating an author's double, the madwoman in the attic.[22] Women authors, the above mentioned critics argue, also experience 'the anxiety of authorship'–or even more, the anxiety of female authorship- explicable as a feminine response to the metaphor of 'literary paternity', the androcentric paradigm, the idea of which is that the author stands in a fatherly relation to the text. In 'Life's Empty Pack: Notes Toward a Literary Daughteronomy,' Sandra Gilbert argues that patriarchal values control even the most rebellious (and creative) of women. Women artists, the 'literary mothers' presented their followers, their 'literary daughters' with a figurative 'empty pack'. The 'mother tongue'

teaches submission to what Jacques Lacan calls the ' "Law of the Father", the law that means culture is by definition patriarchal and phallocentric'.[23]

Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman...* point out that the woman writer's anxiety 'based on the woman's socially determined sense of her own biology makes its way into women's texts in recurring patterns of themes, forms, and motifs'[24] the manifestion of which is illness, hallucination, and death.

The 19th century woman writer inscribed her own sickness, her madness, her anorexia, her agoraphobia, and her paralysis in her texts. But we must also understand that there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structure; no publication is fully independent of the economic and political pressures of the male-dominated society since how women wrote is how they were allowed to write.

Some critics argue that the entire notion of authorship is a patriarchal notion, that ownership of a text and identifying normative ideas within a text are problematic. Women's writing—according to Susan Lanser and Evelyn Torton Beck—is 'a double-voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant.'[25]

1.2 Anxiety of Expression

Women writers of the nineteenth-century were confined both in a literal and figurative sense. Literally they were imprisoned in their homes, or in their fathers' houses. Figuratively, such women were locked into male literary experience and text from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection. In undertaking to explore male adventure, women needed to insert themselves into a discourse, a language, a story, which they have learnt from men and which would provide them with some instructions about who they are. Women writers (Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, the Brontes) soon started to show great deal of interest in women's experience and invented their own story telling version where heroines were freed form those male determined roles which restricted their possibilities of self-fulfillment in a male-dominated society.

They turned to picaresque, the popular male novel form during the 18th century, which was destined for expresssing masculine mode of experience. It was linear, episodic and eventful. The hero moved from adventure to adventure, scene to scene, characters popped up and then vanished for an age; often there were tales told by a peripheral character within the main narrative.

A story in which the heroine, who was forced by circumstances to take charge of her own destiny and act on her own initiative, provided a viable female alternative to the male picaresque, as long as certain constraints were observed: the heroine must not lose her virtue, and

must act in unconventional manner only under duress. For the heroine womanhood is often the obstacle to her development, and when our hero would succeed, the heroine, if she is lucky, merely survives. The elaboration of suitable adventures for such a heroine, that is, of dangers which left the heroine essentially unscatched, being rooted in fantasy rather than in reality, led to the development of the Gothic mode.

Gothic is variously defined. It has been one of the core issues of feminist criticism especially since Ellen Moers created the term 'female gothic'[26] which manifests itself in actions and heroinism. It is not the loving woman, the thinking woman, but the travelling woman who acts, who moves, and who copes with adventures.

The travel motif in women's literature –according to Moers- can be separated into two distant kinds: indoor and outdoor travel. In the Gothic castles with their dark, twisting, haunted passageways there is travel with danger, with a challenge to the heroine's enterprise, ingenuity, and physical strength. Inside the Gothic castle Ann Radcliffe's heroines are safe. With Moers's words: ' ...the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space'.[27] Outdoor travel for Catherine Morland, Jane Austen's heroine is country walking, which is the symbol for the joys of independent womanhood; while Lucy's, Charlotte Bronte's heroine's city walking in *Villette* evoces fear of the unknown, the 'unladylike' adventure.

In the Gothic novel written by men the heroine can also have distinctly unladylike adventures, but she is an innocent victim, and

therefore not responsible for her own odyssey. As Nóra Séllei remarks in her study on 19th century English woman writers the big difference between the Gothic written by men and the Gothic written by women is that the heroine in a male Gothic novel is always a victim, who either dies or saved by the hero in the last possible minute, while in a female writer's Gothic she is a lot more active and takes her life into her own hands.[28]

The female Gothic- where the demands of fantasy are reconciled with the demands of morality- is not an offspring of the male picaresque novel. Rather, it is an elaboration of the female novel of betrayal and seduction. Female Gothic was one of a number of aesthetic developments which made possible to respond to certain things that had long been taboo. In the novel it was the function of the female Gothic to go beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions. It became the great liberator of feeling and fantasy where heroines could enjoy all the adventures that heroes had long experienced, far from their home, in fiction. Quoting Robert B. Heilman: 'It acknowledged the nonrational-in the world of things and events, occasionally in the realm of the transcendental, ultimately and most persistently in the depths of the human being.'[29]

Lacanian psychoanalysis saw the Female Gothic as a mode of writing corresponding to the feminine, the romantic, the transgressive, and the revolutionary. Reading the female Gothic through Freud's *Studies on Histeria* (1964) as well as through Lacan and Kristeva, critics equated the Gothic with the feminine unconscious, and with the effort to bring the body, the semiotic, the imaginary or 'the pre-

Oedipal (M)other Tongue' into language. Several of these critics systematized their readings of female Gothic under the rubric of hysteria. The heroine of the Gothic is considered to be a 'classic hysteric', its hero a 'classic paranoid', and the female Gothic text is a 'hysterical narrative'.[30]

Moers also extended her theory on female Gothic to self-hatred and self-disgust towards the female body, sexuality, and reproduction. The Gothic, in her view, had to do with women's anxieties about birth and creativity, including the anxiety of giving birth to stories in a process that society could deem unnatural. [31]

Female Gothic can also be viewed as a confirmation not just with maternity, but with the the reproduction of mothering and the problems of femininity which the heroine must confront. The Gothic's literalization of imaginative or other subjective states often coincides with the ideas of childbirth and marriage. That women bear children and men do not is the simple origin of this complex and troubling tradition that associates women with the literal and with nature; an association that at once appeals and repels women writers.

The transitory experience of being a mother is the central and recurring metaphor for the abundant sense of danger in *Jane Eyre.* Margaret Homans points out: 'the specific connection between the literalization of subjective states and childbirth's actual passage from internal to external takes place in dreams about the children.'[32] Homans concludes that similarly to other internal states in Gothic novels, dreams are literalized in the object world, and 'the ambiguous

process of their literalization mirrors and reinforces the ambivalence that is almost always integral to the imagery of childbearing.'[33]

The thought of the event of childbirth itself would have had highly ambiguous connotations for any pre-twentieth century woman. In the nineteenth century, giving birth was quite often to be fatal to the mother or the child or to both, and to fear childbirth or associate it with death would have been quite reasonable. Women who become mothers in novels tend to die psychically if they do not die literally; survivors usually subordinate their identities to those of their husbands or of their marriageable daughters. Within the conventions of fiction, childbirth puts an end to the mother's existence as an individual.

Jane Eyre establishes a complex series of connectives between danger or trouble and figures of childbirth or of mother-child relationships.[34] This series originates in Jane's recollection of Bessie's folk belief that 'to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or to one's kin' and both Bessie's and Jane's experience verify the belief.

Fear is a state of being and a central theme in women's novels, which has rarely been confronted for what it is, by men or women readers. One way of looking at women's fear is as an immigrant's fear, the disorientation of anyone who leaves the place where they were born, its people and its language, to enter a foreign country alone. There is a sense in which women are immigrants for most of their lives. As they move towards maturity they enter a world in which men will allow them to be women. In their magnificent exposure of the themes and

the imagery of 19th century women writers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar want us to understand that 'the one plot that seems to be concealed in most of the nineteenth-century literature by women...is in some sense a story of the woman writer's quest for her own story; it is the story, in other words, of the woman's quest for self-definition.'[35]

The fear the Gothic novels were centered around was the reflection of women's oppressed psyche at a subconscious level. By applying Gothic elements the writer could get into the deepest layers of the feminine unconscious. Through Gothic woman writers could work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence towards the significant people in their lives: mothers, fathers, lovers. And furthermore, the genre is used to explore these conflicts in relation to a society which systematically oppresses women. As the woman novelist of the 18th and19th century was torn between her natural instincts and the social pressure to conform with the help of Gothic she could connect the social with the psychological, the personal with the political. And as Eva Figes points out: 'the Gothic mode eventually became an imaginative vehicle for feminism, since it provided a radical alternative to the daylight reality of conformity and acceptance, offering 'a dark world of the psyche in which women were the imprisoned victims of men'.[36]

Women feel imprisoned in a society that favours men and as a result they have also become the prisoners of their own minds. Through the Gothic novel the theme of imprisonment took on a new, far less realistic dimension. Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic(*1979) point out that because women writers felt both literally

contained (within their father's houses) and psychically constricted by 'women's place'... the 'spatial imagery of enclosure and escape' occupies a central place in their novels.[37]

The house remained a central image, though its meaning might change quite radically, and the action tended to be confined to the vicinity of the house and its immediate neighborhood. The setting was almost rural, a fact which emphasized women's isolation from modern business and industry. Often they chose to set their stories not in contemporary England, but in the past 30 or 40 years ago, as though acknowledging their ignorance of present - day reality. (When Charlotte Bronte tried to deal with social themes, to broaden her outlook in *Shirley*, she went to the Yorkshire of the Napoleonic Wars, and her novel is still essentially rural in character).

The imagery was readily to hand for women who were trying to express not conventional wisdom, but the bitter frustration of women's lives. The house, a central image in women's novels, takes on a new dimension. In the clear light of a courtship novel it represents security and status. But in the Gothic novel the house changes from being a symbol of male privilege and protection to an image of male power in its sinister aspect, threatening and oppressive. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte showed that the house of man had two distinct faces. The home which Rochester offers Jane seems, on the surface and during daylight hours to be all that a woman could desire, and Jane, like so many heroines, is a penniless orphan, so that the house seems to offer love and luxury beyond her wildest hopes. But at night, in the darkness of the soul, the house becomes a prison. Shrieks of dispair and rage are heard. The woman

who becomes Mrs. Rochester will go mad, and turn on her warden in a frenzy dispair. It is only through the destruction on the house that a resolution is arrived at.

Charming vistas, gardens, drawing rooms and library are replaced by heavy doors, iron bars, chains, battlements and dungeons. For the mind of woman the marital home is a prison, rank with the smell of decay and death, which threatens to drive her insane. In the female Gothic, Claire Kahane asserts, 'the heroine is imprisoned not in a house, but in the female body, which is in itself the maternal legacy.'[38] The problematics of femininity is reduced not in a house, but in the female body, perceived as antagonistic to the sense of self, as therefore freakish. The Gothic castle is, above all, the house of the dead mother.

It is also not surprising, that a spatial imagery of enclosure characterizes much of women's writing in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries. From Jane Austen's mirrored parlors to Charlotte Bronte's coffin-shaped beds, imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness and her fear of the unknown. It reflects her growing suspicion that what the nineteenth - century called 'woman's place' is itself irrational and strange.

For many nineteenth-century female writers, who became dissatisfied with preaching merely prudence, propriety, and the conduct of courtship, the Gothic suggested independence, adventure, narrative boldness, and self-reliance. Gothic overtones inspired Mrs. Radcliffe, Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, George

Eliot and the Brontes to write protest novels which showed far more imaginative power than the 'traditional' conduct-in-courtship novels. Since the conventions of the novel and of womanhood made it all but impossible for the heroines to exhibit sexuality and power, women writers projected these aspects of themselves into their heroes. Rochester's blindness, for example is a symbolic immersion of the hero in feminine experience. Men, these novels are saying, must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced into dependency.

Gothic takes a new dimension in Charlotte Bronte. While the first Gothic writers described the excitements of mysterious scenes-which Robert B. Heilman called 'old Gothic', - Charlotte Bronte, who made some direct use of this technique, tended towards humorous modifications ('anti-Gothic') and discovered new, deep feelings which, because of their depth of intensity or ambiguity increased the sense of reality in her novels.

As Robert B. Heilman further claims, Charlotte Bronte revises the 'old Gothic', the relatively crude mechanism of fear with an infusion of the anti-Gothic.[39] She created heroines who vibrate with passion and evoke new feelings 'ranging from nervous excitement to emotional absorption.'[40] The 'old Gothic' of crude fear is especially modified in *Jane Eyre* and in *Villette* by the introduction of comedy, by the use of the symbolic, and by the above mentioned 'deep feelings'. Bronte's 'new Gothic' made the 'old Gothic' look more than a stereotype, bringing into existence- in Montague Summers words- 'the Gothic novel of sensibility'[41].

In *Jane Eyre* we see Jane living through an exciting Gothic tale. She seeks situations that naturally develop into complex interrelations of psychology and external motivation. Jane's picaresque wandering and the romantic discovery of her family when she appeals at a lonely house on the moors for rescue from the elements, gives Bronte a looser, less intense and dramatic theater for her exploration of Jane.

In *Villette*, non-realistic traditions are used deliberately to develop a language for an inner psychological world. Parody, as in the discrediting of the Gothic story of the nun, persuades us of the verity of the ordinary world of the novel. Like *Jane Eyre*, it has the unity of a fable about the growth of a psyche, but the reconciliation is harder, and *Villette* is even more possessed by death than was *Jane Eyre*.

In *Shirley* or in *The Professor* there is not much picaresque wandering but similarly to *Villette*, the heroine's fears lead to nervous breakdown, which manifests itself through suspense techniques, confusions of identity, the use of doubles, incest motifs and the omnipresence of death.

Women writers of the 19th century who invade male territory may be under the threat of anathema. They are threatened and frightened. The lessons they learn from great male writers involve them in doubt and contradiction. They learn that women can be powerful, as angels or witches, but they will not learn from men how to speak from a position of power. And this unconventional, stressful state led to female Gothic where fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with

one definite intent of the author: to scare. Not, that is to reach down into the depth of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragedy does), but to get to the body itself, quickly arousing the psychological reactions to fear.

The Gothic novel not only unleashed the imagination, but made it possible to show women acting boldly on their own behalf, with fortitude and courage. In this sense the Gothic novel was itself only a link in the chain, since it was followed by more realistic novels showing young women coping with adversity and disaster. The Gothic's invaluable contribution to the history of women's writing is that for the first time in the nineteenth century women proved that they could write novels like men. It remained for us the twentieth century readers, to prove that they could write novels like women.

Chapter 2 Tension, Ambiguity: The Female Imagination

2.1 The Repressed Self

Women's writing tells us that, like men, women yearn for the often incompatible self-fulfillment and love. The traditional arena for power is marriage where caring for others and the traditional female posture of dependency presents, as we have seen, hidden possibilities for excercising control. 19 th century woman writers all raise questions about women's lot which they answer ambiguously.

They do not give clear answers, because simply, they can not. Women's needs are identical with men's, perhaps the balance may be different, but the substance is the same: work and love, independence and dependency, solitude and relationship, to enjoy community and value one's specialness. Too often, though these polarities present themselves to women as insoluble contradictions: love, dependency, relationship, community: proper feminine goals. Their opposites are assumed to be questionable values for a woman and the woman who presumes to seek them - either real or fictional woman - has to pay a price.

Of course it is by no means true that books by women necessarily differ from books by men. Male writers are often 'sensitive', women frequently knowledgeable: the stereotypes do not apply. Writing novels, women deal with the problems occuring between individual and society that have always concerned novelists. Still, there appears to be something that we might call a 'woman's point of view' - that sounds like a column in the *Cosmopolitan*, a journal for women,

- a rather vague phenomenon, a distinct outlook recognizable through the centuries. Not, again, that the male-female contrasts need to be extreme. Yet it is illuminating to seek the special point of view, and to find how the stories women tell shape themselves into patterns, even if not universal, but at least very widespread in female experience. Women write directly about their own lives in letters, journals, autobiographies, or indirectly in that concealed form of autobiography we call fiction, demonstrating that the experience of women has long been the same, that female likeness is more fundamental than female differences.

