UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE BRONTES AND EDUCATION

A descriptive analysis of the educational experience of the Bronte sisters and its relevance for modern teachers and pupils, with particular emphasis on the theme of rebellion and conformity.

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ABSTRACT

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THE BRONTES AND EDUCATION

by Eileen Margaret Hulmes

An examination of the Bronte sisters' experiences as they attempted to conform in a society which viewed their creative, intellectual and emotional needs with incomprehension throws light on existing problems in girls' education. The constant tension between the pressure to conform and the desire to rebel is the principal theme of this study.

After outlining the prevailing theories about women's education in the nineteenth century, this thesis discusses the Bronte sisters' school experiences and analyses their individual responses.

It is shown that they all adopted independent approaches in religious belief, choosing to modify authoritative doctrines according to individual conscience. It is also argued that their more conformist attitudes to conventional moral ideas of family duty and personal responsibility conflicted to some extent with their intense need for creative self-expression. These existing tensions, it is claimed, were reinforced by their refusal to accept prevailing Victorian stereotypes of femininity.

It is suggested that aspects of the Brontes' experience are relevant to modern girls seeking academic and career success, who find that this still involves some rejection of traditional roles and questioning of conventional social and moral assumptions. The Brontes' experience, it is claimed, shows how some of these challenges might be dealt with and how positive conformity might be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

After teaching English for fifteen years, and becoming involved in organising a Careers Guidance programme for pupils in a girls' comprehensive school, I became increasingly aware of the continuing tension between personal ambition and domestic fulfilment for women. It was fascinating to examine the attitudes girls brought to their institutional experience of education and to assess its practical value for them, not only in terms of qualifications but as a preparation for life.

I came to see that, while many girls were theoretically aware of the opportunities available to them, social amd emotional factors often limited their chances to the more conventional options. My study of English literature had made me aware of some of the frustrations and struggles of women denied the equality of opportunity now available, and Victorian attitudes to female education presented themselves to me as an interesting and fruitful theme for research.

I chose to examine these attitudes through a study of the Brontes' lives and works, as my fascination with them dates from childhood visits to Haworth and regular rambles on the moors when they featured naturally in the conversation. From my first reading of "Jane Eyre" at the age of twelve, when I had just escaped from a rather repressive Church of England School to the enlightened security of a small girls' grammar school, I felt that the Brontes' preoccupations were my own. I am convinced that an analysis of their response to the constraints of Victorian society is still relevant to the needs of girls learning to cope independently in a challenging and competitive world.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: A DISCUSSION OF SOME OF THE ATTITUDES AND THEORIES RELATING TO THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES.

Education for social conformity, according to sex and class.

The demand for the education of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century involved rebellion against existing patriarchal attitudes. Although women had expressed the need to be educated for financial independence and personal satisfaction, the validity of this claim was not widely recognised until the later nineteenth century when it inspired the work of Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale, among others. Earlier educationalists, such as Hannah More, had firmly placed the emphasis on training a girl for her God given role in society, that of devoted and subservient helpmeet to her husband, unselfish nurturer of children and supporter of ageing parents. Acceptance of this stereotype meant girls had to be nobly self-sacrificing in family relationships, as it was their religious duty to be humble and to put others first. Conformity therefore became a moral and religious obligation.

Yet, during the early nineteenth century, the education of girls had a secondary and, in the short term, more important aim. It was clearly a girl's social duty to secure herself a husband and thus provide for her future. For the lower classes, this meant that education should concentrate on making girls domestically competent and socially responsible, and reinforced Hannah More's idea of a restricted curriculum for the poor. For the middle and upper classes the situation was different. The main priority for a girl was to develop her feminine charms and, as a result, much fashionable education deteriorated into mere training in the relatively useless accomplishments which would allure a man. In this more frivolous sphere, conformity often meant success in conventional social terms.

From the outset, then, there were tensions and contradictions in the aims of women's education, although, as will be shown, the religious ideal of godliness could be harmonised with sexual attractiveness in the stereotype of the pure Victorian maiden. Recognising the contradictions between theory and practice, some of the more independent and high-spirited girls were inclined to rebel against the narrow and joyless Puritanism of the strictly religious tradition, as will be shown in the later discussions of Cowan Bridge School. Meanwhile, the more thoughtful and academic pupils in the upper classes, who were consigned

to refined ladies' seminaries, were often frustrated by the superficiality of the training offered and, like Dorothea Brooke in "Middlemarch", longed for more sustaining intellectual fare. The limitations of both these approaches, which offered girls very restricted choices in the future, would surely tend to foster either rebellion or despair, unless pupils were educated in unusually enlightened institutions.

