

Pain in Charlotte Brontë's Novels

Jacqueline Banerjee

要 約

シャーロット・ブロンテの小説にみられる痛み

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痛みは、彼女の人生においてそうであったように、シャーロット・ブロンテの作品の中核をなすものである。すなわち、少女期の途方もない想像上の世界を忘れ去ろうともがいている、作家としての痛み。また、作品中の各々の主人公を圧倒する、感情的そして心理的な痛み。特に『ヴィレット』の最後の部分では、痛みは、最終的に読者に引きつがれる。作者が、これらの種類の痛みを取り扱うのを、マゾヒスト的、サディスト的と批評されてきた。ごく最近、シャーロット・ブロンテの作品は読者に不安定な影響を与えとも言われる。しかし、そのような否定的な意見は、一人の女性として、一人の芸術家としてのブロンテに対して不当であろう。もっと肯定的に判断すると、ブロンテの小説は、人生の痛みを主題にして、作品化しようとしていることの結果とみることができよう。そして、作者が正直に、毅然と、痛み直面する必要性を、作品の中で、何度も示していることを考えると、ブロンテの小説は、読者にも、同じように痛みに立ち向かうよう奨励するのである。

Pain is a preoccupation with all the Brontë sisters, but one of the most gruesome evocations of it occurs in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849). This is when Shirley herself tells Louis Moore how she cauterized a mad dog's bite on her arm, by boring the glowing tip of a hot iron "well in" to the wound (478). The incident, as Mrs Gaskell first learned, is based on something that really happened to Emily Brontë, on whom this eccentric heroine was partly modelled (see *Gerin, Emily Brontë* 155–56). More significant, though, are the "facts" surrounding the incident in the novel itself. The pain is actively deployed to stave off illness and death. It has deep psychological as well as physical aspects. It is for a long time endured in solitary anxiety. And it is then communicated with dramatic effect to a favoured, suitably quiet listener.

Here is an analogy for Charlotte Brontë's expression of her own pent-up sufferings to generations of readers. This process runs right through her work and has always disturbed some of her critics. They see it as a type of self-indulgence, verging on masochism, and the source of serious flaws in each of her novels. Yet the articulation of pain, with all its difficulties and even embarrassments, can and *should* also be seen as a heroic and positive enterprise.

This paper will first deal briefly with the sources of Charlotte Brontë's pain, and her attitude to it both as a woman and as an author; then with the way earlier critics have responded to it in her work; and finally, with how this pain affects the structures of her narratives, her characterization and her vision as a writer.

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The Brontë story is too well known to need repeating here in any detail. But it is worth noting the report of Charlotte Brontë's "anguish of expression" as a schoolchild, when she talked about her dead sister Maria (*LL* 593). She was too young or too profoundly affected to have had any clear memories of her mother, who died when she was still four years old. But Maria, the eldest of the siblings, the one who had helped replace their mother, was vividly remembered and keenly missed. The next eldest sister, Elizabeth, died only a few weeks later, and after that comes the familiar tale of repeated miseries. All the most unwelcome aspects of reality seem to have come Charlotte Brontë's way: separations from loved ones, traumas resulting from a turbulent passionall life, family scandal and further family illnesses and deaths. Not surprisingly, when even her home was "disquieted by a constant phantom, or rather two—Sin and Suffering" (*LL* 497), she was badly troubled by sick headaches or migraines. Her struggles in her personal life, first as a girl and then as a woman, were perhaps bound to be reflected in the difficulties of her heroines, all of whom at some point suffer what would now be called nervous breakdowns.

Moreover, as an author, Charlotte Brontë found it grindingly hard to graduate from the highly-coloured imaginary world of her juvenilia, which she had shared with her remaining sisters and brother, to the more prosaic world of her major novels. Despite some

determined scholarly efforts to find harmony in her narratives, most agree that there are cracks and strains in the fabric of all of them, up to and including *Villette* (1853), her last complete work. Inconsistencies show up particularly strongly in her final chapters, where she seems to pay lip service to literary and social conventions while deliberately undermining them. The endings of both *Shirley* and *Villette* are the most obviously unsatisfactory and controversial, but even that of *Jane Eyre* has upset many critics: "we are left with a sense of an unsolved discord," wrote Sir Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's father, as early as 1877 (*CH* 421). All this bears witness to a painful tension between Charlotte Brontë's own vision and contemporary demands on her as an artist.

Nevertheless, a simple basic contrast between Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels points to the fundamentally positive trend of the older sister's work. Famously or notoriously, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) ends with a sense of discord *resolved*. But this is only achieved by suggesting the post-mortem union of Catherine Linton's and Heathcliff's souls, while leaving a less challenging and challenged couple—the new Catherine and the reformed Hareton—to commemorate their passion on earth. For Emily Brontë's torn and deeply tormented lovers, as I have suggested elsewhere, such a resolution is the only one possible ("Sources and Outcomes..." 24–25). It also seems entirely appropriate, because it reflects the mystical yearnings of their author, which appear in her poetry as well. Charlotte Brontë's main characters, however, must seek fulfilment this side of the grave. Their pain is hardly less intense than Catherine and Heathcliff's. Nothing is denied or hidden; the pain is there, and it is shared with the reader. But there is no question of either yielding to or transcending it. It must be got through, it must be lived through, by the author, the characters and the reader as well. And if the reward at the end of it all is in some ways disappointing, well then, that must be lived *with*.