The female imagination, the female mind can also be responsible for the themes and sexual awareness - the special point of view - that absorbed female minds during the past three centuries as recorded in literature written in English. Surely the mind has a sex, minds learn their sex. At any rate, women characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns, or at least slightly skewed from them. The differences between traditional female and male preoccupations and roles also effect female writing. The dreariness of social frustration permeates much writing by women.

When they say that society denies them a clear path to fulfillment they also affirm the significance of their inner freedom. They can escape reality through writing and through imagination. The fruitful interchange of dream and reality constitutes the special strength of women as writers, and it is the 'positive result' of their social alienation they suffer. The 'negative result' is their anger as a response to social impotence. Neither the imagined world nor their

anger toward reality in itself solves social problems. Both may lead to personal resolutions of dubious value - to indulgent self-pity, masochism, narcissism as postures of defense but they can also provide means for artistic growth.

So what is a woman to do, setting out to write about women? She can imitate men in her writing, or strive for an impersonality beyond sex, but finally she must write as a woman: Is there another way for her? Examining the problems women reveal in imaginative writing, she will necessarily uncover her own. We might come to the conclusion, that there are few generalizations, if any, to be made about the forms and techniques of 'women's problems'. Through all literary genres - criticism as well as poetry, fiction, autobiography - women demonstrate their approaches to the solving of the puzzle concerning women including the dilemma of their own sexuality.

Women of the 19 th century were unprepared, through upbringing, to cope with the first shock of sexual love. When it came, it was something shameful, to be hidden from the outside world and even from oneself. 'Female delicacy', social and psychological constraint made it out of the question for a woman to reveal any feeling for a man unasked, unless he had already declared himself in love with her. But if there was a shame even greater than that of betraying unrequited passion, it was for the object to be unlawful.

The same consciousness of difficulty presents itself over and over. Women dominate their own experience by imagining it, giving it form, writing about it. In their exact recording of inner and outer experience

they establish women's claim for attention as individuals. They define, for themselves and for their readers, woman as she is and as she dreams. A rejection of the traditional concept of woman as man's opposite and complement may be traced throughout C. Bronte's novels, which are - however not exclusively- obsessed with heterosexual passion.

Charlotte Bronte dramatized in her fiction the strong conflict within her personality between the power and sex drives. A desire for freedom and independence and a personal desire for erotic fulfillment contend within her heroines' natures as within her own. In *Jane Eyre*, in bringing about Jane's happiness and fulfillment in a male-oriented society, Charlotte Bronte depicts her ideal of love between the sexes.

By tracing Charlotte Bronte's struggle with the power and sex drives within her own nature, as reflected in her life and by defining the concept of love that she describes there, one finds the novel intimately identified with her personal and literary experience. Early in her life Charlotte Bronte acquired a feeling of inferiority. From the teaching of her Evangelical father and Methodist aunt she acquired a dread of judgment and a sense of sin, including the sinfulness of sexuality. The result was a continuing battle between her conscience and her creative impulses, between her sense of her own worth and the assertions of being neglected, and between her sexual longings and their oppression.

In *The Professor* she is sticking to her conscious, intellectual cover story, that her feeling for the professor was pure and asexual, based

of affinity of spirit. The fact that it is reciprocated in the same fashion, that she is his chosen pupil, is the only element of wish-fulfillment. The denial of sexual passion in *The Professor* is usually seen as a form of wish -fulfillment, but that came later, hidden and disguised in *Jane Eyre.* Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* came to separate the need for love clearly from sexual appetite. She evolved a concept of love as a relationship not divorced from sexuality but separate and superior to it. She came to view satisfaction of the love providing a basis for a happy, mutual relationship free from the trap of sexuality and, prospectively, as a relationship still available to her.

In *Jane Eyre* Bronte distinguishes between a purely erotic relationship and one based on the full range of emotional relationships open to sex partners. Where others would separate the affectional and sensual currents, she integrates and equalizes them by reducing the sexual voltage and by developing sources of interest beyond the erotic.

The master-slave relationship is replaced by one based on companionship. Jane rejects the ascetic ideal, represented by St. John, which would overcome and deny human nature, and she escapes from the unnatural as it would be imposed by tradition and social environment. Rochester's attractive, but threatening muscularity has already been noticed; when Jane and Rochester come together again, 'the muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder, neck, waist - I was entwined and gathered to him'.[1] According to Myer this is 'the most erotic grope in literature. Rochester's masculinity takes control and Jane willingly

submits'[2]. But love's triumph does not come easy ; obstacles to Jane's victory lie both within and without.

Her key traits - her passionate nature, her spirit of independence, and her capacity for love often clash. Passion demands the surrender of control of self and directs one's attention away from the loved one. The independent spirit resists the subordination of self which both passion and love require. And love insists on the restraint of both passion and the assertion of selfhood and may tempt one to surrender without compensating return. Jane's happiness depends on reconciling these internal demands.

Jane Eyre is a fantasy of a young woman achieving happiness and fulfillment in a male dominated world. But until she is financially independent and he has repented his errors, full physical intimacies are terrifying to Jane. She was also horrified to think of clergymen in whom 'the animal predominated over the intellectual'[3] By animal, she meant 'sexual'. She achieves a sexual equality in the erotic sphere, avoiding both sexual surrender and a split between mind and body with rejection of the letter.

Her universe is rendered whole and healthy by the balancing of feminine and masculine attributes in a complementary sexual relationship under the aegis of love. And as though to underline the fact that sexual initiation involves the death of freedom of the spirit for a woman, the servant Bessie sings a song at her beside which begins: 'In the days when we went gipsying / A long time ago...' and young Jane responds to the song with the comment: 'I had often heard the song before, and always with lively delight ...But now... I

found in its melody an indescribable sadness...' "A long time ago" came out like the saddest cadence of a funeral hymn.'[4]

While *Jane Eyre* is about reciprocal love, *Villette* is a requiem for a one-sided love, symbolized by the burying of letters and the drowning of Paul. The ghostly figure of the nun in *Villette* or the snake-bite episode in *Shirley*, like Charlotte's own fears that her imagination might be a form of neurosis, have been reduced to an image not of death, but of sex as enjoyed by other people. But Lucy is not called upon to sacrifice her religion even by the Catholic lover, and she is not called upon to stay unloved for ever. Both these bogies disappear with the emergent love of M. Paul. The heroines are finally free, by the establishment of their own new careers and the knowledge they are loved. In *Villette* and in *Shirley* Charlotte found the way to reconcile emotional frustration and self-control with the help of her unique creative imagination, in the belief that 'this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end. I believe while I tremble; I trust while I weep.'[5]

2.2 The Repressed Sexuality

Mary Jacobus and Margaret Homans argue in *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (1979) that the woman writer can express her difference only through metaphors of female desire which enact Eliot's own realization that they can seldom declare what a thing is,

except by saying it is something else. The strength of Charlotte Bronte's artistic style lies mainly in the imagery which is vigorous and suggestive , and meant to reveal mental conflicts. It can be traced best in *Jane Eyre*.

The core of the book lies in Jane 's description of what goes on in her mind after the tumult that follows upon the interrupted wedding. In chapter 26 she can see herself from the outside; in the third person, as 'Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman' but is now a 'cold, solitary girl again'; she sees her prospects and her hopes in characteristic Biblical imagery, 'struck with a subtle doom, such as, in one night, fell on all the first-born in the land of Egypt.' She sees her love, 'like a suffering child in a cold cradle.' Character, situation, and image are absolutely fused here: observer with observed, subject with object.

It is worth noting that Charlotte's language becomes most imaginative when she is working on a mind in an agony of passion. In such cases even the half - allegorically developed situation becomes an intimate and revealing part of Jane's mind: we can see this in the two haunting dreams of the little child which Jane tells Rochester on the eve of their wedding and which look forward to the impending disaster, the 'suffering child in a cold cradle', and we can see it in the description of Jane's paintings in chapter 13, which again both define her mind and anticipate her fate.

Relying on the 'unconscious scanning' *Jane Eyre* can be seen as a virgin's horrified fantasy of adult sex. Jane cannot imagine without anxiety, anything more physical than kisses. Bertha is an image of

her virginal terror. Bertha's trouble is that she has no intellect, she has destroyed what brain she had with drink. Jane, on the other hand, is a woman of intellect. Charlotte's fable took its shape from the writer's own emotional pressures: a woman giving herself to the principle of intellect. Unregenerated sex is imagined by mad Bertha because Charlotte's own sexual wishes were focused on a married man, a father-figure. Somehow, to make the fantasy come out right, the married lover had to become unmarried, so the heroine could enjoy him without guilt. Myer writes that the marriage between Rochester and Jane cannot take place, because 'Jane is terrified of being mastered, of being "opened'... and turned into a "clothed hyena", growling and sniffling about on all fours.'[6] Bertha's attacks with knife and teeth possibly represent the power of the male to penetrate Jane and make her bleed.

It is implied that sexual experience can degrade a woman so that she becomes a brute beast, like a man. Height, hairiness and strength symbolize, for Charlotte, male sexual appetite, an enlarged vision of her own sexuality. Bertha is a hostile mother figure; a psychological archetype of suppression. Created out of Bronte and the nineteenth-century women's fear of sexuality, Bertha functions primarily as a warning example of the dangers of sex. As the primary instrument of Gothic effects, Bertha appears at moments and in ways that suggest the dangers of passion for Jane.

There are parallels between the two women from the beginning of the novel. Bertha is Jane's double. She is given the position of the other whose presence serves only to define, by contrast, Jane as central female character. Bertha's own identity is excluded from the evolving

female norm. Jane and Bertha are doubles who, suffering from the same set of patriarchal oppressions, lodge a common protest against patriarchy. Jane is driven to such a passion of anger in the opening that she is twice called a mad cat. The first appearance of Bertha follows the evening when Rochester made his shocking revelations to Jane of his affair in Paris with Celine Varens. They are stirring up in Jane's own mind as she falls asleep, only to be woken up by the smoke caused by Bertha's arson in Rochester's bed. Jane then faces 'strange energy' in Rochester's voice and that strange fire in his look.

The parallels between Jane and Bertha are made much more explicit in that final Gothic scene of Bertha's midnight visit to Jane's room before the wedding. As John Maynard points out that the veil - which is torn into pieces - can be identified with both Bertha and Jane. 'At the same time', he says, 'the veil retains its traditional significance as a hymeneal symbol of the bride's giving herself to the groom, who lifts it in the ceremony to kiss her. The ripping serves as yet another warning against the physical and psychic dangers of sex'[7].

Though Bronte overtly acknowledges the connection between Jane and Bertha only once - ' It is not because Bertha is mad that I hate her. If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?' ' I do indeed, sir' - the reader is encouraged to make unconscious pathways between the two women. Unconscious scanning picks up affinities between Bertha and Jane that a conscious reader intent on plot coherence might overlook: the scattered images of fire and room that both Bertha's and Jane's stories have, and which are the reminders of what they share: oppression and rage. Bertha is an awful warning

of what adulteress can degenerate into. Bertha's degradation is a warning against drunkenness and promiscuity, proof of how they can destroy a human being. But her existence is not, as several critics have pointed out, the only obstacle to Jane's marriage. She is afraid and uneasy about the marriage before she knows of any impediment, namely, her bitter resentment of Rochester's economic domination. Bertha must be killed off, so that a moral, Protestant femininity, licensed sexuality and a qualified, socialized feminism may survive.

The psychological world of C. Bronte reveals a lot about her childhood experiences and dreams which often represent themselves in her novels through symbols and images. Bronte shows us how symbolic structures work within the heroine's mind to drive her into anxiety and finally to a doubtful resolution. Images associated with heat were to have important sexual connotations in Charlotte Bronte's later works and these are not simply lacking in *The Professor*, they have been replaced by cold images. Cold gray skies are as much a feature of this book as fiery sunsets are a feature of *Jane Eyre*. And the fiercely Protestant ethic which runs through the book is associated not just with hard work and endeavor, but also with sexual purity. In *Shirley* Caroline sees the proud Shirley kneeling at the fireside with her future husband, 'unconscious of the humility of her present position', and when Mrs Pryor chooses to be a governess to escape a dreadful marriage she says: 'How safe seemed the darkness and chill of an unkindled hearth, when no lurid reflection from terror crimsonised its desolation.'[8]

The hearth also plays an important part in the coming together of Crimsworth and Frances Henry, but the connotations are far from

fiery. Having found Frances in the Protestant cemetery, Crimsworth walks her home. It starts to rain, and Frances invites him into her modest home. She has a green doormat on the threshold, a fact which is mentioned several times, and green is a cool color, unlike red. The carpet in her living room is also green. Crimsworth notices that there is no fire in the hearth, and Frances insists on lighting the fire for his benefit. When he returns unexpectedly she has already extinguished the fire. The reason given for her behavior is poverty, laudable parsimony. But the nature of Charlotte Bronte's imagery makes is inevitable that we should interpret this scene in a deeper way: Frances is sexually pure and unawakened, but is capable of responding to him and only him. When Crimsworth leaves the house the rain has stopped and he sees a rainbow, the nearest we ever get to the flaming skies of Jane Eyre. Since the birth of psycho-analysis parsimony has been associated with sexual suppression, they come naturally together in the protestant ethic, thus the two themes become one in *The Professor.*

Charlotte Bronte associates fire with sexual passion. When Jane lies awake at night thinking of Rochester she hears Mrs. Rochester 's demoniac laughter, and finds the curtains of Rochester's bed on fire. Fire in Bertha Rochester, who has highly strung sexuality, runs out of control and becomes dangerous.

It is the weapon used twice by Bertha, on the second occasion burning down the house and blinding Rochester. But on the first occasion, when Jane lies awake thinking of Rochester and hears the wild laughter coming, it seems, from her own pillow, fire also represents animal sexuality which has to be put down. Jane puts out

fire round Rochester's bed and the terms used by the author are significant: 'I...deluged the bed and its occupant, flew back to my own room, brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh, and by God's aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames which were devouring it.'[9]

Key scenes between lovers tend to take place in front of the hearth which, unlike the fire which burns down Rochester's house, tends to be associated with regulated, properly controlled passion. In *Jane Eyre* there is a key confrontation between Jane and Rochester when the latter dresses up as a fortune-teller and reads Jane's face in the light of the library fire and tells her: 'You are cold, because you are alone: as contact strikes you that is in you.' Jane, who seems very obtuse in not recognizing Rochester, tells him: 'Don't keep me long ; the fire scorches me.'[10]

Snow and fire, hot and cold, red and white are the constant, familiar polarities of Charlotte Bronte's sexual imagery. In Thornfield (thorny field of sexuality) Jane becomes conscious of her want of beauty. The main drawing room, decorated in red and white in a 'general blending of snow and fire' seems to Jane 'a glimpse of a fairy place, so bright to my novice eyes.'[11] Unlike Rochester, Jane is a novice to sex but Jane Air, his Ariel, the woman he constantly refers to as his elf, spirit, fairy, belongs to this 'fairy place'. Rochester represents sexuality rather than romantic love or suitable marriage. He is a libertine, has traveled widely and kept mistresses. Jane first meets him in the red and white drawing room, 'basking in the light and heat of a superb fire', and a few pages further on he is again standing in front of the fireplace, while 'the large fire was all red and clear.'