Very few such institutions existed until the expansion of educational provision in the early nineteenth century. This seemed desirable in view of the general increase in population and the rapid development of the manufacturing towns, which made the middle classes become concerned about the large numbers of the new urban poor. These people reared lawless children whose delinquent behaviour was a threat to the established order; they also demanded political representation to redress their grievances. Education was seen as a means of civilising this potentially powerful and disruptive group; Wordsworth argued that, through appropriate Teaching,

> "So shall licentiousness and black resolve
> Be rooted out and virtuous habits take
> Their place, and a genuine piety descend
> Like an inheritance from age to age." [1]

The founders of charity schools did not generally discriminate on grounds of sex, realising that the moral training of both girls and boys was important, particularly if they were later to rear families. However, during the first half of the nineteenth century, working class girls were registered much less frequently in school than their brothers and their attendance became much more spasmodic as they grew older, as they were considered an invaluable help to their parents where large families had to be cared for. Even if they were later to become wage-earners, as was likely in industrial areas, general education did not necessarily lead to increased financial reward and could therefore be dispensed with.

Although by the middle of the nineteenth century publicly financed schools were providing for the majority of children of all classes, for the working classes attendance remained brief and the average length of time spent in school was no longer than two and a half years until after 1870. Children transferred from school to school frequently and enrolled at a younger age, as later they could earn wages to boost the family income. For most children the chance of progressing much further than the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy would be remote at this period.

For middle and upper class girls the situation was very different. Here the demand for education came largely from women themselves, or at least from the more enterprising and forceful among them. On the whole they encountered stubborn male resistance or incomprehension during the 18th and 19th centuries. This attitude was based on the complacent view of many influential males that women were physically and mentally inferior. The French writer La Bruyere saw women as "firm set in their ignorance, whether owing to constitutional feebleness, indolence of mind, carefulness for their personal appearance or a certain instability which deprives them of the power to concentrate."[2] Charles Kingsley gave his notoriously patronising advice "Be good, sweet maid,

And let who will be clever,"

suggesting that female virtue and submissiveness would be seen as more charming and less threatening to men than obvious brain power. Using pseudo-scientific jargon, an even less enlightened Victorian writer suggested that a woman with an over-developed intellect would probably be sexually abnormal. "The logical, philosophical, scientific woman is not the ordinary type; she frequently - we say it with all delicacy and yet truthfully - departs from it in her physical as well as in her mental characteristics."[3]

It had nevertheless been conceded earlier by some male writers that women might need some form of training to be thoroughly conditioned to a male-dominated society. The supposedly enlightened Rousseau saw the education of women as akin to the breaking in of beasts of burden. "They must be trained to bear the yoke from the first." - - (A woman) should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint."[4] Defoe, with less offensive chauvinism, argued that women should be educated to be suitable companions for men, able to converse with them on literature, history and public issues, rather than on merely domestic matters. While this would undoubtedly help to broaden the woman's outlook, such an argument ignores her own need to pursue independent interests and again emphasises the importance of the dominant male.

Few males, however, appeared to recognise their own deprivation. Intelligent wives were not high on their list of priorities during the nineteenth century. As early as 1675, Hannah Woolley, a capable girl who had to earn an independent living when orphaned at fourteen, had written somewhat bitterly, "Most of this depraved late age think a woman learned and wise enough if she can distinguish her husband's bed from another's -" [5]

She adds the unkind suggestion that men are afraid of educating women in case they should rival their own towering conceits. In 1856, Mrs Elizabeth Reid, the founder of Bedford College, wrote that it was very difficult to find a man who seriously believed that the education of women was of any importance to society, although this same man might have a very silly and tiresome wife at home who was having a thoroughly bad influence on his children.