What is positive about all this is not just the author's honesty, which prevented her from glossing over her problems, but the affirmation of life which she manages to communicate through it. Like Emily Brontë's mysticism, this affirmation of life fits with the author's general outlook, as revealed in her letters and by her many biographers.

For all their closeness, the surviving Brontë children had quite distinct ways of dealing with their harsh experiences. Charlotte Brontë did more than Emily or indeed any of her siblings to confront them successfully, and establish herself in the society of her times. In the first place, she gained considerable experience as a schoolteacher and governess. Emily's excursions from home were shorter, and generally unsuccessful; the youngest sister, Anne, held two governing posts over a period of about five and a half years (the first of which she was dismissed from), but never taught school; their brother Branwell was dismissed from various posts, each time under a worse cloud, and finally as a result of an ill-judged liaison with his employer's wife. Charlotte also entertained wild and unrealistic hopes of a relationship with a married person, M. Heger of the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels, where she spent the best part of two years after her education in England. However, unlike Branwell in a broadly similar situation, she managed to recover from it. In addition, she made and sustained close friendships outside the family circle, particularly with Ellen Nussey and the Taylor family, whom she knew from her

days at school in Roe Head. She is now known to have turned down at least three marriage proposals (one from Ellen Nussey's brother Henry). And after her brother and sisters' early deaths from consumption, she finally married a long-time suitor, her father's curate, Arthur Nicholls. This marriage was probably much more satisfactory than her earlier biographers suggested (see Fraser 472 ff. and Barker 761 ff.). Whatever the medical cause (and like everything else in her life, this too is disputed), she died in the early stages of pregnancy.

Additionally, the bare outline of her life can and perhaps should be filled out with a few examples of her day-to-day effort to overcome not only her sufferings, but also her naturally introverted personality. As well as staying abroad in Belgium on her own, for instance, she made trips to friends (such as the Kay-Shuttleworths—and James Kay-Shuttleworth was a distinguished educational reformer, who became a baronet); visited London, on one occasion for almost a month; went to the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace not once but five times; travelled to Scotland with her publisher and admirer, George Smith; and attended a legendary dinner in her honour, thrown by Thackeray. At the dinner, the guests were nonplussed by the lack of conversation which went with her quiet reserve; such excursions were all, to a greater or lesser extent, ordeals for her, and generally provoked one of her debilitating headaches. However, she undertook them. A typical remark to a correspondent would be, "I put my headache in my pocket ... and went with them [on this occasion, her companions for an evening at the Opera] to the carriage" (qtd. in Evans 91).

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Charlotte Brontë's critics have complained for various reasons when she put her pain not into her pocket, but into her novels instead. Over the years, however, the tenor of their complaints has changed.

By a number of her contemporaries and near contemporaries, the whole project of women exposing and tackling their own problems was interpreted as simply another kind of defiance. In fact, it was one which could pose an even greater threat to society than her sister Emily's. *This* defiance did not conveniently float away into a companionable haunting. It wrung out whatever rewards it could, right here on earth. *Jane Eyre*, for example, was sweepingly criticized in the *Quarterly* review by Elizabeth Rigby, a woman writer who nevertheless felt that no woman (or at least no *lady*) could possibly have written such a subversive document:

there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact has at the present day to contend with.... the tone of the mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*. (CH 109–10)

There was no sympathy for anyone's suffering here, either the author's or her heroine's.

Nor was there any lesson to be learned by such a reader.

Other readers were not so much alarmed as resentful of the depths of feeling which they were expected to participate in. Not even Charlotte's friend, the feminist Harriet Martineau, could accept Lucy Snowe's anguish in *Villette*: "the book is almost intolerably painful ... the author has no right to make readers so miserable.... we ourselves have felt inclined to rebel against the pain," she wrote in the *Daily News* (CH 172). More than twenty years later, the unmarried Martineau would herself write frankly in her *Autobiography* (1877) about her early sufferings. Perhaps she did not then consider this a kind of sadism practised on her hapless readers. However, at this stage in her life she felt alienated by the younger author's apparently shameless and inconsiderate revelation of women's needs.