Bronte's use of the red-room suggests that she had a most unusual degree of perspective on the relation of childhood experiences to adult difficulties. We see Jane's difficulty in getting close to any man - as well as her preference for older men - from her childhood trauma. The 'Red Room' in *Jane Eyre* is a symbol of sexual initiation or rape. The incident in the red room that happened to her in pre-adolescence is the beginning of the process designated to break the rebellious spirit of Jane, who is a 'heterogeneous thing... a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment.' [12] In the red room Jane has to go through the fearful imitation involved in becoming an acceptable woman. 'I was conscious that a moment's muting had already rendered me liable to strange penalties.'[13]

In a male - dominated society sexual initiation is punitive. She must become passive and allow terrifying things to be done to her. In the red room Jane only promises to sit still when the servants prepare to tie her down: 'If you don't sit still, you must be tied down.' Locked in the red room, Jane thinks about her inability to please, and thinks with jealousy of cousin Georgiana's beauty, which purchased 'indemnity every fault.'

Locked up in the red room, Jane thinks about escape from unsupported oppression - like running away, or if that could not be effected, 'neither eating or drinking more, and letting myself die', that is, the anorexia nervosa of female adolescence. Having persuaded herself that the ghost of Mr. Reed is in the red room she panics, pleads to be allowed to remain a child: 'Take me out! Let me go to the nursery!' but her cries do not get the desired response. On the

contrary, the servants do not feel sympathy for her: 'If she had been in great pain one would have excused it' is the comment, again suggesting sexual initiation. And this interpretation is reinforced when Mrs Reed comes to the room and tells her: 'You will now stay here an hour longer, and it is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you then.'[14]

Terrified of the ghost of Mr. Reed, (though she also feels that if he were alive 'he would have treated me kindly'), Jane faints. This is the point of psychical submission, and when she returns to consciousness she is 'aware that someone was handling me; lifting me up and supporting me in a sitting posture, and that more tenderly than I had ever been raised or upheld before.'[15] She has become the delicate female sexual object, to be petted and pandered in return for submission and passivity.

For Elaine Showalter, the red room is 'a paradigm of female inner space: with its deadly and bloody connotations, its Freudian wealth of secret compartments, wardrobes, drawers, and jewelchest, the red room has strong associations with the adult female body.'[16] For Valerie Grosvenor Myer the red room associates with 'bedroom, redwomb'.[17] But for her the echo is with 'tomb' rather than with 'womb'.

Myer sees the red room as a corpse. The terror Jane experiences there is not so much terror at her own physical development as the fear of the dead and death itself. When Jane wakes from her fit, she sees before her 'a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars'. This is only the nursery fire, but fires for Victorian children were

associated with hell. Bertha 's room is described by Rochester as 'the mouth of hell'[18] Bertha's eyes are 'fiery', her visage 'lurid', and for a second time Jane faints from terror. There is an undertone, somewhere, that Bertha is negroid, with her thick lips and blackened, 'savage' face. The picture is vivid, but blurred at the edges. Myer claims that referring to Bertha as a 'creole', is ambiguous. She argues: 'The label 'creole' was given equally to settlers of aristocratic French extraction and to people of colour.'[19]

She also argues that the mad wife does not necessarily belong to Gothic fiction; many men, even today have mad wives. The Victorians had no tranquillizers or psychotheraphy; mad people were locked up at home, if the house was large enough. M.H. Scargill claims, ' The mad woman of the Gothic novel has been put to allegorical use' [20] but Myer asks the question: 'What does the madwoman allegorize?'[21] For David Smith, Bertha is an 'image of the mother-figure' whose place Jane wishes to take.[22] Robert Bernard Martin sees her as 'an image of Jane's soul'[23] while others see Bertha as a sexual license, a symbol of Rochester's misspent youth, or even the female in himself that he must either kill or cure. She has also been interpreted as the embodiment of sexuality, but critics are not sure whether what she represents is male or female. Jane is undersized, undeveloped, a sprite, a fairy, prepubescent in appearance. Bertha by contrast, has the size and strength of a man; she is hairy, muscular and sex - crazed.

Margaret Horne sees the Red Room as a 'magnificent emblem of the interior of Jane's own mind.'[24] In order to analyze Lucy's mind in *Villette* Charlotte Bronte again uses highly metaphorical language.

As in *Jane Eyre* she often draws on Biblical analogies, and here they tend to grow into miniature dramas, as in chapter 17, when Lucy sees her own emotional needs like the psychical needs of the cripples lying around the pool and waiting for a miracle.

Mental conflict in the novels are seen by Inga - Stina Ewbank as a 'debate between Reason and Passion or Prudence and Conscience, often in such a way as to make them only mock serious. From time to time Lucy's state of mind is rendered to us in terms of a "psychomachia" a dialogue in her soul between Reason and Imagination (or Hope, or Feeling, the three being almost synonymous for Lucy).' [25] There is a good example of it in chapter 21. where Lucy's loveless existence in the 'pensionnat' can only be cheered up by the doubtful promise of letters from Dr. John. As soon as she is alone, Reason is surrounded by images of cold and pain: 'laying on my shoulder a withered hand, and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld' making Lucy remember all her struggles.

The mindful reader cannot overlook the buried treasure image. In *Villette* particularly this unmined treasure is her chastity, the source of that self - esteem which can keep her alive. One of Paul Emannuel's predominant characteristics is his chastity - Lucy tells us, that any maiden would be safe with him. This chastity or sexual passion is associated with the hidden treasure image when we are told that long ago M.Paul had buried his passions.

The motif of buried treasure is dramatized several times in *Villette* in a slightly different form. Lucy receives letters from Dr. John. These symbols of her passion for him - not his for her - she figuratively and

literally buries: in a case, secreted in a locked box, hidden in a drawer. In the chapter ' A Burial' she attempts to kill her feelings for Dr. John once and for all. She rolls up the letters, symbols of passion, and thrusts them into a hermetically sealed jar. She buries this jar at the roots of a tree in the 'allee defendue', a walk designed to prohibit commerce between male and female students of the two schools.

Minutes after she hides her 'treasure', Lucy sees the nun, symbol of the denied sexuality that Lucy has just buried. Later when Lucy recalls that moonlight burial, the treasure image undergoes a bizarre change: 'casket' becomes 'coffin', 'buried gold' the gold of Dr. John's hair: 'Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried. Sometimes I thought the tomb unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden, and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks.'

The association of casket with coffin, of treasure with the rites of burial, suggests that Bronte's attitude is unconsciosly ambiguous toward the hidden or reserved passions of her characters. The treasure symbol may also stand for sensibility, inner vitality, courage or independence. In a broader sense, all Bronte characters lead 'buried' lives. Alienated from ordinary social values, checked and bridled by poverty, caste, and sex, her heroes and heroines live unacknowledged by the world, the best part of their natures disguised.

The figurative terms of starvation and nourishment or thirst in Bronte's usage represent salvation and regeneration in human

relationships. When the heroines are deprived of love-hate that is, food, the famine leads to illness. Lucy Snowe consistently translates her life of privation into metaphor of starvation or thirst, her moments of joy into metaphor of nourishment or thirst quenched.

The hunger - nourishment motif illustrate Lucy's feelings toward M. Paul as she speaks of his letters: 'They were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed.' Hunger language predominates in Caroline Helstone's unrequited love for Robert Moore. When Moore is kind, then cold, Caroline suffers: '... a few minutes before, her famished heart had tasted a drop and crumb of nourishment, that, if freely given, would have brought back abundance of life where life was failing; but the generous feast was snatched from her, spread before another, and she remained but a bystander at the banquet.' When Caroline is dying of a 'famished heart', Bronte tells us: 'Life wastes fast in such vigils... during which the mind - having no pleasant food to nourish it - no manna of hope - no hived honey of joyous memories - tries to live on the meagre diet of wishes, and failing to derive thence either delight or support, and feeling itself ready to perish with craving want, turns to philosophy, to resolution, to resignation...'

Chapter 3 Holding the Balance

3.1 Ideology

As was pointed out earlier, gender is constructed through language and style, which represents the articulation of ideologies of gender. But the definition of ideology contains the notion of contradiction. This is because ideology is what we construct to explain to ourselves, our experience and the experience of others. 'Ideology is our way of coping with the contradictions of experience'- claimed Maggie Humm.[1] It is inevitable that the ideologies of women contain more contradictions than the ideologies of men since women seem to have more confusing images of themselves than men do.

Although society has designated different roles to men and women and social conduct was defined and predictable, Charlotte Bronte's heroines certainly have difficulties in discovering male intentions. They read or misinterpret signals addressed to them by men the result of which is bewilderment, frustration, and illness: clear signs of physical and emotional weakness.

Men, if they want to know more about the secrets of women's souls turn to the morally condemnable tools of spying. Charlotte Bronte's attitude to men spying on women in general is entirely ad hoc. There is no suggestion that William Crimsworth, eavesdropping on an intimate conversation between M. Pelet and Mlle Reuter, is equally guilty or indeed guilty at all. But the denial of sexuality makes Crimsworth appear sly, calculating and misogynistic. Whilst disapproving of his Roman Catholic pupils and their sexual depravity,

he himself seems a rather nasty voyeur when he gets the boarded window of his bedroom opened up so that he can watch the girls in the garden below.

Paul Emanuel is the master spy, but then he is a devout Roman Catholic; Bronte seriously considers that this would account for this vice. Lucy is deeply shocked when he points to a window overlooking the pensionnat and shamelessly describes his spying on her: 'That is a room I have hired, nominally for a study- virtually for a post of observation. There I sit and read for hours together: it is my way - my taste. My book is this garden: its contents are human nature - female human nature. I know you all by heart.[2]

Mr. Rochester is not above using such methods to discover the true character of the woman he is interested in: 'The next day I observed you - myself unseen - for half an hour while you were playing with Adele on the gallery. It was a snowy day, I recollect, and you could not go out of doors. I was in my room: the door was ajar: I could both listen and watch...[3]

Neither is Louis Moore above spying. When Shirley and her relatives are out he wanders thoroughly and notes down his conclusions: 'I never saw anything that did not proclaim the lady: nothing sordid, nothing soiled: in one sense she is as scrupulous as, in other she is unthinking: as a pleasant girl, she would go ever trim and cleanly. Look at the poor kid of this little glove, - at the fresh unsullied satin of the bag.'[4] This is nanny's talk, and it is really rather ludicrous that the suitor should be summing up the loved one's character by rummaging through her personal possessions, but Louis clearly feels, like Mr.

Rochester and Paul Emmanuel, that snooping is a perfectly fair way for a man to assess a woman's character.

The early Victorians were confronted with the growing frustration and contradictions women were experiencing. The anger of Lucy Snow and Jane Eyre is a powerful example, but by no means unsingular representations of dissent from the prevailing ideology of womanhood. The contradictions of a society which promulgated a belief in individualism and self-help while denying half its population the legal and social right to pursue any such autonomy were becoming apparent. Charlotte Bronte's novels deal forcefully and explicitly with the central contradictions of a woman's life which manifest themselves in illness, hysteria, transvestism, and inclination towards bi-sexuality.

As feminist historians, social scientists and literary critics have demonstrated, there are significant relations between particular diseases (anorexia nervosa, agarophobia) and the cultural and historical conditions shaping women's social roles. The Victorian sickroom scenes are linked to moments of crisis during which the sufferers have become separated from the social roles and norms by which they previously defined themselves. The sickroom in Victorian fiction is a haven of comfort, order, and natural affection. 'Professional work', Ann Douglas explains, 'was hardly a socially acceptable escape from a lady's situation, but sickness, that very nervous condition brought on by the frustrations of her life was.'[5]
According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg hysteria in the 19 th century functioned as a 'socially accepted sick role' which provided middle class women with relief from discontinuities in the ideal of

womanhood.[6] Victorian women, sexually repressed, became hysterical. Freud marked the casual factor accurately: the hysterics - according to him - become sick because they 'conceive everything sexual as incompatible with their moral content, as something that soils and pollutes. They repress the sexuality from their consciousness, and the ideas of such content which have caused somatic phenomena become unconscious through the "reaction of defense". [7]

As is seen in *Shirley* the sensuous excitement in a virgin contains a mixture of anxiety, the fear of the unknown. The hysterics become sick from their sexual needs, from their inferior social roles and through hysteria they express their struggle to defend themselves against sexual and social discrimination. Freud accepted his society's faith that women were inferior and went on to state that any woman who could not adjust to this was neurotic, so must be cured. Victorian women had good cause to envy men, of their privileged status - but basically it was the social benefits they claimed, not a penis.

Again and again in works by women of the period (Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, the Brontes) illness occurs when the desire to reject the characteristics appropriate for women threatens a profound loss of identity, whereas to accept it would result in a return to frustration and self-reduction. Illness can be a register of deviance or alienation from social and personal norms.

In Charlotte Bronte's novels 'somatic disorder' becomes the primary form of convalescence, the measure of comfort, and physical dependency the enabling condition for intimacy. The conflict between a desire for romantic fulfillment and for autonomy is, in *Shirley* a central dilemma. Caroline's illness is a projection of her fading sense of relationship to the external world. Illness not only renders the loss of identity, it also allows for self-assertion. A similar pattern of self-assertion in the romance world of the sickroom takes place in *Villette*. Lucy, too, is seen by others and by herself as a 'colourness shadow', who represses her hopes and desires and, like Caroline, fears the 'crime' of forwardness. Russel Goldfarb argues that *Villette* is about a 'sexually frigid young woman who learns to come to terms with her abnormal sexuality... at the end of *Villette* Lucy is happy, healthy, and emotionally secure.'[8].

Another vehicle for expressing women's bewilderment towards gender roles and for balancing the contradictions of their experience is transvestism. There is a surprising amount of transvestism in Charlotte Bronte' novels. One important example is Alfred de Hamal's impersonation of the nun in *Villette* which spreads frighteningly and symbolically over the entire book until the moment when the discarded clothes are left on Lucy's bed. Another is Mr. Rochester's dressing up as a gypsy woman in order to have private conversations with certain ladies at the Thornfield house party under the pretence of telling their fortunes. And what are we to make of Lucy's admitted attraction to the feather-headed and selfish Ginevra, and the strange episode of the mock courtship, with Lucy wearing a man's collar and jacket over her own long skirt? Lucy here has been encouraged by Paul into acting, into feeling and publicly displaying

sexual emotion, which is simultaneously make-believe and real. Lucy is unwillingly attracted by another woman, Ginevra, and is playing at wooing Ginevra away from the man Ginevra despises and Lucy would like to have, Dr. John, who is at the audience. Lucy is exalted by this emotional tangle and her violent reaction to the demand that she play a man's role is to make herself ridiculous by retaining her skirt, a reminder to herself and the world that she too is a female. She is only capable of displaying repressed passionate feelings by pretending that she is a male. She is both excited and afraid to demonstrate courtship behaviors towards an unworthy object whom Lucy partly envies and would like to identify with, because she, Ginevra, is attractive and beloved, though undeserving.

Charlotte Bronte also succeeds in depicting noncompetitive, supportive relationships between women where women are in real and supportive relationship with each other not simply as points on a triangle or as temporary substitutes for men. Although Shirley and Caroline belong to different social ranks, their friendship is harmonious and supportive. Jane Eyre's school connection with Helen, a girl who is older and wiser than her is similarly strong, but Helen's intellectual superiority never intrudes into the relationship. The image of the two girls lying in a single bed - Helen dies in Jane's arms - suggests with all its sexual ambiguity the special intimacy of the bond between women.

Caroll Smith-Rosenberg's influential essay, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual' implies that there existed a distinctive women's culture, in which women assisted each other in childbirth, nurtured each other's children, and shared emotional and often erotic ties

stronger than those with their husbands.[9] Although premarital relationships between the sexes were subject to severe restrictions, romantic friendships between women were admired and encouraged.