The need for financial independence for women

In general, then, middle and upper class Victorians were happy for women to remain dependent on their fathers, husbands and brothers provided they were sufficiently devoted to provide the emotional support and domestic comforts they required. Images of the "angel in the house" and of the fragrant honeysuckle embracing and depending upon the stalwart oak abound in Victorian literature.[6] Yet some girls were unfortunate enough to be left without the protection of a kindly male relative and needed a sound basic education in order to earn their living. Working class girls could survive through manual work on the land or in factories but so-called young ladies had only their scanty stock of accomplishments to fall back upon. As early as 1697, in "An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex," Mrs Drake urges education for financial independence, emphasising the need for business and accounting skills and basic literacy. In 1694 Mary Astell had urged that a seminary should be set up to train "pious and prudent ladies" as teachers, so that girls minds should be furnished with "a stock of solid and useful knowledge."[7] She took the view that a girl should not be forced into an uncongenial marriage for economic reasons, and be so oppressed by the horrific prospect of becoming an old maid that she was tempted to fly to "some dishonourable match as her last though mistaken refuge "[8]

The only socially acceptable paid occupation for middle class women during the first half of the nineteenth century tended to involve residence in another's house for the purpose of instructing children, supervising the household or providing care and companionship for elderly people of fortune. Governessing appears to have been particularly stressful. The isolation, low status and inadequate pay, combined with total responsibility for the behaviour and welfare of frequently intractable charges, often led to nervous and physical illness. In "Agnes Grey" Anne Bronte outlines her trials in realistic detail while in "Jane Eyre" Charlotte Bronte reveals the widespread contempt which was entertained in some quarters for governesses. Lady Ingram claims to have suffered a"martyrdom"from their incompetency and caprice."[9] and Blanche, her daughter, refers with contempt to the "dozens at least" she and her brother enjoyed tormenting, "half of them detestable and

the rest ridiculous, and all incubi."[10]

When Florence Nightingale reorganised the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in 1853, she discovered that it was mainly inhabited by governesses. Among them a few lunatics were to be found but the main diseases were "hysteria" and cancer. Dr. Pincoff, who also worked there is quoted as saying, "I think the deep feeling I have of the miserable position of educated women in England was gained there, (or rather, of half-educated women)."[11] The recognition that governesses and teachers needed proper training to cope with their exacting task led to the foundation of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution in 1843 and lent impetus to the demand for higher education for women in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The inadequacies of girls' education in the early nineteenth century

Even the genteel girls who had progressed satisfactorily through ladies' seminaries could not be regarded as really educated. In "Shirley" Charlotte Bronte condemns the Misses Symptom as "vapid products." "More exactly-regulated lives, feelings, manners, habits it would have been difficult to find anywhere. They knew by heart a certain young ladies' schoolroom code of law on language, demeanour etc; themselves never deviated from its curious little pragmatical provisions; and they regarded with secret, whispered horror all deviations in others."[12] They were, in fact, like Rosamond Vincy in "Middlemarch" and Amelia Sedley in "Vanity Fair", victims of the rage for accomplishments which dominated female education during this period, to the exclusion of much that was useful and valuable.

Hannah More, in her "Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education" published in 1799 had condemned the frivolity and lack of principle which informed the education of upper and middle class girls. Sound religion, she claimed, was neglected and far more value was placed on the cultivation of superficial charms and skills to entice men into marriage. A disproportionate amount of time was spent on cultivating an almost professional standard in dancing, music and drawing, an approach only educationally justifiable if real talent existed. Mrs More commented that the insistence on the public exhibition of accomplishments to ensure social success "erected the whole sex into artists and encouraged affectation and vanity among the young and foolish."[13] A young prodigy would be much admired in fashionable drawing rooms where her talents might secure her the attentions of a desirable suitor in spite of lack of beauty or fortune. (This was obviously the hope of Mary Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice" whose relentless display at the pianoforte reduced her sister Elizabeth to cringing embarrassment.) Head Teachers had

therefore to provide results and bring in "an immediate revenue of praise and profit."[14] Hannah More felt that girls who had received the worst kind of training might well cut the best figure in a world of perverted standards.

Continuing the war against accomplishments, Maria Edgeworth in her "Practical Education" published in 1798, appealed to the snobbery of her readers by pointing out that these were becoming a sign of vulgarity, and that even innkeepers' daughters could play tunes on the spinnet and converse in French for a limited period. She suggested the futility of hours spent on producing useless tapestries which were then consigned to the garret or of spending frustrating periods practising scales at a stammering harpsichord if one had no real musical talent. She believed in the development of habits of patience, perseverance, industry and intellectual curiosity, and felt that children should be praised for exhibiting these qualities, rather than for acquiring mechanical talents or brilliant skills to attract the attention of the superficial and thoughtless.