By 1877, though, it was already time to recognize that Charlotte Brontë's protest on behalf of her sex did not simply contravene propriety. In fact, it was seen to be oddly and incongruously "combined with a most unflinching adherence to the proper conventions of society." This was Leslie Stephen again, complaining about the "inharmonious representation of life" in her work (CH 420). In a predictable swing of the pendulum, then, Charlotte Brontë's more recent feminist readers have adopted an opposite view to Rigby's and Martineau's: for them, it is frustrating that her "rebellion" against society and its rules does not go further, that the painful struggle does not produce results, and that in the end she seems to settle for compromises. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar decry the "social role" in which even the spirited eponymous heroine of *Shirley* "becomes enmeshed" (118), even though they are well aware of the author's own reservations about it. This of course reflects changes in attitude towards the role and rights of women, and changes in the kind of demands made on women writers.

More recently still, things have become much more complicated. The current critical trend is to explore the very nature of both sides involved in the struggle. That is to say, radical questions are being asked about the identities of Charlotte Brontë's characters, and particularly about the meaning of the reality to which they try to accommodate themselves. Again, the debate on these issues has its germs in past critiques. G.H. Lewes, for instance, posited in his review on the novel's first publication that the "reality" offered in *Jane Eyre* is not the ordinary novelistic one, but a "deep, significant reality.... it [the book] is soul speaking to soul; it is an utterance from the depths of a struggling, suffering, much-enduring spirit: *suspiria de profundis*!" (CH 84; Charlotte Brontë was suitably gratified). But the scrutiny now is far more intense; and it is proving to be quite disturbing. It is no longer at all clear who is making a compromise, or what it is that they are compromising with—let alone whether the compromise is at all worthwhile.

In a conclusion every bit as disquieting as any Charlotte Brontë's own endings, Sally Shuttleworth's 1996 study of the works in the context of Victorian psychology agrees with Martineau's original opinion, that they are not simply tormented but "tormenting." But this, she maintains, is not just because of an outpouring of passion, but because the novels leave readers to question their own "cherished assumptions of subjective integrity and literary unity" (247). In other words, the novels unsettle us by their challenge to our

sense of selfhood, and to our aesthetic expectations of how a novel should help to shape human experience. Put simply, what Charlotte Brontë shares with her own "quiet listeners" is not just the pain of the inevitable conflict between the individual and society, which Lewes had noted, but the deeper pain of exposing and then probing the wound in her art; and then, of leaving it open.

It is particularly important to address this latest criticism, because it is a fundamental attack on the whole *oeuvre*, from beginning to end. When she died, Charlotte Brontë left behind an unfinished twenty-page fragment of manuscript entitled *Emma*. It was criticized at the time (by her husband) for treading old ground, because it introduces a typically unprepossessing girl abandoned at school under mysterious circumstances. A victim, it would already seem, of both her guardian's and the schoolmistress's callousness, Emma is at once pathetic and "insolently distant" (236). Here, no doubt, is a rebel to follow in the footsteps of those earlier heroines like Jane Eyre who seek to assuage their desire for love denied in childhood. But here too is another complicated heroine ready to try to find some terms of her own on which to confront an unfriendly world. Charlotte Brontë, after years of hard-won progress, was not simply going back. The importance of wresting something from this painful confrontation has always been, and evidently would have continued to be, her major (and most courageous) theme. Each successive work explores it more deeply; and the power of the writing, which even the most damning of her critics acknowledge, ensures that her readers can hardly help becoming involved in the same process. To assess the value of that process is therefore a vital task for any critic.

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The first step for Charlotte Brontë the author was to free herself as far as possible from the romantic imaginary worlds of her early sibling collaborations. For her as much as for Emily Brontë, engagement in the dreamy world of the juvenilia had been exactly what R. D. Laing calls the creative act—an "attempt to recapture personal meaning in time and space from out of the sights and sounds of a depersonalized, dehumanized world." Charlotte Brontë's writings, like her next youngest sister's in particular, were "bridgeheads into alien territory.... acts of insurrection" (37). Indeed, in her case, there is clear evidence, from the journal she kept at Roe Head girls' school, of the conflict between the imagined and the real world, and of the rebellious spirit in which the *former* was originally pursued. On one occasion, for instance, she describes how a trying day in "wretched bondage" as a young schoolteacher was followed by an imaginative experience so intense that she longed to remain in its grip, and put it into narrative form—"But just then a Dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited" (qtd. in Gerin, *Charlotte Brontë* 104).

The urgent need to indulge in the increasingly elaborate fiction of Angria can be (and indeed has been) seen as regressive and escapist. It was at least partly a response by the surviving Brontë children to the losses and relative isolation of their childhood:

Strangers who met them later in life remarked on their clinging love for

each other in the face of a hostile world. This need for emotional security may help to account for the intense passion with which the young Brontës pursued their joint creative adventures. (Alexander 12)

But, with the help of Robert Southey's warnings about the "daydreams in wh[ich] you habitually indulge" (LL 166), Charlotte Brontë knew that she must tear herself away from these immature pursuits. It is well known that she eventually wrote a reluctant, self-denying farewell to "that burning clime where we have sojourned *too long*" (emphasis added) before embarking on work intended for publication. As she put it herself, in an often-quoted declaration of intent, "the mind would cease from excitement & turn now to a cooler region—where the dawn breaks grey and sober" ("Farewell to Angria" LL 560, n.3). But it was not an easy task; it was not even one which she was always sure was *right* for her. As a result, the wrench from that "burning clime" was slow and painful, and would always leave its traces on her work.