The 19 th century idea of female passionless - the belief that women did not have the same sexual desires as men - created sexual solidarity among women; it allowed women to consider their love relationships with one another of higher character than heterosexual relationships because they excluded (male) sensual passions. In fact the homosexual world of women's culture allowed much leeway for physical intimacy and touch; 'girls routinely slept together, kissed and hugged one another' state Smith-Rosenberg in *Disorderly Conduct.*[10]

Women's love for each-other recognizes Annis Pratt in her *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*(1981) is a major source of emotional sustenance and self-assertion.[11] Nancy Chodorow believes that men are socialized to be aggresssive, non-empathetic and affectively repressed, intimate relations between men and women will always disappoint women, who crave more intimacy than men can provide.[12] Women therefore seek this intimacy by re-creating with their babies the symbiotic bonds they first enjoyed with their mothers or turn to other women as Adrienne Rich points out in her paper on heterosexuality.[13] She sees all women as originally and potentially lesbian because all women first love another woman. Chodorow and Rich describe gender differences in terms that imply women are nicer than men. Empathy, responsibility and interdependence seem to bind women together. However, other feminists see the same characteristics in terms of female disadvantage. For Jane Flax(1980) and Jessica Benjamin(1980),

women's fluid ego boundaries are a weakness. They see women's chief problems as achieving independence and separation from others.[14]

In many ways Bronte conveys her convinction that intimacy between women may be more profound and more balanced than any union possible between the sexes. Several critics have pointed out Charlotte Bronte's bi-sexuality. Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*(1970) attempts to show that Lucy is in love with Ginevra. Though this conclusion is simplistic there are many passages that seem to lead to it. Lucy intensively admires Ginevra's beauty and at one point says something which certainly sounds lover-like: 'In my eyes , you will never look so pretty as you did in the gingham gown and plain straw bonnet you wore when I first saw you.'[15] But beyond a certain point she does not go and it then seems as though Ginevra is the keener of the two. In fact, if one were looking for a theory to propound, it would probably be easier to prove that Ginevra rather than Lucy has lesbian tendencies: 'When she took my arm, she always leaned upon me her whole weight; and as I was not a gentleman, or her lover, I did not like it'[16].

Charlotte Bronte herself can quite naturally address the same loving words to both men and women. In a letter to Ellen Nussey, lamenting the fact that Ellen contemplates leaving the neighborhood she says: 'Why are we to be divided? Surely it must be because we are in danger of loving each-other too well - of losing sight of the Creator in idolatry of the creature. [17] Certain men and women are seem to be each-other's physical counterparts. M. Paul in *Villette* observed that the growing rapport between Lucy and himself has a physical as well

as a spiritual identity: 'Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass ? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine - that your eyes are cut like mine?.:. Do you know that you have many of my looks ?'[18] And due to Bronte's creative imaginative powers we can see the reaction of a woman imagining she is a man, as when Lucy says of Madame Beck : 'Had I been a gentleman I believe Madame would have found favour in my eyes, she was so handy, mat, thorough in all she did.'[19]

In *Shirley* Bronte turned masculinity into make-believe, into a sort of joke. It is though she could not bear to present a woman who was really masculine. Shirley has a man's name, and, as a landowner, a man's status and from these facts alone would have sprung considerable jocularity in those days. Shirley , like Lucy Snow, thinks of women as if they were men and possible mates: 'If she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., Lord of the Manor or Briarfield, there was not a single fair one on this and the two neighboring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor.' [20] It is strange that Shirley, the manly woman, turns out to be more of a silly little thing than Jane Eyre or Lucy Snow.

3.2 Reality

As is noted by several critics, Charlotte Bronte's novels are rich in that which is not said. But to see only in those sub-texts the narrowly sexual is to distort reality. They are much possessed by criticism of

society: how to stay physically or mentally healthy in a world where schoolgirls die in epidemics every day, where chances for women to find life enhancing satisfaction are very limited.

Jane Eyre suggests a new vision of the inner, sexual life running triumphant over a moribund society of Mrs. Reed, Brocklehurst, and even St. John. Yet it ends, as does *The Professor*, with a vision of ultimate sexual retirement, not of integration into society. *Shirley* and *Villette* confront and admit a division between personal life and the social world. They are written as works that accept an opposition between sexual fulfillment and the social world, between the author's vision of life and that of her society.

The emphasis is not on escaping that society but on developing an inner life despite it and within it. Formally, the last works move forward a greater sense of a solid, unchangeable and unresponsive world of things and social structures; but within this more realistic world there is a fierce assertion of the reality of an inner, sexual life. *Shirley* takes a large step, apparently a false one, toward the broad social panorama of the Victorian industrial novel. In *Villette* she turns again deliberately to psychological development, this time within the context of a hard, realistic social world from which romance and fairy-tale conclusions are rigorously excluded. *Jane Eyre* demonstrates how much Bronte linked sexual issues with the problems of women's place in society. In *Shirley* a more detached look allows Bronte to isolate and clarify the context of the relations between men and women.

Bronte's last three works all look at sexual relations as they are affected by complications of external issues of power, money, position and relations. Perhaps most prominent in these women's issues is Bronte's study of that recurrent problem in women's lives: men, a topic will be analyzed in detail later in this study. But Bronte's primary concern was always with intense psychological analysis. Her use of plot structure, myth or romance, was to reveal inner feelings with greater vividness and complexity.

In *Jane Eyre* the mythic motifs are connected so easily with the romantic structure of the work itself that they naturally led the reader from narrator to author. The main aim, revealing Jane's psychology, demanded a realistic context; yet the mythic structures developed to uncover her psychology often worked in the world of the novel to violate that world, to suggest to us that the external world of the novel could be adjusted and manipulated to gratify Jane's and her creator's inner needs. Bertha's laughter becomes a threat to all that Jane had desired and demanded in her dreams. Bertha represents the world of mad servants and mad mistresses, she is a nymphomaniac, a half-breed, a syphilic, an aristocrat, who turns violently on keeper, brother, husband, and, finally, rival. She and her noises become the site of anarchy which must be destroyed. Bertha must be killed so that a moral, Protestant femininity and licensed sexuality, the 'socialized feminism' may survive.

In *Villette* motifs from myths or fairy tales and strong symbolic structures are omnipresent yet carefully adjusted to the needs of plot and social world of the realistic novel. Lucy's tendency to parody romance forms and mythic motifs serves in the first instance to credit

the reality of her world. In *Villette*, non-realistic traditions are used deliberately to develop a language for an inner psychological world.

Charlotte Bronte, although a devout Christian, found fault with the Church. It is true that religion was to some extent a torment to Charlotte and her heroines but undoubtedly it was also a shield against the world. Given bitter resentment of and contempt for the clergymen who align themselves with the social establishment, a male dominated hierarchy, it is hardly surprising that Charlotte Bronte was at first so averse to marry a clergyman.

The religious content of *Jane Eyre* is misleading. At three important points in the plot Jane apparently turns to God for support: at Lowood, under the influence and admonitions of Helen Burns; at Thornfield when Rochester tries to persuade her to live with him; and at Marsh End, when St. John Rivers urges her to marry him and go with him to the mission field. But in all three cases commonsense is as much at stake as morality, and indeed, as has often been pointed out in connection with Jane's flight from Rochester, sheer prudence is her guide as much as anything. At Lowood, too, the Christian virtue of meek endurance fits in with what commonsense tells Jane even as a child, that to stay at school is the only way to escape Gateshead and to get an education which will eventually lead to independence.
The St. John Rivers episode is particularly ambiguous. What St. John is urging Jane to do is eminently moral: marriage and missionary work are both ordained by God. Jane's scruples are not religious, as they were in her opposition to Rochester's proposals, but rather they belong to the realm of moral issue : she does not love St. John and to marry without love, a marriage of convenience is

immoral. So when she appeals for supernatural aid in her tussle with him she is invoking religion against religion.

Lowood school in *Jane Eyre* is a charity institution run by the Church, and Charlotte Bronte puts a strong emphasis on the way the patriarchal church teaches women to know their places. When Mr. Brocklehurst arrives at Gateshead to collect Jane he says: 'No sight so sad as that of a naughty child...especially a naughty little girl' [21] and when Mrs Reed says she wants Jane 'to be made useful, to be kept humble' he assures her: ' I have studied how best to mortify in them the wordly sentiment of pride.' Mortification of the flesh amounting to sexual castration is the schooling given to girls at Lowood. Going to church is associated with discomfort and frigidity; 'We set out cold, we arrived at church colder: during the morning service we became almost paralysed.'[22]

Only Helen Burns (note the surname) is immune to the harsh treatment. She retreats into daydreams, and literally burns up inside. She dies lying in the same bed with Jane, as though she was her alter ego. In Lowood they teach Jane male Christianity; its degradation of women is contrasted with true Christianity in the shape of Miss Temple (again the name is significant) but as a woman she has no power, and 'has to answer to Mr. Brucklehurst for all she does.'

We learn from Helen Burn's and Miss Temple's example that conscious Christian piety helps to suppress the unruly libido. Young Jane reads the text of the school wall and finds it highly ambiguous: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven". Should women shine "before men" and the male God in heaven? I read these words over and over again: I felt that an explanation belonged to them, and was unable fully to penetrate their import.'[23] After the death of Helen Burns, and under the tutelage of Miss Temple, Jane seems a reformed character. The day-dreaming Helen, her alter-ego, had told Jane: 'By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had no qualities or talents to make my way well in the world: I should have been continually at fault.'[24] The Jane who was left behind appears, in time, to be properly schooled: 'I had given allegiance to duty and order: I was quiet; I believed I was content: To the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character.'[25]

Charlotte's treatment of religion in her fiction is explicit. It would be difficult to conceive of a more precise definition of her attitude towards the life-denying gloom of the Calvinist mind than Mr. Brocklehurst , Jane Eyre's 'black marble clergyman', and the ice-cold, drearily sententious St. John Rivers. Both Brocklehurst and St. John represent an unacceptable male Christianity which tries to deny women their natural sexuality. On the other hand, in Jane herself, we have Charlotte's idea of true Christian faith and virtue in an imperfect world. According to Barbara Prentis:' It is in *Villette* that she shows most clearly both the intensity of her concern for religious truth and her contempt for the self-serving distortions of 'Christianity' of all denominations'[26].

The resentment against male Christianity and clergymen which simmered in *Jane Eyre* erupts with full force in *Shirley*, in which

pompous, self-important clergymen and ridiculous curates figure so prominently. Mr. Helstone, Caroline's uncle and guardian, and himself a man of the Church, typifies the attitudes which run so explicitly through the book. Caroline Helstone, the rector's niece and Sunday school teacher, is without question a devout girl. But the misery she undergoes through her disappointment in love and the loneliness and frustration of her life is a trial quite unassuaged by the consolations of religion. And the two old maids, Miss Anley and Miss Mann, whom in despiration she tries to emulate, are not very inspiring in this respect. Miss Anley's self-abnegation seems negative and depressing, and the good works of both have no more than overtones of religion, and those chiefly because the good works are necessarily done within the framework of the church.

Lucy Snow is a protestant before she is a Christian. Her acid bigotry is sectarian rather than spiritual and the neurotic outbursts in response to the least whiff of Roman Catholicism sends her are unedifying and even comic. Paul Emanuel being a Roman Catholic may be bigoted, and he certainly is, but he has deeds of truly Christian kindness to his credit. In the end each respectfully allows the other freedom of worship, but what would have happened in the course of normal family life, especially with regard to the upbringing of children, is another matter. This may be one more reason why Paul Emanuel has to be drowned.

There can hardly be another novel whose central character is more powerfully antipathetic towards one religion in particular and to all religious excess in general. Identifying the views of an author with those of her characters is a doubtful procedure, but in Lucy Snow we

have what is palpably an authorial voice, speaking with impassioned directness of the Roman Catholic church as a prison of the mind, quoting Barbara Prentis: 'hiding its chains with flowers, its repression with a large sensual indulgence, that permitted the victims of slavery to develop robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, un-thinking, un-questioning.'[27]

It is not surprising to find that the idea of escape is central to the novels of Charlotte Bronte. Jane Eyre leaves Gateshead while still a little girl, and after eight years of Lowood she wants to have a fresh start. She feels trapped and desires freedom: 'I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing.[28] She goes to Thornfield and, when Mr. Rochester arrives the place becomes quite enough for her till the day when the bigamous marriage ceremony is broken off and she has to escape once more. The fresh air and the open countryside remain for her the symbols of personal freedom and independence in contrast with the stale air and suffocation which the thought of being Mr. Rochester's slave evokes.

Foreign countries are, clearly, a cliche of escape. Frances Henry, in state of subservience in Belgium, keeps England before his eyes as a way out. Lucy Snow, being in a desperate emotional and financial state, looks to Belgium for her escape. But there is an ambiguity in all those 'escapes'. These heroines are the prototypes of all struggling imprisoned women who want to be liberated by men.

While many of these ambivalences seem purely personal , it is not a simplification to find at the heart of them a basic conflict between a desire for freedom and the need to submit to authority . Because this conflict is essentially unresolved in Charlotte Bronte's mind, life and fiction, her position in the literary world of mid-nineteenth century England is rather exceptional. In the sense that Charlotte Bronte's novels deal with heroines who are essentially cut off from the rest of the world , they sound the note of alienation that was to become the central theme of late nineteenth and twentieth century fiction.

3.3 Power

Charlotte Bronte is accused of being a conformist, whose writing, like her society, is fundamentally male-oriented. On a superficial reading it might seem that though for herself Charlotte Bronte seemed largely resigned to living in a man's world, for her heroines she did not accept social conventions. Several critics argue that even her heroines' much-vaunted freedom is defined in masculine terms; her successful women are always those who can take on the 'man's world' according to its own rules, and survive. The heroines are said to fight with traditionally masculine weapons of courage and self-assertion for the masculine rights of liberty and work.

It is also claimed that nowhere in Charlotte's fiction is there any attempt to challenge these assumptions of her society on ways which insist on appropriately feminine modes of self-expression. Their

argument is supported by giving the example of *Villette*, where Charlotte nerved herself to bring about an ending which would have left her heroine without a man, having to face the world on her own, so she bowed ultimately to her father's intervention in favour of the more conventional solution.

The ultimate conclusion is that Charlotte always supports the conventional assumptions in her use of the traditional theme of the woman's need of a man. In order to prove that these assumptions lacked deep and profound understanding of the novels we do not have to go far : Charlotte Bronte's texts speak for themselves. And it is left to the conscious reader to decide how far Bronte did actually go in demanding freedom and equality for her heroines.

Marriage, for a young woman, means dependency, responsibility defined by others, the sacrifice of autonomy, and an endangered inner experience. Charlotte Bronte recognizes the appeal, but also the threat and her novels contain elements of uncertainty in terms of marriage and happy endings. The happy ending is an indisposable element of a novel for its ability to raise the spirit of its readers. It manages to do so by involving the reader in the gradual evolution of a loving relationship through a description of a herione's and hero's life together after their necessary union.

The happy ending certainly has its therapeutic value: without it the story could not hold out the utopian promise that male-female relations can be managed successfully. After all, the reader can identify with the heroine at the moment of her greatest success, that is, when she secures the attention and recognition of her culture's

most powerful and essential representative, a man. The happy ending is, at this level, a sign of a woman's attainment of legitimacy and personhood in a culture that locates both for her in the roles of lover, wife, and mother.

Charlotte Bronte expresses her doubts about marriage by creating not so 'happy' endings that are open to further dilemmas. Happy ending restores the status quo in gender relations when the hero enfolds the heroine protectively in his arms. That ending, however, can also be interpreted as an occasion for the vicarious enjoyment, of a woman's ultimate triumph. as it is in *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley*. Marriage is the completition of life for Caroline, Lucy, Shirley and Miss Temple, Diana and Mary Rivers; but for Lucy marriage is in no sense merely a solution or a goal. It is not patriarchal marriage in the sense of a marriage that stunts or diminishes the woman; but a continuation of the woman's creation of herself.