The other striking disadvantage of teaching particular skills in isolation was that the child would be bewildered by the succession of different teachers and fail to grasp the important connections between the various branches of learning. A teacher of 'enlarged and philosophic mind"[15] was necessary to coordinate a sensible curriculum and encourage the child's healthy moral and intellectual development. (It is interesting to note here the similarities with the cross-curricular approach at present being developed in many schools as part of the TVEI extension programme.) It was also necessary, of course, that parents should have a similarly enlightened outlook, and, as accomplishments, and the accompanying training in fashionable behaviour, were thought to provide distinct advantages in the marriage market, Maria Edgeworth's advice was largely ignored.

In reviewing the argument so far, it will be seen that only a few enlightened women were advocating that girls should be educated for their own benefit and satisfaction rather than to fulfil the needs of a patriarchal society. Education for the poor, however, was rapidly becoming essential to teach them to be satisfied with their lowly position in society, and to carry out willingly and competently the instructions of their superiors, whether they were employed as agricultural labourers, factory hands or domestic servants. Females, it was felt, should be taught the virtues of

self-sacrifice and good household management so that they could rear docile and hard-working children and exercise a wholesome moral influence on their husbands. Similarly, middle and upper class girls should be trained for domesticity; as hard work would not normally be required of them, they had to concentrate on developing their powers of attraction to secure a suitable domestic establishment to adorn with their charms. The subservience of both classes of women to men was never really questioned by the majority, and during the Victorian period a debased and sentimental view of femininity was purveyed in both popular and serious literature.

The Female stereotype

Some of the most patronising advice was offered by Dr. Fordyce, a cleric who should have known better. In "Pride and Prejudice" Jane Austen makes the pompous and absurd Mr Collins read his sermons aloud and approvingly to his inattentive cousins. Dr. Fordyce is all in favour of delicate and submissive women, finding weakness and an air of pious devotion erotically stimulating. A Victorian maiden is seen as radiating the beauties of holiness. In order to preserve this mock purity, a wife should "never let her husband know the extent of her sensibility or affection."[16] although he must be allowed to assume that she married him because "her physical and mental weakness was unable to resist him."[17]

It is a measure of the inadequacy of women's education that so many of them could take this nonsense seriously and that girls could be induced to recline on sofas, listlessly awaiting their heroic rescuer or sinking into an affecting decline through the pangs of unrequited passion. Although the one aim of the fashionably educated female was to secure a husband, there was little in her training to fit her for the serious responsibilities of marriage. As she had been taught to concentrate on the trivial and showy, she was likely to miss the constant admiration and flattery of her youth and become petty-minded and querulous in middle age.

Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" is scathing in its condemnation of such an outlook. She despises fashionable women who "glory in their subjection" but she cannot entirely blame them, as they are taught from infancy that "beauty is a woman's sceptre." Consequently "the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison."[18]

In her "Education of Daughters" she emphasises the limited outlook of many married women, commenting on the triviality of their interests and their lack of insight into their own minds and hearts. Although she was concerned primarily about a woman's individual fulfilment, she did feel she should be able to run a home efficiently and possess the necessary household and organisational skills. She should also be able to comfort in times of suffering because of her own emotional strength, which could only be built up by cultivating universal benevolence and controlling the passions and temper.

This worthy and Christian ideal of a strong, resilient woman to provide support for her family, was sentimentalised into the pure and morally superior presiding genius of the hearth. Mrs Chapone had urged, in her "Letter to a New Married Lady" (first published in 1777 but reprinted at intervals for a century) that a wife, who spent her days remote from the hustle and contamination of the business world, should prepare with "cheerful complacency"[19] to restore her husband's good humour when he returned exhausted from his labours to her welcoming and peaceful home. Not only would this approach ensure domestic harmony, but it would enable her to exercise a discreet influence over her husband's moods. Respect was accorded to women manipulative enough to gain their own wishes through persuasion and flattery, while maintaining an apparently submissive attitude. Such feminine cleverness merited approval.