Indeed, her deliberately toned-down first novel, *The Professor* (published posthumously in 1857), contains characters and situations taken almost straight from the childhood fantasies of Angria. For instance, the lineage of the Crimsworth brothers, with whose altercations the plot opens, runs right back through the Ashworth brothers, characters in her first attempt at a novel set in the real world (*Ashworth*—see Alexander 204 ff.), to the Angrian Percies: in fact, these sets of rival siblings share the same Christian names, William and Edward. As for Frances Henri, the lace-mender and pupil who eventually marries William Crimsworth, she owes much to such Angrian heroines as Lily Hart, who (for example) also at one point encounters her future husband unexpectedly in a graveyard. And Frances's later concern over a certain disturbing "*something*" in her son, Victor, which she feels her husband's friend Mr Hunsden encourages (221), is clearly a more serious echo of Lily's reproof of Colonel Percy in the earlier story:

"...you will spoil my child by your too-great indulgence. Already he is getting as wilful and unmanageable as—as—"

"As myself, madam, you would say," interrupted the colonel, laughing.

("Lily Hart" 87)

In this way, the childhood characters, situations and preoccupations all run on into the published work, carrying with them the freight of painful "over-excitement" which Southey had solemnly warned her against (LL 170).

However, what puts the published work on a different level is the way this older material comes to be adapted and controlled. This is partly a matter of improved artistic technique; but it also shows the author bringing a new attitude to the material. Southey had predicted for her an ever-broadening experience of "the vicissitudes of life & the anxieties, from wh[ich] you must not hope to be exempted" (LL 167). Now this was actually happening, and in no half measure; and she was finding a way of coping with the new torments in her art. To return to some of the examples given above: unlike her feeble forebear, Lily Hart, Frances shows admirable self-possession in her graveyard encounter; and while Lily's son is apparently going to be all the better for the addition of a bit of "impetuosity" ("Lily Hart" 88), Frances's son Victor in *The Professor* is expected to

have all *his* high spirits knocked out of him at Eton. Victor's glittering eye and teeth-grinding mark him out as an embryonic Heathcliff, but he will not be allowed to blossom into one in here. On the contrary, he will be sorted out by discipline at school, and made to adjust. But it is the change in the heroine which is most revealing. Unlike the child-brides of the juvenilia, not only Frances Henri/Crimsworth but all the subsequent heroines as well, whatever their plights, are made to grit their teeth and confront all obstacles in a new spirit of determination which overrides their pain. "Against slavery all right thinkers revolt," says Frances, "and *though torture be the price of resistance, torture must be dared ... for freedom is indispensable*" (212; emphasis added).

This is not to say that this author's break with her earlier unpublished work was ever complete. Writing to the publishers as *Jane Eyre* neared its conclusion, Charlotte Brontë described it as "a second narrative ... to which I have endeavoured to impart a more vivid interest than belongs to the [sic] Professor" (LL 535). There is an uncertainty here which would still allow inroads of almost overwhelming adolescent intensity into the whole oeuvre. For example, Fannie Ratchford has explained how the face of Marian Hume, the fragile, childish heroine who is the first wife of the Duke of Zarmona in *Angria*, peeps out behind little Paulina in *Villette* (74–5). Marian in the juvenilia dies of a broken heart when the Duke rejects her for a new love. The similarly "fairy-like" Paulina would probably find it equally hard to withstand such a crisis (524). But she is not required to. Instead, it is Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette*, who actually does have to deal with rejection. And she is just tough enough to survive the ordeal. Not stifling but at least controlling the colossal passions which felled her Angrian heroine, Charlotte Brontë is able to impart to this later one a far more practical legacy—her own hard-won capacity for endurance.

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The strains in the narratives of all the mature novels indicate just how painful it was for this writer to adapt herself to the realist project of the Victorians. The most obvious departures from the quotidian occur at the moments of highest drama. Examples include the telepathic communication between Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, and the enormous coincidences in the last two novels: Caroline Helstone's reunion with her mother in *Shirley* (1849), and Lucy Snowe's with Mrs Bretton and her son Graham (alias Dr John) in *Villette*. However, although Lord David Cecil long ago criticized Charlotte Brontë's plots as "badly constructed" (114), plot devices such as those just mentioned need not be seen as inconsistencies or lapses. They have been variously defended by later critics, and have their own justifications.