Terry Eagleton points out that Charlotte's characters want independence, but they also desire to dominate, and 'their desire to dominate is matched only by their impulse to submit to a superior will.'[29] Patricia Meyer Spacks goes even further claiming that Charlotte Bronte 'depicts a world in which women constantly and cleverly manipulate men. Men command women, but they cannot in a deeper sense control them.'[30] Bronte characters have a large scale of desires and wishes; they share some of them, others are tailored: but they all agree on one thing: in the end their most desirable wish - which is to achieve power - is fulfilled.

Caroline, Jane, and Shirley form a continuum of female types. Caroline embodies the most conventional notions of femininity with her gentleness, compliance and determination to be good. Jane is strong-willed, passionate, not attractive; but external forces prevent her from following her own will. Shirley in addition to her forcefulness, possesses social position, wealth, and beauty. Like the other two women, she wishes to have a man on whom she can depend, but who she can also 'help'.

Shirley is capable to deal with men easily; her self-confidence derives from being pretty and rich. The masculine superiority, masculine spirit, and masculine style of courtesy characterize Shirley throughout the novel. Her wealth and beauty make it possible for her to gain control over her own destiny , her intelligence enables her to manipulate men to her own purposes. Shirley also recognizes the emotional danger of her freedom. Having taken full advantage of her independence, in the nineteenth-century sense of financial self-sufficiency, she must find the way to fulfill the other side of her nature, her need for dependence. She does so by making her lover dominate her.

Luis Moore, her financial and social inferior, has intellectual and emotional strength of his own, demonstrated in his response to her fantasies of hydrophobia. Shirley, bitten by a dog which she believes mad, immediately declares herself doomed to die. Instead of seeking medical advice she shuts her hand silently on the scorpion, waiting for death. It reveals Charlotte Bronte's tactic for women: endure without crying out even in the greatest suffering. Louis penetrates her secret and relieves her mind by persuading her that the dog was

not mad, and by doing so he demonstrates his power over her. Thus, Shirley demonstrates her power by making Louis exercise power.

It turns out that Shirley has yielded all control of her household to Louis before the marriage. As Patricia Meyer Spacks expresses in *The Female Imagination*(1975): 'Much more ostentatious than the gentle Caroline in her yielding, Shirley also controls more forcefully, her self-love triumphant in the arrogance of her performance.'[31] It is the social inequality of the marriage alone which makes the situation possible. Rochester is crippled to equal things out between him and his bride; the poverty- stricken Louis Moore marries a rich wife. From the security of her wealth - equivalent to Jane's new social position - she can demonstrate her willingness to yield, since 'her dependence is the ultimate sign of her independence', writes Spacks.[32]

Charlotte Bronte in *Shirley* associates women with nature and men with industrial life. (Shirley's fantasy about Eve, the first woman, claims women as the ultimate source of power.) The contrast exemplifies the different sources of masculine and feminine power, feminine power being independent of external circumstance. Charlotte Bronte recognizes the difficulties of women's lot; but her sensibility is not revolutionary.

She appears to accept as given the woman's need for dependency and for control, and the close relation between them. Her fantasy provides images of how these needs can be fulfilled. She sees the relation between men and women as questions of power. And she goes on: equality is not enough, she wants to have power over men. Jane is a 'resolute, wild , free thing', Shirley is a tameless panther,

Lucy is described by Paul as a 'wild creature, new caught, untamed.' The similarity of imagery in the three novels underlines the point: a man wins a woman by capturing her; she defies him with subtle and devious sources of power, the resources of the captured wild creature.

Men constantly make decisions about how they will act , women can only make decisions about how they will accept. The effort to accept often generates suffering. Caroline suffers spectecularly and at length. Even if men can refuse to love them they cannot force them to live. A Victorian heroine can display her disappointment in love by dying which reveals the length to which women would go to escape male domination. Women are granted the freedom to die which is a significant feminist dramatization of passivity. Caroline does not have to die: her wish to be dependent by the man she loves is fulfilled; in her dependency she can help him, support him emotionally and control him.

Jane Eyre in her relationship with Rochester shows some similarities to Caroline's. She is willing to do whatever Rochester asks her since she feels herself dependent on his goodwill, dependent on his existence for her own happiness. But Rochester sees matters differently: 'Jane: you please me, and you master me - you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart, and while I am twining the soft, silken skein around my finger, it sends a thrill up to my heart. I am influenced - conquered; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win.'[33] In displaying her weakness and passivity, Jane manifests her strength. Once engaged to her employer, she delights in manipulating him, teasing him

because she thus maintains his interest and suits his taste. Close to their wedding the balance of power between them has been seriously disturbed. Although she teases him with increasing desperation believing that a submissive, adoring companion would not truly please him, she suffers from 'a sense of annoyance and degradation'.

Rochester treats her like an object, a puppet, he would dress her like a doll, which can be chained to his bosom. She can hardly endure being 'kept' by him and as a result of her frustration she starts to inquire about her uncle in Madeira. When an external force prevents her becoming Rochester's bride it interrupts a relationship that seems to have already seriously deteriorated. The 'external force' is the mad wife hiding in the attic, a melodramatic figure characterizes one of the novel's central concerns.

Jane Eyre's problems centers on what to do with her feelings. The novel begins with an image of her childhood when she physically attacks her cousin, her first male oppressor when he persecutes her. Suffering a dreadful punishment for her violence, she learns the lesson of a lifetime that emotions - particularly hostile ones - must be repressed.

Her experience at Lowood School elaborates the same lesson, providing models of Christian piety and self-control. At Thornfield her emotional satisfaction derives not from 'real knowledge of life' but from indulged fantasy. She wonders around the third floor daydreaming, contemplating the condition of her sex : 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men

feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do'.[34]

This false calmness hides the reality of womanly rage - directed at all who limit female opportunity. Rochester would be its immediate target, but Jane cannot allow herself to express her anger at him directly. It emerges indirectly in her depression and annoyance and the mad wife is the symbol of her dramatic expressiveness.

The unexpressed female anger implies the danger of madness: once a woman allows herself to reveal her rage, will it ever stop? Better to oppress it, to keep it underground. When Jane leaves Rochester, she takes refuge with St. John Rivers, who tempts her by offering her a real task which would fulfill her sense of achievement. Unlike Rochester, he recognizes her special talents, finding her not only 'docile' but also diligent, faithful, disinterested, constant and courageous. He demands that she control passion in order to participate in heroic action as a missionary; he takes her more seriously than Rochester does - Rivers sees her as a fellow human being.

He also dominates her utterly. Rejecting him and the relationship he offers, she chooses passion over professional achievement. The mad wife is dead by now - no longer needed as a symbolic embodiment of female anger since that anger has been satisfied and the balance restored by Rochester's maiming, a shocking accident which provides a masculine equivalent for the disease that punishes women's moral devaluation. Rochester has paid the penalty for his

efforts to control Jane: he has lost his hand and his sight; symbolic castration both; fire has scarred his forehead.

The last pages of *Jane Eyre* speak almost obsessively of dependency. Conscious of his physical handicap, Rochester feels he can no longer be attractive to a woman because he must depend on her. Jane is now an 'independent woman', meaning that she has enough money for her needs, but meaning also that as a consequence she can lead whatever life she wishes. Rochester suggests that only a desire for self-sacrifice can motivate her interest in him; she responds that his lamentation is pitiful. Despite the reality of her pity, she seems almost to gloat over his distress, turning over in her mind the fact that now he really needs her.

As they move toward marriage, she declares explicitly that his need to be helped makes him appealing. 'I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector.'[35] The woman reader's wish to participate in the gradual growth of love and trust and witness the way in which the heroine is eventually cared for by a man who also confesses that he 'needs' her suggests that women do indeed want to see a woman attended to sexually in a tender, nurturant, and emotionally open way. These preferences also hint at the existence of an equally powerful wish to see a man dependent upon a woman.

Rochester must be crippled for his sins; but also so that Jane can help him and helping, substantiate her power to govern. This dependency, however, is not altogether one-sided. When Rochester

complains about his sense of uselessness, Jane replies, 'You are no ruin, sir, - no lighting - struck tree: you are green and vigorous.' And also,: To be privileged to put my arms round what I value - to press my lips to what I love - to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice ?'[36]

Rochester, even in this maimed state, remains the strong male on whom a woman can safely and happily depend, to whom she will willingly submit. But depriving him of physical power helps to equalize the situation, expressing the feminine need to be needed and achieving the balance between helping and controlling. Similarly, in *Shirley* Robert Moore behaves shamefully in trying to marry Shirley for financial gain, as Rochester married Bertha Mason for money. Like Rochester, the proud man has to be brought low before he is a fit husband. Rochester is crippled and blinded by his vengeful wife, Moore is shot and wounded by vengeful, disaffected workers, and then nursed by a bossy woman who 'turned him in his bed as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle.'

Getting married, for Lucy, is in no sense either a solution or a goal. Paul gives Lucy her own school, thus giving her independence and putting her on an equal social footing with Madame Beck. As Myer observes:' Once again, it is fairy gold that emancipates Lucy; even the power to earn a decent living, free of prying and oppression, comes to her not as something she has saved for out of her own earnings, but as a magical gift, snatched from the witch-mother, the evil queen.'[37]

While, we have seen, Moglen and Eagleton see Charlotte Bronte as a masochist, wishing to be dominated, Schreiber even sees her novels as castrating their heroes.[38] Maybe Charlotte does not believe in happy endings. She did not care for single life and the struggle to earn a living, but her view on marriage was clear-eyed. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1971) was one of the earliest feminist readings of *Villette.* With hindsight, we wonder how it was possible to read Charlotte Bronte any other way. Millet points out that Lucy, though a gentlewoman, is a servant by occupation; the low-status, low-pay occupation open to women '... involve "living in" and a twenty-four hour surveillance tantamount to imprisonment. The only circumstances under which Lucy is permitted an occupation are such that they make financial independence and personal fulfillment impossible... One of the most interesting cases of inferiority feelings in literature, Lucy despises her exterior self, and can build an inner being only through self-hatred. Yet living in a culture which takes masochism to be a normal phenomenon in females, and even conditions them to enjoy it, Lucy faces and conquers the attractions Paul's sadism might have held...'[39]

Millett also points out that Lucy finds herself liberated at the end: 'Escape is all over the book; *Villette* reads like one long meditation on a prison break. Lucy will not marry Paul even after the tyrant has softened... Lucy is free. Free is alone; given a choice between 'love' in its most agreeable contemporary manifestation, and freedom, Lucy chose to retain the individualist humanity she had shored up, even at the expense of sexuality... On those occasions when Bronte did marry off her heroines, the happy end is so fraudulent, the marriages so hollow, they read like satire, or cynical tracts against love itself...

As there is no remedy to sexual politics in marriage, Lucy very logically doesn't marry. But it is also impossible for a Victorian novel to recommend a woman not to marry. So Paul suffers a quiet sea burial.'[40] The novel's ending can be interpreted as a triumphal fantasy of female power, the power to withdraw from the traditional plot of love and marriage. One might read the literature of seduced and abandoned women in the same way, since such women can control their lives verbally while appearing socially dependent and compliant. Lamenting a man after he has gone may be easier than conforming to his wishes when he is present.

With men at once strong and weak, women successful and powerful, Charlotte Bronte manufactures an ideal realization of a female fantasy. Annette Schreiber describes the position of women in Bronte's fictions triumphantly: '...the men reappear wounded and maimed, stripped symbolically of their manly role and sexuality, literally controlled and dependent on the heroine... Frances refuses marriage until she is financially .... independent... Louis Moore gives up his job and moves into his wife's house and money... Paul emerges with the ultimate wound, the final castration, death.'[41]

Even if the endings all show a castrated submissive male subservient to a powerful and controlling female, the heroines happiness is not the fairy-tale kind. It is true that the heroines reached a stage of financial independence but do they really live happily ever after? Male characters obviously have to change in order to match their female partners. This 'change' is not exclusively 'sexual mutilation' as Freudians claim, but the inevitable suffering necessary when those in power are forced to release some of their power to those who

previously had none. As Showalter sees it: 'Rochester's blindness... (Robert) Moore's sickness... are symbolic immersions of the hero in feminine experience. Men, these novels are saying, must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced unwillingly into dependency. Only then can they understand that women need love but hate to be weak. If he is to be redeemed and to rediscover his humanity, the "woman's man" - says Showalter - must find out how it feels to be a woman.'[42]

Part II Reading with a Difference

Chapter 4 The Reading Experience

According to feminist critics gender leaves its traces in literary texts. They argue that gender determines everything, including value systems and language structures; as Elizabeth Abel said, 'sexuality and textuality both depend on difference'[43]. The introduction of gender - which is biological sex in the world of culture - into the field of literary studies works as a new phase in feminist criticism, an investigation of the ways that all reading and writing, by men as well as by women, is marked by gender.

It was Virginia Woolf who in her essay 'A Room of her Own' (1929) claimed that since women's social reality, like men's is shaped by gender, the representation of female experience in literary form is gendered. Androgynous theory in literature is linked with Woolf's name and her book *A Room of One's Own* (1931) she structures the writing and reading experience differently depending on the gender of the reader. This new kind of critical approach was related to both the reader's and the writer's creative imagination, the gender of which is said to be neither masculine, nor feminine but androgynous. The theory of androgyny, the man-womanly mind raised a lot of questions and answered only a few; thus promoting the formation of alternative gender theories.

The negative task of exposing androcentric biases against women in general and women writers in particular was replaced by the more

positive task of defining the specificity of women's writing and reading. During the 1970s several major studies (by Rich, Spacks, Show, Chodorow and Fetterley) on women and literature reflected an awakening to the study of women writers and readers as distinct from male writers and readers. Such studies were called 'gynocritics' by Elaine Showalter who is an advocate of a feminist criticism that is independent, women centered, and intellectually coherent.

According to the theory of early gynocritics[44] a feminist novel is one in which the reader identifies with the female writer. In a later phase of gynocritics it was claimed that a feminist novel is one in which the reader identifies far more with the female hero than with both female and male characters as she would in case of an androgynous novel. If in an androgynous novel the 'Self' happens to be female and the 'Other' male, and reading is constructed solely as reading for self-identity, the reading of androtexts poses a dilemma. 'The real question', according to Josephine Donovan, 'is not whether a woman can identify with the subjective consciousness of the self if it is male, but whether she *should*, given her own political and social environment.'[45] Politicized in this way, quoting K.K. Ruthven, 'to read promiscuously is to read perfidiously, and to be compelled to do so by a patriarchal education system which favors androtexts is an injustice to women'.[46] As a moderate, Showalter thinks that the gap which opens for an educated woman reader between a Self made up of female experience and an Other which is androcentric could be closed by the invention of a new kind of discourse which would integrate intelligence with experience. Showalter's 'double-voiced discourse' is doomed to embody the social, literary, and cultural

heritages of both the muted (female) and the dominant (male) cultures.

Late gynocritics outgrew the problems of 'women as writers' and were more concerned about wider gender theory issues from the position of women's texts as Showalter herself concludes in her *Speaking of Gender* (1989). Showalter sees the reading process as a learned activity where one 'becomes' a reader due to her previous experience. Women's experience will lead them to value works differently from their male counterparts. For men problems women characteristically encounter are of limited interest. (Charlotte Bronte for instance, makes her characters' physical beauty or plainness a matter of intimate importance which might bore male readers). In each case their experience as women or men is a source of judgement as readers. The difference itself is produced by differing.

Despite the necessary appeal to the authority of women's experience and of female reader's experience, feminist criticism is concerned, as Showalter puts it, 'with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual coes'[47] Showalter's notion of the 'hypothesis' of a female reader marks the double structure of 'experience' in reader-response criticism.