Unsuccessful females: old maids

The economic, social and psychological disadvantages of educating women for dependency on men have already been indicated; during the Victorian period these became increasingly apparent as there was a surplus of women in the population and many girls were unable to find husbands. The desperation of upper and middle-class parents anxious to dispose advantageously of their daughters was attested in many novels, and the hideous inappropriateness of some fictional marriages must have reflected some real-life arrangements which led to violent unhappiness. (For example, Edith Dombey, in Dickens' "Dombey and Son", sacrifices her reputation to leave the husband to whom she feels she bas been "sold as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck."[20] Gwendolen Harleth, when given the opportunity to save her abominable husband, Grandcourt, from drowning, finds herself unable and unwilling to assist him.) Though less harrowing than the torments of a disastrous marriage, the life of the unmarried daughter was beset with frustrations. It was not merely the feeling

of being unwanted that caused emotional distress, but the enforced inactivity and boredom.

Charlotte Bronte had great sympathy for old maids, no doubt considering herself one of their number by the time she published 'Shirley' at the age of thirty-three. She wrote feelingly, "Whenever I have seen, not merely in humble but affluent homes, families of daughters waiting to be married, I have pitied them from my heart."[21] If anything, the lot of the comfortably maintained spinster was worse, as it was not considered genteel for her to dabble too much in household affairs when domestic staff were available. Her main recreations were the inevitable "accomplishments", gossip and visiting, and contemporary writers spoke sympathetically of the impossibility of real happiness "where the days drag along filled with make-believe occupations and dreary sham amusements."[22]

This enforced idleness undermined health and spirits and sometimes led to morbid brooding and introspection. In "Shirley" Caroline Helstone, who is suffering from apparently unrequited love, longs for change and activity even if it involves the drudgery of being a governess. Jane Eyre is thankful that, after the deeply distressing separation from Rochester and her subsequent illness, she is given the opportunity to open a school. "Can labour alone make a human being happy? No: but it can give varieties of pain and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none."[23] The aim here was different from the self-abnegation of the wife and mother; obviously society would benefit from a woman's exertions, but they were seen to be a means of self-realisation rather than of service.

Education for personal fulfilment: Dorothea Beale

In pursuing her aim of a much more comprehensive, demanding and soundly based education for girls Dorothea Beale, writing in 1900, absorbed and developed the ideas of earlier writers. In "Work and Play in Girls' Schools", she claimed that an education which fulfilled a girl's spiritual and mental needs would strengthen her character, enable her to resist temptation and to become a thoughtful, disciplined and extremely valuable member of society. Such a woman would find satisfaction in life, rather than frustration, because of the wider outlets available for her talents. She quoted Ruskin with approval, "Education is the leading of human souls to what is best, and making the best out of them; - the training which makes men happiest in themselves also makes them most serviceable to others."[24] Such an

education would be liberating yet rigorous and would perhaps help to solve the problems that had arisen when girls were trained merely to conform to the prevailing female stereotype. Married or not, Miss Beale's pupils would be able to achieve something of value in their own right. It is remarkable, too, that Miss Beale seemed unaware of the divisive effects of social class and outlined a system of education which would apply to all girls, regardless of their original station in society, whereas earlier theorists and practitioners had been overwhelmingly concerned with their pupils' preparation for their future role in a hierarchical system.

The importance of moral training: Hannah More

Miss Beale's idealistic approach to education led her to adopt the views of William Law, expressed in his "Treatise on Christian Perfection". "Show me a learning that makes man truly sensible of his duty; that fills the mind with true light; that makes us more reasonable in all our actions; that inspires us with fortitude, humility and devotion."[25] She believed that the aim of education should be no less than the achievement of individual perfection, with God's help, whereas her predecessor, Hannah More, was more narrowly concerned for the salvation of souls in the evangelical sense and with the provision of basic literacy for the lower orders. The point they had in common was their sincere commitment, above all, to the moral improvement of their pupils through Christian teaching.

Mrs More, writing over a century earlier, in the 1790s, was not dealing, like Miss Beale, with the reasonably intelligent daughters of the enlightened middle classes, but with barely civilised rural children who had often been reared in poverty and neglect. She aimed to inculcate reading and practical skills, but not writing, and "to form the lower class to habits of modesty and virtue. I know of no way of teaching morals but by infusing principles of Christianity; nor of teaching Christianity without a thorough knowledge of Scripture - To make good members of society (and this can only be done by making good Christians) has been my aim. Principles, not opinions, are what I labour to give them."[26]

Although, in modern times, these objectives seem extremely limited and the approach patronising, Mrs More, like Miss Beale, believed that the regeneration of society could be achieved by the moral excellence of educated women, and that the first essential was interesting religious instruction from their early years which would make religion "a lively pleasure, rather than a dry duty."[27]