Robert B. Heilman was one of the first to claim that Charlotte Brontë deliberately *used* the Gothic: "it released her from the patterns of the novel of society and therefore permitted the flowering of her real talent." Interestingly, Heilman goes on to define this "talent" in such a way as to equate the flaunting of realism with a higher kind of realism. It was a talent, he says,

for finding and giving dramatic form to impulses and feelings which, be-

cause of their depth or mysteriousness or intensity or ambiguity, or of their ignoring everyday norms of propriety or reason, *increase wonderfully the sense of reality in the novel*. (108–9; emphasis added).

Writing more recently, Pauline Nestor feels able to be more specific about this process, co-opting Heilman's argument for the feminists. In Nestor's reading, for example, Jane Eyre's supernatural summons is a deliberate rebuttal of the supremacy of reason, which serves to empower the more emotional, more "intuitive" female (65). In other words, Charlotte Brontë promotes a different *kind* of reality in her work: the reality of the pulsating (female) heart.

How convincing is this stance? Paradoxically, it is in *Villette*, perhaps the least cohesive and most Gothic of the novels, that the author herself seems to undermine it most. She does so through Lucy Snowe, the last and most revealing of her heroines. Lucy, who could well be speaking for her author here, portrays her own personality as split:

I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (140)

The narrative of this novel has already been marked by Gothic excess—a chase through the dark streets of a foreign city by two sinister-looking bearded men—and there is much more of the sort to come. "Thought" for Lucy includes "strange necromantic joys" indeed, and she knows that her survival depends in the end on *rejecting* her natural inclination for them in favour of calm subsistence in the everyday world. (One is inevitably reminded here of the author's "Farewell to Angria.") This rejection is presaged as early as Chapter 14 of the novel, when she resolves to abjure "the world of delight" which acting in the school vaudeville had opened up for her: her evident gift for it, "the strength and longing" involved, "must be put by; and I put them by," she adds, "and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked" (211).

Nevertheless, in the actual practice of her writing, Charlotte Brontë herself appears to be ambivalent. That is to say, she seems prepared to let her extravagant passions out from time to time, in desperate ploys and at desperate junctures. The release may not be as calculated as Heilman and Nestor suggest. The counter-claim of reason is always felt, and there is no sense of the privileging of passion over rational control. But it is equally unlikely that such a highly self-conscious writer is just thoughtlessly carried away on floods of feeling without "pausing to attend to so paltry a consideration as artistic unity" (Cecil 116). Most probably, Charlotte Brontë simply found that the psychological conflict of the heroine, and the dramatization of it, sometimes demanded such outbursts. There might be something peculiarly feminine at work here (though such outbursts are not to be found in, say, Jane Austen's work); more importantly, it does contribute to the force of her writing—the very quality which finally made it impossible for Cecil to dismiss her from the ranks of genius.

As the narrative is torn between two kinds of logic, the logic of the heart and the logic of the head, many individual episodes become almost unbearably fraught with ten-

sion. Another example mentioned above is Caroline Helstone's reunion with her mother in *Shirley* (1849). Matthew Arnold's disgusted comment on the "hunger, rebellion and rage" in *Villette* (CH 201) fits this earlier work just as well, if not better. After all, it is a novel set in the period of the Napoleonic wars and Luddite riots. Many people were literally going hungry then, and the problem of the "starving poor of Yorkshire" disturbed the author intensely (61). It is the hunger of the *heart*, though, which drives this particularly improbable episode in Caroline's life—an episode in which her mother's love proves a temporary substitute for Robert Moore's. The moral bent of this narrative is towards enlargement of the woman's sphere, but here as elsewhere it is halted and threatened by images of regression, withdrawal and even imprisonment. The moment when Shirley's governess Mrs Pryor at last reveals herself as Caroline's mother is narrated in language that resonates with all three:

"...Daughter! we have long been parted: I return now to cherish you again."

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

"My mother! My own mother!"

The offspring nestled to the parent: that parent, feeling the endearment and hearing the appeal, gathered her closer still. She covered her with noiseless kisses: she murmured love over her, like a cushat fostering its young. (410)

The narrative here becomes less realistic in the usual sense (less credible, less rational) not only because of its improbability, but because of its sentimentality. It is, of course, tempting to refer back to the autobiographical context of a novel which was written during the very worst period of Charlotte Brontë's life, when Branwell, Emily and Anne Brontë all died one after the other.

Yet the episode does have both its logic and its power. As for logic, Caroline, like Jane before her and Lucy Snowe after her, has lacked the love and support of a mother. This is something which all three heroines miss keenly. For example, the idea of a "haloed face, bending over me with strange pity" comes to Jane in the red-room at Gateshead (48). At another critical time in her life, after Mr Rochester's pleas for her to stay with him as his mistress, Jane's need is so great that she actually seems to hear the voice of such a ghostly presence, saying, "My daughter, flee temptation." To her, at least, there is no question about whose voice this is: "Mother, I will," she replies (346). All this is easily understood in terms of psychological necessity. Extra artistic license is used to grant Caroline and Lucy more solid manifestations of a mother figure, in their hours of utmost need. Nevertheless, it is possible to accept Mrs Pryor, like Mrs Bretton after her, as a materialization of deep longing. Surely it is in this sense, rather than because of her own "typically female experience" as a governess in the past (Gilbert and Gubar 125), that Caroline's mother is exactly what her name seems to imply, a "prior" woman. As for the power of the episode, it is worth putting it in the context of its time. Lewes, who had so much to say in criticism of the novel, and to whom Mrs Pryor's behaviour in abandon-

ing Caroline in the first place was quite beyond belief, found the recognition scene in itself "in its simple, humble, thrilling naturalness one of the most touching and *feminine* scenes in our literature" (CH 169; emphasis added).