The experience and perspective of women as readers has been systematically and misleadingly assimilated into the concept of generic masculin so in the circle of feminist critics there has been an ongoing debate on how to correct this error. Judith Fetterley for instance wants us to read her book on American fiction as a 'self-

defense survival manual for the women reader lost in 'the masculine wilderness of the American novel'.[48] Maggie Humm asserts that no man can read as a feminist because at any time he can escape into patriarchy; the extent of 'difference', she feels, is 'infinite'.[49] Showalter claims that while reading as a woman may involve constructing a gender identity, reading as a man does not.[50]

Criticism based on the presumption of continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures and their experience as readers is likely to become most forceful as a critique of the phallocentric assumptions that govern literary works. The difference between the male and the female reader's reading experience is rooted in the different culturally constructed roles for men and women, which Woolf describes as 'difference of view, difference of standard'.

The problem of female readers is that women do not or can not always read as women: they have been alienated from an experience appropriate to their condition as women. However, her experience can justify reading, the female reader is asked to take part in an experience she is explicitly excluded. Women will have to learn to read. Showalter argues in 'Women and the Literary Curriculum': 'Women are expected to identify with the masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one'[51] In its present phase feminist criticism brings about a new experience of reading and makes readers—both males and females—question the literary and political assumptions on which their reading has been based.

In such conditions, the only authentic reader is Fetterley's 'resisting' reader, who refuses to let herself be 'immasculated' into the sort of token male who succeeds aping male ways of reading, and instead gets a purchase on androcentric classics by reading them against the grain. [52] The feared alternative is to end up in that condition of divided consciousness described by Elaine Showalter, being at once 'daughters of the male tradition' which asks them to be 'rational, marginal and grateful' and 'sisters in a new women's movement' which requires them to 'renounce the pseudo-success of token womanhood, and the ironic masks of academic debate'.[53]

Since the significance of gender in reader response criticism has already been explicitly raised it raises further questions: What kind of reading experience can we produce? How should we read 'against the grain'? While we are searching for an answer to these questions there are four issues of reading which need to be investigated thoroughly.

The first issue is the question of control: Does the text control the reader, or vice versa? Most critics say that the reader has a creative role but the text is the dominant force, that is reading means creating the text according to its own promptings. Literary texts are often full of contradictions and competing levels, and readers, too, read texts in different and competing ways. Women's own suspicious reading of texts may take the form of 'close reading'.[54] Close reading techniques work on the assumption that the reader analyses the language of a text to support her intuitions; the process consists of spotting language items in text and, having identified a preponderance of certain items, using the data to back up an original hunch about the

text. In these circumstances, text analysis is used as a way of justifying an initial reaction felt by the reader. Although the reader is an active agent in relation to the text, this does not mean that she is free to choose whatever reading she wants from the text; in this sense, the text determines the positions which the reader can take up. For these reasons feminist criticism has a difficult task: it has to clarify contradictions while not losing sight of the fact that contradictions often contribute to misinterpretations of women.

The second issue derives from the first one: What constitutes the 'objectivity' of the text? What is 'in the text'? What is supplied by the reader? The process of reading is necessarily subjective even if it should not be so. One must respect the autonomy of the text. Quoting Schweickart ,' the reader is a visitor and, as such, must observe the necessary courtesies.'[55] A good text, regardless of the gender of its author manipulates the reader. Readers, men or women, also manipulate the text to produce the meaning that suits their own interest. Without the reader the text is nothing - it is inert and harmless. It is the process of reading that makes it alive. Reading for women has a kind of therapeutic value, a collective remedy, something that binds them with other women. Rachel Brownstein claims that women want to become the heroines they read.[56] What most women enjoy most about reading romances is the opportunity to project themselves into the story, to become the heroine, and thus to share her surprise and slowly awakening pleasure at being so closely watched by someone who finds her valuable and worthy of love. Of course men have also read fiction, and have been affected by what they read. But for women, I think, novels have been particularly preoccupying.

The third issue is identified by the ending of the story. Though most of the time stories end happily, some critics find these optimistic endings questionable, and prefer stories that stress - as Paul de Man calls it - the 'impossibility' of reading. 'If", as he says,' rhetoric puts an obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding, then the reader may be placed in impossible situations where there is no happy issue, but only the possibility of playing out the roles dramatized in the text'[57].

As it has been said earlier, the reader can identify with the heroine at the moment of her greatest success when finally she achieves legitimacy in her role of a lover, wife, and mother. Readers may be manipulated, and after finishing the book their experience turns into 'knowledge'. How many of us have a favorite woman author whose works we read and reread whose characters shared our lives and served as 'touchstones' for our own achievements, models for our decisions, and listeners to our problems? Girls get to know from novels about the most important things in their lives, sexual and personal relations, in training for marriage, 'the great profession open to our class since the dawn of time' as Virginia Woolf described it ironically.[58]

The fourth issue concerning the gender of the reader and writer raises sub-questions: Is there a difference between women reading male texts and women reading female texts? Is there something 'distinctively female' in reading? While it is difficult to specify what 'distinctively female' might mean, there are currently very interesting speculations about differences in the way males and females

conceive of themselves and of their relations with others. Maggie Humm in *Feminist Criticism* (1986) gave a good example of this gender-debate by bringing up the disagreement between Woolf and her father, the literary critic Leslie Stephen, about Charlotte Bronte's 'hysteria'. Woolf argues that Bronte's subversion of syntactic order, her incomplete sentences and emotional outpourings are a sign of the isolation of writing women and a lack of cultural space, while her father in his essay described Bronte's hysteria' as a sign of feminine instability.[59]

The works of Jean Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow, and Carol Gilligan suggest that men define themselves through individuation and separation from others, while women have more flexible ego boundaries and define themselves in terms of their affiliations and relationships with others. Men, they say, value autonomy, and they think of their interactions with others principally in terms of procedures for arbitrating conflicts between individual rights. Women, on the other hand, value relationships, and they are most concerned in their dealings with others to negotiate between opposing needs so that the relationships can be maintained.[60]

Women reading texts written by men are usually motivated by the need to disrupt the process of 'immasculation', women reading texts the authors of which are women are motivated by the need 'to connect', to recuperate or to formulate the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one-another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women. A woman writer would hardly write from a different position and perspective rather than her own; she would rarely condemn her own sex. As Virginia Woolf

observed: 'in *Jane Eyre* we are conscious not merely on the writer's character, but we are conscious of a woman's presence - of someone resenting the treatment of her own sex and pleading for its rights. This brings into women's writing an element which is absent from a man's'.[61]

The woman reader takes the part of the woman writer and regards the text as the manifestation , the 'voice' of another woman. What fantasy structures do girls take away from reading *Jane Eyre?* The book gave them alternative ideals of female autonomy and female solidarity. Jane's refusal to be contained with gender categories, in the face of countless pressures and temptations to accept a subordinate role, can inspire her reader with a determination to make the fantasy of defiant autonomy her own. But I suspect that many readers are attached to *Jane Eyre* because it reflects so vividly our own ambivalence.

The woman reader while battling her way out of the maze of patriarchal constructs in reading male texts, finds herself in intimate 'conversation' with the female writer once the implied author's and the implied reader's viewpoints are the same. One woman is standing witness in defense of the other. A woman reading novels written by another woman encounters not simply a text, but a 'subjectified object': the heart and mind of another woman. She comes into close contact with inferiority, and suffering not identical to her own. One of the motives for reading fictions which construct an illusory reality is curiosity about the world they depict. How does it feel to have that kind of experience? How do the people relate to each-other? What does it mean to be a woman or a man? Many of us encounter major

events like love and death more commonly in fiction than we should in normal life, and to that extent fiction influences, perhaps unconsciously, our understanding of these events themselves and our experience of them.

If fiction is often the unconscious source of our images of ourselves and the world, it follows that fiction can make an important contribution to the process of reaffirming or reconstructing cultural norms. We should strive to redeem the claim that it is possible for a woman, *reading as a woman*, to read literature written by women, for this is essential if we are to make the literary enterprise into a means for building and maintaining connections among women. Feminist writers, at least since Virginia Woolf, and perhaps since Mary Wollstonecraft have always been aware of this. For a woman to read as a woman is more than a repetition of identity or an experience that is given. Reading for a woman is using Jonathan Culler's words:' to play a role she constructs with reference to her identity as a woman, which is also a construct, so that the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman'.[62]

A good many of the political propositions recently put forward by feminists have been formulated in fiction. Correspondingly, when Rosalind Coward, Tania Modlensky, and Janice Radway write about current popular fiction addressed to women, they take it seriously as the location of both patriarchy and possible pressure points for change.

4.1 Charlotte Bronte and her Readers

Women have always wanted to read books written by members of their sex. They are looking for help, for models, for ways of being and coping with perplexing perceptions and feelings even if they suspect that they are not supposed to feel anything of the sort since it is not 'intellectual'. They would not always confess that to read books by women would have direct personal meaning for them.

Nonetheless it is believed that the investigation of other women's feelings and the acceptable modes of expressing them might provide a way to justify individual intensities of emotion. Women, as much as men, want to be 'special' to someone and struggle with the problem of individuality. For women the burden of 'uniqueness' is particularly heavy, since they have often been bred to believe that they are not supposed to be different from the accepted 'norm', that there is something wrong with wishing to stand out, except possibly in the basis of physical beauty. If they can discover their kinship with women who have boldly asserted themselves as writers, they may be helped toward self-realization.

To read books by women answers few questions, and raises many. These books do not destroy or even seriously challenge the old, male-created myths about women, but rather they shift the viewpoint: for example, the Freudian description of women as masochistic, passive, and narcissistic. Autobiographies and fiction by women supply abundant evidence of these traits. Everywhere women gaze into mirrors, embrace suffering, welcome roles of helpless submissiveness. But it is interpretive as well, as all myths are, and it

can be interpreted differently. To prefer suffering to pleasure may seem perverse from one point of view, and profoundly wise from another. The Bronte heroines' capacity to accept or even welcome unhappiness derives from their refusal to compromise, their unwillingness to conform to social definitions of what should constitute happiness and their determination to preserve their own identity. Narcissism, masochism, and passivity can provide means to self-preservation; they can be strategies for maintaining the personality. Charlotte Bronte's writing supplies awareness on the necessity for such tactics, given conditions of life that make direct methods of survival impossible.

Especially female critics have recently made it their business to ask in what ways Charlotte speaks for us as women, though there is still disagreement about what she says and what she means. Although she keeps reminding the reader that reason controls her novels, her dominantly figurative language appeals to the imagination and emotions rather than rationality.

Throughout her four novels, Charlotte Bronte stresses the lifelikeness of her material. In *The Professor* she gives a program-declaration by stating : 'Novelists should never allow themselves to weary of the study of real life.'[63] She writes similarly in *Villette* : 'Let us be honest, and cut, as heretofore, from the homely web of truth. '[64] These quotations are intrusive comments on the art of the novel, but not for its own sake: her claims for lifelikeness are an attempt to create a bond of agreement between her and the reader. In *Shirley* the self-reflecting narrator repeatedly steps out of the narrative to lecture the reader on what she is doing, often implying a criticism of the kind of

thing she is *not* doing. She warns the reader at the very beginning in *Shirley* not to expect anything but realism: 'If you think ... that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations : reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you ; something unromantic as Monday morning.'[65]

In *Jane Eyre* the reader is often appealed to in order that s/he be drawn into closer involvement with the story. These appeals tend to come at crucial moments in the action: when, in the afternoon of the interrupted wedding, Rochester, asks Jane to forgive him ('Reader ! - I forgave him'), or when the happy ending approaches ('Reader, I married him') or, when Jane runs away from Rochester : 'Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt!... for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love.'

Her habit of addressing the reader is not unique: she has good precedent for the device in Fielding and Scott, and also in her much-admired contemporary, Thackery. These writers address the readers in order to involve them with the story, to make them part of the experience. Charlotte Bronte goes on: she also uses this device for venting tensions and regarding balance between her natural impulse towards the thrilling and supernatural and her belief in the importance of the rational.

The ambivalence of the author's personality impede her in describing male experience. This disability manifests itself in her style where

tension is tangible. The sense of strain arises partly from contradictions of tone - the frequent alliance of morality and passion - and partly from the conflicting impulses of wish and fear.

The axiom in modern psychology that one's greatest wish is simultaneously one's greatest fear surely describes the opposing elements in Charlotte Bronte's prose. Margaret Bloom writes that while Charlotte depicts unmated women as psychologically crippled, they can only respond to a male whose ability and willingness to control them are in part sadistic, so that Jane Eyre, Caroline Helstone and Lucy Snow rightly fear what they seek.[66]

Lucy Snow's ambivalent behavior in accepting a masculine role in the play enacted for Madame Beck's *fête* reveals a lot about her insecurity. Quite literally refusing to wear the pants, symbolic of masculine sexual and social dominance, Lucy - and Bronte, as her career as a novelist writing under a male pseudonym indicates - can still play a masculine role well, despite the liability of femininity. The exhilaration Lucy feels on stage playing the role of the fop and the revulsion she experiences afterwards is a confirmation of the neurotic ambivalence of Lucy's and Bronte's mind. With this understanding , we can speculate that the intense dislike of women who are large, dark, and sensually attractive expressed frequently in the novels conceals an equally strong attraction toward just that type of women.

Following the same logic , we can also guess that Charlotte Bronte's antipathy for the Catholic Church derives from unconscious envy of those who could give themselves up to the comfort and security,

which, she herself admitted in *Villette* the Catholic Church could provide. Or we can hypothesize that a conflict between her ardent desire to be married and a rooted distaste for that same condition resulted in state of neurotic agitation that quite literally contributed to her rapid decline after marriage, and to her death.

Although most readers today, I suspect, automatically think of the fictionalized reader addressed by Lucy as female, on the rare occasions that Lucy refers to her reader by pronoun, she uses the generic 'he' and 'his'.[67] In addition to following an accepted literary convention (and despite the fact that most novel readers were women), Lucy may deliberately be positing a male audience to emphasise that the power to pass both literary and moral judgements on her story belonged, in the public sphere, predominantly to men. Lucy is deliberately creating not only a new form of fiction for women, but a new audience: part critic, part confidante, part sounding board - whose willingness to enter her world and interpret her text will provide her with recognition denied to women who do not follow traditional path of development.

In order to test this hypothesis, we must trace Lucy's relationship to the fictionalized reader in the text. There are, in fact, particularly in the beginning of the novel, at least two readers to whom Lucy reveals different aspects of her experience and herself. In her narrative the two kinds of implied readers are firstly, the conventional or socialized reader, who embodies society's expectations about women and of whom she asks the implied questions that she anticipates in her relation with the world and secondly, the rebellious and unsocialized

reader with whom she has a shared perspective - an arbitrary narrative - that gradually dominates both readers and the text.

The split between the two implied readers in the early part of Lucy's narrative may signify a split between those readers who accept male dominance and women's subordinate position and want to find them mirrored in novels - an audience that speaks with a male voice and male authority and might well condemn her actions - and those readers, who like and understand Lucy's psychic outbreaks, in whom they can trust. If this distinction breaks down later in the novel when the different implied readers begin to merge, it may be owing to Lucy's sense that she has shaped her audience to her own ends that gender becomes insignificant.

Except when she wrote *Shirley* , where she was consciously trying to get away from the subjective voice and broaden her scope to take in social themes and problems, Charlotte Bronte always chose a first person narrator. All the Brontes did, and this is an important, one could even say revolutionary element in their work. The use of a first person narrator guarantees a kind of basic unity: the constant presence of the 'I' narrating binds together the different ranges of material of the novel. In *Shirley* the attention is not so much on the individual as on the individual seen in close relation with the society he lives in. The kind of narration and structural form appropriate to the novels of individual life are abandoned here as the individual life is no longer in focus. A first person narrator would be less suited to a novel concerned not so much with the individual as with society as a whole.