Her ideas on method were sound, as she believed in telling "interesting parables and relating them to passing events, local circumstances, natural objects."[28]

More controversially, she emphasised the natural corruption of human nature, stating that children bring into the world "an evil disposition which it should be the great end of education to rectify."[29] She did in fact argue that the most important qualification for an instructor of youth was "the possession of such a strong impression of the corruption of our nature as should ensure a disposition to counteract it."[30] This would seem to threaten a harshly authoritarian and punitive approach, like that of the Rev. Carus Wilson (Mr Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre) at Cowan Bridge. Yet, although Hannah More believed that the law of Christ demanded a complete change of heart and without repentance there would be no salvation, in practice she applied her principles with warmth and humanity, and her courage and natural charm won her friends and supporters throughout the Cotswold villages where she lived and worked with her sisters. Again, in common with the later attitude of Dorothea Beale, she emphasised the spiritual and emotional rewards of the dedicated life, rather than dwelling on the horrors awaiting the unrepentant sinner. Suitable role-models were held up for admiration, for example, Mrs Baker, a Cheddar schoolmistress, whose untimely death united the whole village in heartfelt regret.

An alternative nineteenth century curriculum for girls

Hannah More believed that even secular subjects should be taught for the religious insights they afforded. History was of paramount importance,as it illustrated her favourite theme of the corruption of human nature, but also showed the workings of Providence. She was therefore against the piecemeal method of instruction in which events were detached from each other and stock answers memorised. Literature, too, should be taught through the reading of whole books, rather than collections of extracts. Solid reading, Hannah More believed, provided worthwhile leisure activity and food for thought, which would prevent habits of idleness and dissipation. She suggested that high-class girls should read Locke's"Essay on Human Understanding" and Butler's "Anatomy of Religion" to form their minds, judging their intellectual interests and abilities by her own, and not, perhaps, in this case, following her own excellent advice of relating learning to the pupils' immediate experience.

Although Hannah More disapproved of the rebellious attitude of

Mary Wollstonecratft in her "Vindication of the Rights of Women", their views on several educational issues were remarkably similar. Mary Wollstonecraft was also a great believer in the value of reading, though she was less austere in her recommendations, favouring books in which amusement and instruction were blended. However, she soundly condemned subject matter which gave a distorted impression of human passion. Sensational novels could create a false taste in which "the mind must be kept in a continual ferment"[31] and the reader could then render herself ridiculous by posturing like a fictional heroine. (One is reminded of Jane Austen's contemporary treatment of Marianne Dashwood and Catherine Morland.) She saw reading as an aid to rational thought, which would provide a valuable counter-balance to the immediate appeal of more sensual enjoyments.

Religion, Mary Wollstonecraft believed, should be taught chiefly by example rather than by the study of theological works. The Bible should be read with reverence for its essential truth, and should not be used as a reading primer. Although she did not emphasise the doctrine of personal salvation, it is unlikely that the evangelicals could disagree with the following statement from "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters". "Principles of religion should be fixed, and the mind not left to fluctuate in times of distress, when it can receive succour from no other quarter."[32] She concludes by emphasising the spiritual aim of education again. "Everything should tend to an expansion of the faculties and prepare us for the state of purity and happiness where we no longer see as through a glass darkly, but know, even as we are known."[33]

These beliefs about the development of individual potential and the primacy of moral and religious education came to dominate the thinking of nineteenth century pioneers in women's education. Ultimately the personal and moral growth of a pupil mattered more than the acquisition of particular skills and information, highly desirable as these were. Religious education formed the essential basis of the curriculum and was therefore, in a real sense, as "useful" as needlework or writing. Not only would it help the pupil to prepare for eternity, butit would provide the foundation for a sober, industrious and rewarding life on earth. This ideal survives in an altered and diluted form. With the decline of religious belief and commitment, the emphasis on Christian teaching has been much less insistent in state schools during the latter part of the twentieth century, but the need for responsible commitment to a personal system of values remains an important priority in current schemes for personal, social and moral education.