Moreover, here as always in this author's work, there is a strenuous effort towards equilibrium. The explanations that follow the miraculous reunion are hardly more credible than those which account for the more famous one at the end of *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps most incredible is the fact that Shirley alone had noted the likeness between mother and daughter; and that, having noted it, she had not seen fit to comment on it. Still, the explanations are made, the episode is gradually subsumed into the more acceptable tenor of the narrative, and the author resumes her engagement with the quotidian. So, with the help of her newly-restored mother, does the heroine. Mrs Pryor, who has suffered from a lack of "moral courage" herself, will not indulge herself by over-protecting the daughter who now clings to her. When Caroline murmurs happily, "It seems so natural, mamma, to ask you for this and that. I shall want nobody but you to be near me, or to do anything for me...", the ex-governess responds very sensibly, "You must not depend on me to check you: you must keep guard over yourself" (413). Thus melodrama and sentimentality alike subside, the "sweat of agony" dries off the watching mother's forehead (418), the worst anguish of her spirit is calmed, and both Caroline and the narrative itself are set to embark on a new stage of development.

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The pain involved in this kind of narrative progress, if not from "good" passages to "bad" passages, as Cecil suggests (114), is still wrenching. The heaviest burden falls on the characters themselves, so that this pain has its expression in the breakdowns which afflict not only Caroline Helstone but all the heroines of Charlotte Brontë's major works.

Jane Eyre's inner conflict after the aborted marriage ceremony is the ultimate struggle between heart and head. When Rochester's rage at her intransigence gives way to sorrow, she tells herself, "*only an idiot ... would have succumbed now*" (345; emphasis added). So the head wins, as it must; but the pain is proportionately intense. The thwarting of the heart—her natural impulse to stay with Rochester—produces "gaping wounds" and "inward bleeding" in it (350), and reduces her to wandering on the moors, begging for bread, and being taken in half-dead by charitable strangers. Moreover, these people think her so far gone that they talk freely over her sickbed, commenting on such personal matters as her appearance and class. It takes three days before Jane can even begin to speak to them, and put them right about her.

All this has parallels in the other major novels. Caroline's collapse in *Shirley* comes after she is misinformed about her beloved Robert's relationship with Shirley Keeldar. She wisely keeps her own counsel, but is passing through "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" (the title of Chapter 24) when Mrs Pryor's revelation of their relationship restores her. In the same novel, not even Shirley, proud, strong and mannish as she is, can escape completely: she becomes "queer and crazed" (593), not as a result of the mad dog Phoebe's bite, but as she bows to the yoke of marriage with Louis Moore. It is the only

course for her, and she knows it, but there is still a loss to her pride. As for Charlotte Brontë's last heroine, Lucy Snowe, Volume I of *Villette* leaves her plunging into the abyss after Dr John's confession of his feelings for Ginevra Fanshawe. Her solitude in the summer vacation, and her spiritual turmoil, have exacerbated and been exacerbated by this disappointment in love. It is fair to say that in the end she is only saved by a miracle similar to Caroline's—her godmother Mrs Bretton's unexpected reappearance.

Successful recovery, however, cannot *simply* be put down to the author's obtrusive intervention. This is particularly so in the case of Jane Eyre, who very deliberately puts herself in the way of rescue: longing to throw herself simply on the mercies of nature, she nevertheless tears herself away from the sunny open moors. "I was a human being, and had a human being's wants: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them" (351), she reminds herself. Though apathy descends with the heat of the day, she fights against it, and turns towards the sound of a church bell. "Human life and human labour were near. I must struggle on: strive to live and bend to toil like the rest" (352). Then, when she comes to the village, she seeks earnestly for employment, and when all else fails, humbles herself to the extent of begging a farmer for food one day, and a child for left-over porridge the next. It is with a tremendous effort of will that she manages at last to reach the friendly shelter of Moor House.