The Professor is the only novel in which Bronte chose a male narrator, and she is so ill at ease with him that one is forced to conclude that she chose Crimsworth as a narrator to put as great a distance possible between herself as author and the female heroine, with all the painful dangers that would entail. And Crimsworth himself is rather a cold character. The male narrator allows C.Bronte to distance herself from the emotions of the heroine, with whom she would have identified too closely for safety. But she is not at home inside Crimsworth. She had a preference for strong, dominating heroes who manipulate women but in the case of Rochester, manipulation is forgiven because it is motivated by sexual passion. The denial of sexuality in *The Professor* makes Crimsworth appear sly, calculating and misogynistic.

Villette can easily be interpreted as a study of a neurotic, (although its message is a lot more complex) a woman who undergoes perhaps the most frightening nervous breakdown in the history of the Victorian novel. The language and structure of it- which is for the most part melodramatic- contribute to our understanding of Lucy Snow's mental chaos, dispair, and terrible loneliness. The storm at the beginning and the end of the story recalls the narrator's, Lucy's turbulent spirit and fears, who is – according to Tony Tanner – turning her experience into a linguistic arrangement or discourse.' [68]

The text itself offers two different levels of narration. Firstly, there is Lucy, the extra-diegetic narrator, who –similarly to Jane Eyre- occupies the same narrative as her public. Secondly, there are the intra-diegetic narrators - e.g. Ginevra telling Lucy about her advantures with male admireres or M. Emanuel telling Lucy about his

voyage in Guadaloupe – addressing narratees within the text. Besides, Lucy's narration is also regarded as public narration considering that her narration is - quoting Susan S. Lanser – 'addressed to a narratee who is external to the textual world and who can be equated with a public readership'[69].

This notion of public and private levels of narrative, the complete analysis of which is provided by Lanser, is an additional category relevant to the story of women's texts.[70] As she argues the sanctions against women's writing have lond taken the form of prohibitions to write for a public audience. This helps to explain why more women writers than men have chosen private forms of narration more frequently e.g. letters, and memoirs rather than forms of private narrative. Letters were private and as such forms of narration they did not seem to disturb the male hegemony.

C. Bronte found in Lucy the most appropriate female narrator to explore the tensions in her own inner and outer experience. There is the narrator Lucy Snow, the intradiegetic narrator addressing narratees inside the text and there is Lucy Snow whose actions are contained within the story thus evoking a direct link between the reader and the narratee. This direct relationship makes Lucy's story authentic, where the reader is constantly aware of her pain and suffering.

Much of *Villette* is about Lucy's suffering which she has learnt to survive. Gilbert and Gubar state that 'Lucy's depression is a response to a society cruelly indifferent to women.'[71] Lucy's sufferings derive from her being a woman: a woman, who is single,

without economic support and friends, and has to work and find her own means of support. Since suffering is not gender specific, it might also speak to anyone who has known loneliness, isolation, and the peculiar feeling of being alien in a different culture, including men.

Lucy has to deal with what comes to her; as she does, she grows, changes, develops. Her actions and feelings are often contradictory , but that is because she has a complex and complicated character and has very little to do with her being a woman. To the question: 'What is female?' C.Bronte, accepting women's inferior status as inevitable, would have answered: Sometimes men, but always women. Beginning to understand the complexities of the social and psychological problems of women she created a new kind of heroine , who would be neither more nor less than herself. As she wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell: 'I will show you a heroine, as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.'[72]

The heroines hidden desire to look nice and neat is very intense. Staring at themselves in the mirror C. Bronte's rebellious women are startled by the image. They are not enamored of their own reflections, as Narcissus is, but rather they are horrified by them. Quoting Leo Bersani: 'mirrors are instruments of ontological insecurity, the alien versions of the self'[73] The mirror confirms the heroines' narcissistic personalities: they suffer from low self-esteem, require constant attention and recognition, and they also have an extreme need for self-preoccupation.

Behind Lucy's and Jane's self-pity lie feelings of rage, inferiority, and shame; behind Shirley's and Caroline's sickness lies depression that

is extremely common among narcissistic people. Accompanying the depression are painful self-consciousness, hypochondria, and chronic envy of others. It is undoubtedly true that they want to compensate for their unbecoming looks with intellectual competence. The subject matter of *Jane Eyre*, and *Villette*, and, with certain elaborations that of *Shirley*, is the Cinderella-theme that Charlotte Bronte treats in the form of 'naivite': instead of supposing that Cinderella has the advantage of physical beauty over the Ugly Sisters, it is suggested that it is they who are beautiful, and she who is ugly, through possessing spiritual quality which abolishes that disadvantage. In her use of the Cinderella-theme she demonstrates our hope that though we are plain and distressed, a miracle will happen and we shall be made queens of the world.

Admiration of the heroine of a romantic novel -beautiful, wise, beloved, and lucky - is love for an idealized image of oneself. Studies have shown that there is a girl within each female reader with childhood experiences and a wish to be beautiful which leads to further psychoanalytic investigations into women's psyche. Freud writes that 'an intensification of the original narcissism' normally occurs in a girl's early adolescence.[74]

Reality-illusion, presence-absence, subject-object, unity-disunity, involvement-detachment present binary oppositions of human existence in Ovid's myth of Echo and Narcissus and can be traced down in C. Bronte's novels. Ovid's myth contains the the psychological complexity of a Freudian case study. The two major parts of Ovid's tale, the Echo episode and the reflection episode, embody numerous interrelated motifs: error and illusion, beauty,

rejected and frustrated passion, hunger and thirst, discovery and recognition, death, and obliteration.

The myth of Echo and Narcissus contains ideas that are as old as the ancient Greeks and as modern as the latest clinical research. The story- as well as C. Bronte's novels- dramatizes the consequences of thwarted desire, the problem of identity, the role of sexuality and aggression in mental illness, the double and mirror image and the interplay between self and other. Ovid's myth that can be traced in Bronte illustrates the main reason for people now entering psychotherapy: problems of self-esteem and self-fragmentation. Man and woman in Charlotte Bronte's fiction are two individuals in a pathological union who-similarly to Echo and Narcissus-succeed in tormenting each other. The ambivalence toward marriage is assigned to the absence of boundaries in male-female relationships, and the failure to distinguish between self-and the other, which indicates two selves that have never come into independent existence.

The more desperately Echo pursues Narcissus, the more cruelly he rejects her. The more desperately the Bronte heroines are in love the more pain they have to endure. Narcissus's actions silence Echo as effectively as if he had cut out her tongue. Caroline, Shirley, Lucy, and Jane suffer still and escape to illness, the register of deviance or alienation from social and personal norms. Echo suffers two painful narcissistic injuries. Silenced by Juno and spurned by Narcissus, she retreats into the woods and feeds her love on melancholy until her body withers away.

Echo's figurative 'escape' is implied within each of Charlotte Bronte's novels, one of the central elements of which is the heroine's running away. She is either escaping from frustration and humiliation, from 'real life' to find shelter during her picaresque wandering or running away because of her fear of married life. Both cases lead to nervous breakdown, which manifest itself through confusion of identity, incent motifs and the omnipresence of death.

Echo's crippling dependency on Narcissus betrays a self that cannot exist on its own. Without a man, she feels worthless, empty, incomplete. There is a need for passionate love in all Bronte novels, though the roles between men and women undergo an idealized inversion: men cannot exist without women, once strong they become weak, dependent, physically or morally castrated losers. Male dependency promotes the heroines' self-respect and their feeling of self-satisfaction as much as Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus has the effect of further depleting her self-esteem, while her adulation succeeds only in reinforcing his grandiosity.

The parallels between Narcissus self-admiration and the Bronte heroines lead to the recognition that women characters in the novels seek love to achieve self-confidence, and to get assurance of their physical and moral superiority. Freud seems to support this theory by claiming that analytic object choice is characteristic of most men, while narcissistic object choice is characteristic of women.

Additionally, Freud insists that unlike men, who are capable of complete object love, women take themselves as the love objects, which results in their complacency. 'Women, especially if they grow

up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed upon them in their choice of object. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them'[75] Freudian insight into narcissism results in startling paradoxes. Behind narcissistic 'self-love' lies self-hate, beneath their grandiosity lies insecurity. The shallowness and emptiness characteristic of narcissism are defences against virulent inner forces assaulting a person's self-esteem. The narcissistic person craves love that has never been offered when needed. According to Freud at early adolescence a certain self-sufficiency arises in the woman which, especially if there is a ripening into beauty, compensates her for the social restrictions upon her object-choice. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved, and that man finds favor with those who fulfil this condition.

The narcissistic desire to become a heroine is to want to be something special, something else, to want to change, to be changed, and also to want to stay the same. The Bronte reader wants to identify with Jane, Caroline, Shirley, and Lucy as they attempt to comprehend, anticipate, and deal with the ambiguous attentions of Rochester, Louis and Robert Moore, John Graham and M. Emanuel, who inevitably cannot understand their feelings at all.

The point of the experience is the sense of exquisite tension, anticipation, and excitement created within the reader as she imagines the possible resolutions and consequences for a love affair and then observes that once again the heroine in question has avoided the ever-present potential disaster because finally the hero

has fallen helplessly in love with her. By immersing themselves into the romantic fantasy, women readers vicariously fulfill their needs for nurturance by identifying with a heroine whose principal accomplishment, if it can even be called that, is her success at drawing the hero's attention to herself, at establishing herself as the object of his concern and the recipent of his care.

While the Bronte heroines may appear foolish, dependent, and even pathetic to readers who have already accepted as given the equality of male and female abilities, they appear courageous, and even valiant, to others still unsure that such equality is a fact or that they themselves might want to assent to it. Their desire to believe that the romantic heroine is as intelligent and independent as she is asserted to be even though she is also shown to be vulnerable and most interested in being loved is born of their apparently unconscious desire to be assertive within traditional institutions and relationships. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize that the readers' reveling in the heroine's intelligence, independence, self-sufficiency, and initiative is as important to their reading experience as the fact of the heroine's final capture by a man who admits that he needs her.

The marriage plot most C. Bronte's novels depend on is about finding validation of one's uniqueness and importance by being singled out among all other women by a man. The man's love is proof of the girl's value, and the marriage is a kind of payment for it. Jane just as much as Shirley or Caroline maintains her integrity on her own terms by exacting a formal commitment from the hero and simultaneously provides for her own future in the only way acceptable to her culture. It is not megalomaniacal to be significant neither is gender-specific; it

is only human. But to suspect that one can be significant only in the fantasy of fiction if female, in Rachel Brownstein's words: ' to look for significance in a concentrated essence of character, in an image of oneself, rather than in action or achievement, is, historically, only feminine. Or mostly.'[76]

When the Cinderella story is completed, when the book must be closed, the reader is forced to return to herself and to her real situation. Although, she may feel temporarily revived, she has done nothing to alter her relations with others. More often then not, those relations remain unchanged and in returning to them a woman is once again expected and willing to employ her emotional resources for the care of others. How can the short-lived therapeutic value of reading be transformed into a critical way of thinking, a determined world-view? Feminist readings of female texts provide us with the answer.

4.2 Charlotte Bronte and the Feminist Reader

Showalter in the process of 'rediscovering' women writers studies their contribution to literature as part of 'the female subculture'. She emphasizes that the female literary tradition should be viewed in '...relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant society'.[77] She distinguishes three stages in women's literary history, which mark their growth in

consciousness as *feminine*, *feminist*, and *female.* The 'feminine' stage involves *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of social roles, the 'feminist' writers express their *protest* against these standards and values, and their *advocacy* of female rights and values while the 'female' phase includes self-discovery, a search for identity.[78]

Accordingly, Charlotte Bronte can be considered a 'feminine' novelist being concerned with conflicts between self-fulfillment and duty and being aware of her place in social hierarchy. She could partly belong to the category of 'feminist' since she writes about taboo areas of sexuality and raises her voice against prevailing standards but she fails to meet Showalter's criteria of the 'female.

Although Showalter's 'feminine', 'feminist', 'female' categories are disputable and have been under severe attack in literary circles Bronte critics seem to agree that Charlotte Bronte significantly contributed to the debate on female problems in nineteenth-century novels. Controversies still arise in literary circles on her evaluation as an advocate of women's rights. She - together with her sisters - is criticized for being 'as Victorian as the Queen herself', 'Custodian of the Standard' who only bears the sign of the collective classification as 'female novelist' but female emancipation received little if any support from her.[79] Beyond any controversy though is the fact that all the Brontes were accused by contemporary reviewers of having written 'unwomanly' book (as defined by the social and literary standards of the time.) Charlotte Bronte, the 'custodian of the standard' with her 'unwomanly' writing, and her unconventional thinking by all means helped to undermine the standard she was

unable to adopt, and in that sense she can be viewed as a feminist thinker.

I use the term 'feminist' although it was not widely recognized or accepted till the turn of the century.[80] My understanding is that the emancipation or liberation of women involves more than politics; educational, sexual, economic, and cultural emancipation are also relevant. A feminist history includes Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony as well as Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Bronte.[81]

By putting personal life in the centre of her novels Charlotte Bronte reveals the contradictions within the social conventions of nineteenth-century England with special regard to women's position. At the time when the Bronte sisters were growing up much of English society was experiencing the industrial revolution when women's life had possibly never before in Western culture been more codified and restricted. It cannot be surprising that even the best women novelists were less vocal on the subject of the Woman Question than might have been expected. Since there was little feminism in the 1840s, and Charlotte Bronte had little contact with what there was, her works are valued for the way they increased awareness of social injustice and thus, to a great extent, contributed to the awakening of feminism.

How feminist is Charlotte Bronte? The answer is complex. Charlotte Bronte's women do have an immense desire for independence, growth and development, a desire which echoes their author's yearning for escape from the stifling restrictions of her own life as an impoverished Victorian 'lady'. On the other hand the protagonists' longings are predictably in conflict with the rebellious, autonomy

seeking feminist impulses, whose source is a rational understanding of class and gender subordination. Charlotte Bronte was no political radical.

When in *Jane Eyre* she declares her own views on the Women's Question she is pulled towards the positive linking of class rebellion and women's revolt through her anger at the misrepresentation and suppression of women's identity, not through an already existent sympathy with 'other masses and millions': As she remarks: 'It is vain to say that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility; they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. ...[82] For Charlotte Bronte the 'women's sphere' means sexual and romantic longings which can be considered as potentially radical and disruptive of mid-Victorian gender ideologies.

The Bronte heroines are liberated women, who - besides their desire to work and achieve independence, - have the courage to reveal their feelings (Jane, Lucy) and search for normal sexuality. Charlotte Bronte was neither prude nor libertine regarding this question. According to some critics the young ladyhood in *Shirley* and in *Villette* and the heroines' nervous breakdown (Caroline, Lucy, Jane) and their sexual awakening are closely related to one-another. Since in common usage 'Victorian' means sexually ignorant or repressive, the Brontes made a great step forward in exploring deeply and thoroughly the awakening of a girl and a young woman into love and sexual fulfillment, the process of which was not without pain and suffering.

The protagonists' sufferings derive from being women in nineteenth-century England; they give voice to their protest against the social conventions and the law which regarded them as second-class citizens. The female sex, said John Stuart Mill, was brought up to believe that its 'ideal of character' was the very opposite to that of men, 'not self -will, and governed by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.'[83]

Bronte created a new type of heroine (Lucy; Jane;) who achieved independence through education and work. Economic independence and social position in the community were accessible to them through being either a governess or a teacher. In each of her novels there is a powerful analysis of the sense of inferiority inherent in women's condition.

Though all Bronte heroines would like to achieve independence through work, the real fulfillment for them is love and marriage. Marriages in her novels are based on emotion, on both partners' mutual growth while marriages of convenience or social advantages are despised. According to Charlotte Bronte equality of emotions does not mean anything but the demand of a woman to be tied to a man. Their romantic heroes offer them the promise of equality, which is really a 'promise' considering the fact that these heroes (Rochester, Paul Emanuel, Robert Moore) are authority figures, having the image of a 'master'.