During the nineteenth century the curriculum was based on the acquisition of sound knowledge and moral principles, which to most teachers meant the instilling of facts rather than the encouragement of independent thought. As early as 1826, in "The Complete Governess" Miss R Mudie was criticising the uselessness of much rote learning. As she believed that girls were the intellectual equals of boys "and far exceed that sex in both diligence and docility," she was concerned that they should not waste their energies. Existing school books, she felt, tended to "load the memory of the pupil with a mass of rules and formulae, for which no application is to be found without the walls of the classroom."[34] She felt that writers of text books should introduce girls to useful material in an interesting way. Mrs John Sandford, writing in 1831, agreed with Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More in favouring general literary studies, but insisted that they should be systematic, rather than "rambling and desultory".[35] She stressed the need for routine, but felt that the study programme should be adapted to the needs of individual pupils so as to make it satisfying and pleasurable. She condemned mere learning by heart as "the most irksome and least refreshing exercise to the mind, especially as the mind itself makes progress."[36] It was left to Miss Buss and Miss Beale to implement these more liberal and imaginative ideas later in the century.

Limitations of the Nineteenth century curriculum

The recommended curriculum varied according to the social class of the pupils. In the early nineteenth century, Priscilla Wakefield envisaged several different types of school. One would cater for the nobility and the upper classes, providing instruction in Scripture, literature, history, geography, arithmetic, natural history, music, drawing, embroidery and foreign languages. There was increasing emphasis on the value of fresh air and exercise, with walking and gardening being popular as decorous activities for girls. Middle class pupils would be given a more restricted diet of useful domestic subjects; Scripture, English Language, grammar and the best literature, drawing, simple arithmetic and book-keeping. Geography, science and history were not mentioned, as there was a constant fear of educating the lower middle classes above their station and arousing intellectual desires and interests which could never be satisfied. The daughters of the poor were to be taught only Scripture, reading, domestic subjects and the basic calculations necessary for handling household expenses.

In spite of all this emphasis on training according to future prospects, which classified children without any reference to innate differences in ability and aptitude, proponents of a more child-centred

view of education did exist at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The French writer Fenelon and his followers were already advocating the securing of bodily health and intellectual growth through the constant study of the child's natural inclination and disposition, so that she could be given profitable and agreeable tasks. However, such careful attention to individual welfare could only be given by a devoted and perceptive parent or a skilled governess, and was hardly appropriate for the lower orders who could, at most, hope for a limited amount of time and attention from the teacher of a large class in a charity or dame's school. It is reasonable to assume that much latent talent among the poor remained underdeveloped in such circumstances, and that the rigid and largely unquestioned class system was the main obstacle to their progress.

The other inescapable conclusion based on the writings of the period is that there was, especially among the middle and upper classes, an almost complete acceptance of a stultifying feminine ideal, in spite of occasional protest and rebellion. A final example of this type, described with nauseating sentimentality, is Bennett's heroine Louisa, "wholly a woman"[37] whose main function in life is to weep picturesquely at her lover's departure. "The farewell tear stands big in its transparent sluice."[38] She remains unmoved by other interests and emotions, never showing anger, speaking gently and softly, being demurely unconcerned about politics until "he returns, (when) the easy undissembled smile testifies her joy."[39] A process of education with this type of product as a model could have little to recommend it.

The failure to emphasise the common humanity of both sexes and all classes was responsible for many of the apparent absurdities in educational writing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Emily Davies wrote in 1866, "There is a theory afloat --- that the human ideal is composed of two elements, the male and the female --- a dual theory, with distinctively different forms of female excellence. Persons who take this view are naturally governed by it in their conceptions of what women ought to be."[40] Frances Power Cobbe enlarged sarcastically on the different theories advanced for effective classification of the subordinate female species. "One theory, the Domestic Theory, is almost universally accepted by the civilised world and is notably favoured by the English nation."[41] It is worth noting that modern educational writers concerned with equality of opportunity, notably Eileen Byrne,[42] have argued that a more up-to-date version of the "domestic theory" is still widely accepted and forms part of the

hidden curriculum for both boys and girls. In addition, it is still the case that members of the lower social classes find educational achievement more difficult because of fewer material resources and, often, lower parental expectations. We can therefore still sympathise with the problems and frustrations of intelligent and ambitious women in the nineteenth century, while being thankful for all that the later reformers have achieved.

The implications of nineteenth century educational attitudes for the Bronte sisters.

In considering the tensions and difficulties experienced by the Brontes, who were not only intelligent and ambitious but creatively gifted, four main causes of frustration emerge, though these vary in importance for the individual sisters and are not necessarily relevant at all stages of their development.