Although finally overcome by fever, Caroline Helstone and Lucy Snowe also struggle earnestly towards succour. Devastated as she is by hearing that her beloved Robert Moore is Shirley's "favourite," Caroline gets herself home before collapsing: "she must go home. Home she would go: not even Robert could detain her now" (398). As for Lucy's struggle in the town of Villette, "amidst the street of flood and gust, and in the perplexity of darkness" (259), that is fully appreciated later by Dr John, who is only now revealed as her godmother's son Graham Bretton. The physical struggle clearly reflects not only her emotional but her spiritual confusion. Nothing but the direst need could have led such a dyed-in-the-grain Protestant as Lucy to make confession to a Catholic priest. Yet her instinct for survival is proved right, for it is the same kind elderly priest who first rescues her and brings her to Graham Bretton's attention. Thus for the two later heroines, as for Jane Eyre, pain is also part of a productive effort to move forward in their lives.

However, perhaps the most interesting case is Shirley's. Her troubled behaviour before her wedding is, apparently, not entirely genuine:

In all this, Miss Keeldar partly yielded to her disposition. But a remark she made a year afterwards proved that she partly also acted on system. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier." (592)

In other words, there is a good deal of co-operation here between heart and head, even during the period of the most painful conflict.

After the other heroines fall ill, too, they try hard to take control of themselves and their lives. Jane Eyre is soon down in the kitchen of Moor House, insisting on helping

the servant Hannah prepare gooseberries for pies. Lucy Snowe, ever wary of both rejection and dependence, tells herself firmly not to get too involved with the Brettons. Caroline comes the nearest to luxuriating in her illness, but that is because of the new and delightful experience of being cared for by her own mother. It is quite uncharacteristic of her: "Caroline was usually pained to require or receive much attendance" (401). And it soon passes, to be replaced by "a touching endeavour to *appear* better" (419), and, at last, the strength to implement the will to recover. There is no malingering here.

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Still, the endings of these heroines' stories have always been controversial. Leslie Stephen's complaint about the return of Jane Eyre to Thornfield, "What would Jane Eyre had done, and what would our sympathies have been, had she found that Mrs Rochester had not burnt in the fire at Thornfield?" (CH 421), is implicitly a criticism of authorial manipulation, a *deus ex machina* situation in which character itself has not provided the spring of the action. The same might be said of all the novels, though the manipulation is to such different effects. Thus the conclusion of *Shirley* has seemed even less satisfactory to some, despite the fact that no supernatural voice or convenient disaster is employed to bring the two heroines, Shirley and Caroline, to their marriage partners. Such an ending still seems to have been deliberately intended as a sop to the Victorian public ("Yes, reader, we must settle accounts now" [587]). But for various reasons it did not go down at all well with some of the most important critical voices of the day—certainly not Lewes, whose favourable review of *Jane Eyre* had so pleased its author. Having said that the novel lacks the "artistic fusion, or intergrowth, by which one part evolves itself from another," Lewes goes on to say that *Shirley* leaves behind it "no distinct or satisfactory impression" (CH 164, 165). As for *Villette*, Stephen is by no means alone in thinking that someone with a better mind would "even under her conditions have worked out some more comprehensible and harmonious solution" (CH 422). The author's hand is as obvious here as in *Jane Eyre*: a tremendous storm at sea seems arbitrarily whipped up in the final chapter for the express purpose of depriving Lucy Snowe of her happy future with M. Paul. As noted above, another "friend" of Charlotte Brontë's, Martineau, was greatly disturbed by the fact that there is "no respite" from the misery in the novel. That Lucy's need for love is not only constantly shown, but never answered, is, of course, the source of the book's "pervading pain" (CH 172).

However, it is also clear that in these successive endings, Charlotte Brontë is gradually coming to grips with the intransigence of pain. Hers is not the "sunny" imagination which she apportions to her more sanguine readers at the end of *Villette* (596). *They* may entertain unrealistic hopes of conventional happy endings; she no longer can. It has been a process, not a sudden revelation. In fact, Lucy watches the flaming autumn sunrises with great trepidation at the end: "I know some signs of the sky; *I have noted them ever since childhood,*" she cries (595; emphasis added). Life has taught Charlotte Brontë its hard lessons, as Southey knew it would, and she has passed them on to her heroine here. What Southey might not have expected, though, is that the feverish "over-excitement" of

the imagination which he deplored would then be replaced by a passionate outcry, issued through Lucy Snowe, against the near-certainty of denial, restriction and loss.

That is not to say that the pain of this world has won any victory over either the author or her heroine. Just as the former struggled on with her life, even preparing to start a new one as a mother, Lucy is set to carry on with the life M. Paul has left her in. "I had been left a legacy...—I *could* not flag" (594). His support has given her a new stability and sense of purpose, and the economic means for independence. That is worth a great deal, even if the love which she had wanted fails to materialize. Not "too consolatory to console" as Frank Kermode puts it (164), such an ending reflects the same sort of mature accommodation to life which is found later, in, for example, Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* (1864), and, later still, in the sad but not hopeless outcome for Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876). As I have argued elsewhere, such works are simply ahead of their time in checking their heroines' progress towards the altar and the family hearth (*Through the Northern Gate* 140).