Male characters are of great importance in the heroines' awakening as they help them achieve self-esteem and self-confidence. Women characters develop and grow with male assistance but they do not dare to part with their 'supporters'. Margaret Blom, in 'Charlotte Bronte, Feminist Manquée' discusses the 'half -doll, half - angel' view of women and concludes, that...'despite their capacity and need for independence, women wish to be dominated'.[84]

This idea is stated explicitly by her most attractive, most fortunately endowed woman, Shirley Keeldar, who, though she consistently asserts her love of independence, ultimately remarks that when she chooses a husband, she will 'prefer a master... A man whose approbation can reward - whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear.'[85] The desire to be both independent and mastered creates an inevitable and irresolvable conflict which runs through all of Charlotte Bronte's works.

To the question of - how to reach the loving state of a mature life while still maintaining independence, Charlotte did not provide her readers with a satisfactory answer. The central element of paradox - to be free while having the desire to be tied to someone- is either released by an idyllic picture of a married life as it is in *Jane Eyre* or the novel is concluded with a 'double ending'. The double ending in *Shirley* or *Villette* both literalize and amplify the duality that lies at the centre of Charlotte Bronte's response to the Victorian world. Since Charlotte is unable to assure the readers that her heroines live happily ever after she embeds her fears in an ending which can be interpreted differently. It is probably worth mentioning that in *Shirley*

the heroine's final decision on marriage is preceded by long hesitation which is a sign of her reluctance to give up her independence.

Charlotte Bronte had a kind of moderate feminism which accepted the fact that quoting Helen Moglen; 'women's natures were fundamentally different from men's that although women craved social and psychological equality, they would not wish -except in extraordinary circumstances- to enter those occupational and political bastions traditionally arrogated by men to themselves.'[86] Society further reinforces this difference by making occupational 'barriers' between the two sexes. This difference is presented in *Shirley* when Caroline observed that Robert's thoughts'...were running in no familiar or kindly channel,...Nothing that they had ever talked of together was now in his mind: he was wrapped from her by interests and responsibilities in which it was deemed such as she could have no part.'[87]

Most significantly, she fully understood but did not often agree with conventional notions of womanhood. 'Women feel, just as men feel', she had the audacity to say. In recent times, there has been a tendency for Charlotte Bronte to be taken to task for failing to confront the problem more explicitly, but such criticism takes little account of the enormous psychological pressures on those women for whom the vocation of authorship meant more than a usual exposure to social scrutiny. The use which Charlotte Bronte made of the male pseudonym is evidence in itself of the need felt for protection from the invidious effects of such exposure. Intelligent, proud, passionate, innately gifted, she found all these great assets balked rather than

encouraged by society. As a result she was driven to write about the outsider in revolt against her destiny: she is a novelist of alienation. Isolated by poverty, lack of beauty, depth of feeling, and merit, her characters like Jane or Lucy look upon the secure but shallow world of the middle classes and dislike it wholeheartedly.

Even if we do not find single-minded feminism in Charlotte Bronte's works, we do find a complex and interesting struggle by a passionate, intellectual and strong-minded woman with problems of self-expression and self-development in very circumscribed conditions of life. Ambivalence about male superiority and female independence are not the least worrisome for both the writer and the reader. The interplay between the protagonists' fights to 'make something out of themselves' and sexual politics relates the novels closely to readers of today, who one hundred and fifty years later are still ambivalent about their roles and circumstances.

The question of who Bronte's readers were and are has been an important issue to discuss since the last decade. If Charlotte Bronte's novels are considered 'feminist' readings we are supposed to read them differently, in the way as feminists would read and interpret them. How feminists read 'differently' needs to be explained briefly. In a feminist story there is a necessity of choosing between two modes of reading. The reader can submit to the power of the text, or she can take control of the reading experience. A feminist reader should take the latter alternative. An example of reading Charlotte Bronte is at hand. What do feminists get from reading *Jane Eyre* or *Villette?*

A non-feminist reader would see in Rochester's blinding the embodiment of a godlike, Byronic hero 'punished' by his female author while for a feminist Rochester's symbolically castration is a necessary counterpart of Jane's independence in the terrible condition of a relationship of equality. Besides, Jane's rejecting St. Jones' marriage proposal for a conventional marriage where sexuality was of secondary importance can also be interpreted differently, according to the reader's expectation of marriage. If, for the reader, marriage is a situation of mutual interdependence, a relationship, where neither partner is submissive to the other and both are equals by submitting themselves to mutual limitation then St. John River's view is closer to the modern concept of marriage than anything Rochester can offer. Rivers offers a marriage in which love will grow with habit, in other words married love instead of romantic love. Rochester, despite his romantic love, attempted to turn Jane into a plaything, a dependent, a sexual object and a slave as soon as she agreed to marry him. Any woman who really wanted to reject the eternal feminine role would choose Rivers rather than Rochester.

The Victorian world was a man's world. Charlotte Bronte raised her voice and testified to the existence of women's desires. She did more than unconsciously correct the error of her age, she saw and felt deeply as poets do. To the present-day reader her feminism might appear rather tepid and moderate. But we must remember that first of all she was an artist, not a politician, a sociologist nor an economic historian. Because the 19 th-century world in which the Brontes lived is the world we have ourselves inherited, I discovered that to chart the process of their growth was also to explore the formation of the modern female psyche. It was to indicate the nature of the feminist

struggle - through which men and women today define themselves - both in support and opposition.

Conclusion

Woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such. The fact is that she would be quite embarrassed to decide what she is; but this is not because the hidden truth is too vague to be discerned; it is because in this domain there is no truth.

Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (1953)

The introduction of gender into the field of literary studies marks a new phase in feminist criticism by asserting that gender determines everything including value systems and language structures: all reading and writing by men as much as by women, is marked by gender. Feminist scholars take gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience and study diverse social constructions of femaleness and maleness in order to understand the universal phenomenon of male dominance.

Over the past two decades in the history of feminist literary criticism there has clearly been a general shift from a negative attack on the male writing about women towards a positive portrayal of women's redefinition of their identity in their own writing. Elaine Showalter in her 1979 essay 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' named this trend 'gynocritics'. This new approach to 'female subculture' concentrates on female literary traditions while bringing attention to neglected women writers like Jane Austen, Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot, Willa Catcher or Charlotte Bronte. Her theory balances content stressing Anglo-American and language stressing French theoretic approaches to feminist literary criticism.

I find myself both by turns persuaded by each of these approaches, but even more by the view that 'female experience' includes the experience implicit in both reading and writing. My project is to find out the construction of a nineteenth-century woman writer and her role in the construction of the subject of the woman reader while analyzing Charlotte Bronte' s novels. Showalter's gynocritics not only opened up the possibility of describing Charlotte Bronte's writing as a continuous and progressive narrative but also presented an opportunity for focusing on gender difference in reading and writing.

Since gender difference is in the focus, there are three further questions to be answered: What difference does it make (for the reader) if the writer is a woman? What difference does it make (for the writer) if the reader is a woman? What does it mean for a woman, reading as a woman, to read literature written by a woman writing as a woman? In this study I attempted to answer these questions using gynocritics as guidelines to the rediscovery of Charlotte Bronte's texts.

Resulting from superficial judgement Charlotte Bronte might be viewed as a custodian of nineteenth-century prevailing ideologies who served the dominant patriarchal culture in which she lived. Her complex, ambivalent attitude to the male dominant culture is reflected throughout her texts which provide a common bound between writer and reader, besides, connect women readers to a large community of women. A nineteenth-century woman writer implied her own frustration, ambivalence, anxiety and tension into the writing process, which is not always explicitly formulated in the text. The reader's task

is to find out to what extent, and with what effects the woman writer who wrote about women's experiences subscribed to the cultural myth of woman's place and identity, and to what extent she speaks to us as woman. Isak Dinesen short story, *The Blank Page*[1] reveals some of the secrets that link a woman to a community of women as much as it links a woman writer to women readers regardless of times and cultures.

The story concerns nuns in a convent in Portugal who are famous for spinning and weaving the finest flax in the country and who have the privilege of supplying linen bridal sheets for princesses for their wedding night. The nuns act like tour guides in their gallery where they put once used royal wedding sheets on display. In their later years, the princesses visit the convent to ponder over the stories told by the sheets. Each gilt framed sheet 'adorned with a coronated plate of pure gold, on which is engraved the name of a princess, each frame displaying a square cut, the 'faded markings' of the wedding night. There is, however, one framed canvas in the gallery on which 'no name is inscribed, and the linen within the frame is snow-white from corner to corner, a blank page'[2]. *The Blank Page* is always told by a woman who passes the story down to her daughter with the admonition: 'Where the storyteller is loyal, eternally and answeringly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak.'[3]

Dinesen's tale represents western European patriarchy which can be clear only to a reader who understands male hegemony. The nuns are the storytellers, who put their stories in frames of patriarchy and thus serve the interest of traditional social practices. It is also the nuns who keep another kind of record, the empty frame, that mutely

speaks of a female experience outside the patriarchal order and by its very presence challenges the existing paradigms of male dominance. And it is the empty frame that arrests the attention of the visitor, it is the blank page that arrests the attention of the reader. It is the task of the reader to reconstruct the female experience, to fill in the blank pages and make the silences speak. Dinesen' tale calls up the association of nuns with women writers who hand down the art of narrative from one generation of women to the next and who, at the same time represent a counter-culture outside the legitimized one.

A feminist perspective enables us to read both in a way that allows the silence to speak. And 'listening for the silences' is, as Adrienne Rich suggests, essential in understanding women's experience: 'Listening and watching in art and literature, in the social sciences, in all the descriptions we are given of the world, for the silences, the absences, the unspoken, the encoded - for there we will find the true knowledge of women. And in breaking those silences, naming our selves, uncovering the hidden, making ourselves present, we begin to define a reality which resonates to us, which affirms our being'.[4]

The present study reveals the 'silences' in Charlotte Bronte's texts representing themselves in forms of tension and ambivalence that originate from the contrast between the spotted bridal sheets and that which speaks in the silence of 'the blank page' i.e. marginalized female experience versus dominant male cultural paradigms.

Women, since they form a marginalized and muted group, interpret 'silence' differently from men. For a woman reader Charlotte Bronte's text is a voice of another woman and while reading it the reader

should take control of the reading experience: she should read the text as it was not meant to be read; in fact, read it against itself. Concrete examples are in order: Rochester's mutilation is a necessary counterpart of Jane's independence; Paul suffers a quiet sea burial which can be interpreted as a triumphal fantasy of female power, the power to withdraw from the traditional plot of love and marriage. The ghostly figure of the nun in *Villette* or the snake-bite episode in *Shirley* reflect Charlotte Bronte's own fears of sexual life. Turning down St.John's marriage proposal in *Jane Eyre* is victory of love over duty.

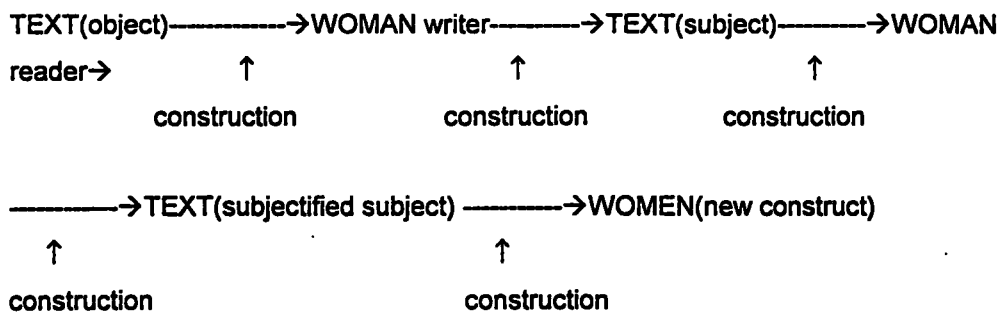
The woman reader finds herself in intimate conversation with the female writer. For her a book means a lot more than pure entertainment. As Poulet points out: 'A book is not only a book; it is a means by which an author actually preserves (her) ideas, (her) feelings, (her) models of dreaming and living. It is a means of saving (her) identity from death...To understand a literary work, then, is to let the individual who wrote it reveal (herself) to us in us...'[5]

To the question how is it possible for a woman, reading *as* a woman, reading literature written *by* a *woman* writing *as a woman* the answer lies in the dialogic model of reading and writing.

TEXT(+writer)------->READER----->TEXT(+writer+reader)------>READERS
TEXT(woman writer)------> WOMAN------>TEXT(woman writer+woman reader)---->WOMEN

This model can also be viewed as a modified 'double voiced discourse', a somewhat new paradigm of reading, where the text (object) is transformed into a subject (woman writer's mind), which becomes a subject of another subject (woman reader's mind) through

the reading process. In this kind of reading the position of the implied author is not different form the position of the implied reader, for this reason their viewpoint ends up to be the same.



The woman in the text, the implied author, the subjectified object, converts the text into a woman, a new subject, and the circulation of this text/woman becomes the central ritual that establishes the bond between the author and her readers. In this model there is a dialogic relationship between a woman writer and a woman reader, a woman reader and the large community of women through the text that is a 'subjectified object' of another woman. The woman reader succeeds in effecting a mediation between her perspective and that of the writer since she is longing for relationship, and she has a strong desire for intimacy. The woman reader goes through the same process of construction as the woman writer, and her subject is a product of the writer. In this construction the reader's struggle to become a 'subject' of another woman is similar to the writer's own struggle when her subject is constructed. At the end of the reading process a new contruct is born: the new construct is *women,* the polyphony of voices.

Another relevant issue in feminist criticism in terms of reader-response criticism is not the distinction between woman as reader

and woman as writer, but between feminist readings of male texts and feminists readings of female texts. While in feminist readings of male text there is a 'dialectic of control' that gives way to the 'dialectic of communication', in feminist readings of female texts reading is a 'matter of connection with the existence behind the text'.[6] To read a text and then to write about it is to seek not only with the author of the text, but also with a community of readers.

Feminist literary critics cannot take shelter in the objectivity of the text, or in the idea that a gender-neutral criticism is possible. Literature produces representations of gender difference which contribute to the cultural perception that men and women are of unequal value. Yet while some critics stress gender difference, others argue that the entire concept of gender difference is what has caused female oppression; they wish to move beyond 'difference' altogether. To ignore the implications of feminist criticism in reader response can only be done at the cost of incoherence and intellectual dishonesty.

The critical contradictions outlined above are in many respects the products or symptoms of the same history that formed the problems of 19th century women's fiction writing. We are all the inheritors of the same literary tradition, through which cultural values and myths are transmitted stretching from the classics and the Bible to Milton and the romantic poets. Contemporary woman's writing--critical and theoretical as well as literary--is still playing out the 19th century's contradictions. For 19th century women writers, the collision between the urgent need to represent female experience and women's

silencing within language and literary history remained a collision, articulated but not resolved.

Recently differences of color and sexual preference have become a key focus in feminist criticism which arrived at a postmodern stage. None of the new approaches can simply be thought as completely new, as offering entirely new paradigms and new ways of reading. Feminist criticism quoting Maggie Humm 'suffers the trauma of historical change'[7] thus it invites readers to look up at the world outside the covers of books.

Notes and References

Notes to Preface and Introduction

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[7] Elaine Showalter, "Towards a feminist poetics", In: *Women Writing* (Mary Jacobus ed.) (London: Methuen, 1979) 25.

[8] It is not insignificant to remark for the future direction of feminist criticism in the 1990s into the pluralist theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism that Sandra Gilbert was the American editor of Helene Cixous' and Catherine Clement 's *The Newly born Woman* (1986) and that Showalter also brought French feminists into her 1985 *Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*.

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