It seems strange, then, that a modern critic like Sally Shuttleworth should still be disturbed by this ending. Along with other feminist critics, she sees the marriages which conclude *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* as forms of "self-annihilation" or "vanquishment" for the heroines (182, 218); she also queries the relationship of William Crimsworth and his new wife Frances in *The Professor*, pointing out that each partner has a radically different view of women's roles (145–6). But she finds *Villette* even more unsettling, because while the heroine does remain single, and "achieves economic competency, the dominant final note in the novel is not one of triumph or content but rather overwhelming loss" (232).

A simple response to this is that anything else would be totally out of character. The emotionally needy Lucy could not be expected to welcome blessed singleness. At the end of *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë comments that "the squeak of the real pig is no more relished now than it was in days of yore," and she goes on to oblige her public with a double wedding. Those who wish to can ignore the false notes. But in the later novel, this order has been reversed. Lucy's perfectly understandable wretchedness is put to the fore, and the suggestion of its being unwarranted (of M. Paul's returning to her arms) is offered almost as an aside. As an artist, Charlotte Brontë now has the courage to paint "the unvarnished truth" of the matter, despite knowing that this "unvarnished truth does not answer" (*Shirley* 587).

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Yet, as acknowledged earlier in this paper, Shuttleworth is not another petulant Martineau. Far from it: she is deeply impressed by the way this author deals with the often contradictory paradigms of her age, and admires the intensity with which she does so. Her problem therefore is not that Charlotte Brontë thrusts her last heroine's "realistic" suffering in the reader's face, but with what this suffering suggests. In the end, this critic feels, none of the author's heroines is able to define herself except by defying social norms; they all lack autonomy.

This insight immediately rings true: Cecil pointed out long ago that these characters' "highest joys arise from some sacrifice of self..." (128). Perhaps Shirley's abandonment of her independence is the best example here, but Ginevra Fanshawe's question in *Villette*, "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?" (392), might well be asked of any of the heroines even (or especially) at the end of their stories. D.H. Lawrence caught the odour of disintegration and, looking askance at the maiming of Mr Rochester at the end of *Jane Eyre*, thought he knew where it came from, too: the collapse or even death of the "deep instincts" ("Pornography and Obscenity" 39). So it seems fair enough when, in her conclusion, Shuttleworth implies that the lack of autonomy in Charlotte Brontë's heroines comes down to what the author herself lacks. This Shuttleworth identifies as "overall moral vision" rather than "deep instincts," but of course the two were also deeply connected in Lawrence's mind. What is more, Shuttleworth says, Charlotte Brontë lacks the apparatus to convey such a vision—she complains that there is no "omniscient narrative voice in which we can place our trust." The result, this critic fears, is that Charlotte Brontë's intensity will cause the readers, like the heroines themselves, to "undergo a fundamental destabilization of selfhood" (247).

But is this negative conclusion *really* fair? Concern with the way an author grapples with contemporary discourses should not lock critical appraisal into the past as well.

The day for neat characterization, or even for E.M. Forster's ideal of rounded, not entirely predictable characters, has now gone. Instead, contemporary novelists offer the kind of characters described by D.H. Lawrence in another essay, "Why the Novel Matters," as those who "do nothing but *live*" (107). For his own reasons, Lawrence himself failed to respond to the kind of nervous, edgy life which flows through Charlotte Brontë's heroines. Yet most readers would probably agree with Cecil, whose various criticisms of this author fade beside the important admission that "every page of Charlotte Brontë's novels burns and breathes with vitality" (125). As for omniscient narrators with moral authority, their day has also gone. This is largely a post-Lawrentian development: Kafka's *The Trial*, for example, was published in 1930, the year of Lawrence's death. G. H. Lewes's "*suspiria de profundis*" review of *Jane Eyre* foreshadowed a new age for literature, one in which the novel of introspection, of guilt, of *angst*, and the post-modern collage of the fragmentary and the unresolved, have both been flourishing. In this age, the exploration of painful and untidy reality is much valued. No one criticizes authors like Kafka or, say, Saul Bellow and Salman Rushdie for "destabilizing" their readers. However, on this point it is worth challenging Shuttleworth anyway: that Charlotte Brontë is able to turn Lucy Snowe *and* (if we accept this critic's premise about the profound effects of art) her readers resolutely away from the abyss towards the ordinary daily round, without any expectation of "flagging," is surely not destabilizing at all. Rather, it is helpful and encouraging.

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It would seem, then, that in her handling of pain Charlotte Brontë has much to offer—much more, indeed, than some of her early (or even her most recent) critics have realized. In her work, as in her life, she demonstrates the strength of mind to face and en-

duce the deepest anguish, and to accept that there are no easy answers to it. In the end she yields neither to facile hope nor to debilitating despair. That her popularity continues to grow suggests that so-called "ordinary readers" recognize this strength in her, and have never failed to respond to her efforts to confront the pains of life positively, with courage and fortitude.

Abbreviations:

CH—*The Critical Heritage* (Allott)

LL—*Letters* (Brontë)

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