In many ways they were fortunate in belonging to the educated middle class. They escaped the snobbish and ridiculous finishing school type of education imposed on many upper class girls and had the leisure and opportunity to follow their creative and scholarly interests in childhood. As the parson's children, their place in the social hierarchy was assured, but their father's dramatic rise from his very poor and humble Irish origins meant that they had little money and few influential connections. Their future prospects were therefore extremely limited. They were almost certainly destined to be governesses unless they made suitable marriages. In addition, their father's relative poverty led to the disastrous Cowan Bridge experiment, where poor but genteel children were offered an education in accordance with their expectations and future restricted prospects. The effect of this experience on Charlotte will be discussed in the next chapter.

A second cause of frustration and distress, as well as consolation, was the evangelical religious emphasis of much of the Brontes' early education and training which caused both Anne and Charlotte to approach the point of breakdown. Anne bore a "burdened heart, oppressed with sin and woe"[43] and feared eternal damnation, while Charlotte struggled repeatedly to harmonise her sense of duty with her longing for freedom and emotional fulfilment. The positive and negative aspects of the Victorian emphasis on religious and moral training will be traced in their writing and experience.

Perhaps the most obvious difficulty faced by the Brontes was their inability to conform in many ways to the approved Victorian female sterotype, and to accept the restrictions imposed on women simply because

they were female. The negative effects of female stereotyping on girls' aspirations are still very apparent and the contemporary relevance of Charlotte's attitudes in particular will be examined.

A final problem, limited to pupils with exceptional ability or talent, was the restriction of individual creativity by the demands of a formal education in an institutional setting. Undoubtedly the Brontes were ill-adapted to a formal system of education in Victorian times, although Charlotte found a brief period of fulfilment during her first year with the Hegers in Brussels. It is arguable that even now, with our much more progressive system, the Brontes would find it extremely difficult to fit into a modern school which was not highly selective academically. An educational regime which would foster the talents of gifted children will be discussed in the light of Charlotte and Emily's experiences in Brussels.

In all, the piecemeal system of education in Victorian times, while better than nothing, presented middle class girls with a restrictive and conformist view of the world and encouraged rebellious tendencies in those with some flair and independence. As the struggle between conformity and rebellion is analysed in the Bronte's writing and experience, it became apparent that, in spite of many advantages, modern girls are still facing similar dilemmas as they try to reconcile their educational experience with their role as women in what is still, essentially, a male-dominated society.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGINS OF REBELLION: THE COWAN BRIDGE EXPERIENCE

When examining Charlotte Bronte's picture of Cowan Bridge school in the light of the issues discussed in the opening chapter, it becomes apparent that the unquestioned aim of the institution was to secure strict social and religious conformity. It will be shown that the varying needs of individuals were ignored in the interests of self-denial and that the version of Christianity offered was narrowly evangelical and rigidly Puritanical. This dogmatism, combined with a lack of awareness of the needs of growing girls, led to emotional and physical suffering for the pupils. In this chapter, through analysing Charlotte's response to the regime, it is made clear that such an institution tends to foster unhappiness and rebellion. At Cowan Bridge, although outward conformity was secured through rigid discipline, girls expressed their anger and distress through grumbling, bullying each other and ultimately becoming sick.

A "noble institution" or "a death trap"?

The inadequacy of the institution became apparent after the disastrous epidemic of 1825; the school had to be thoroughly reformed and reorganised before it could become successful. The picture Charlotte presented of her former school in its original state in "Jane Eyre" aroused dismay and disbelief, but was recognised as authentic by some readers even in her own life-time; controversy really flared up later with the publication of Mrs Gaskell's account of Charlotte's sufferings at Cowan Bridge in "The Life of Charlotte Bronte". The dispute remains unsettled to this day and the arguments of 1857 are still being exchanged with fervour. Was Cowan Bridge really a good and charitable institution, which had a few minor problems when newly established, or was it a hotbed of disease for its deprived inmates? The facts remain undisputed: Charlotte's two elder sisters died after becoming ill there and, rightly or wrongly, she held the school responsible for their deaths. This responsibility is firmly denied by the defenders of the Reverend Carus Wilson, respected founder of Cowan Bridge (later Casterton School), who are still writing enthusiastically in vindication of his ideals and his dedication, while admirers of Charlotte Bronte regard any questioning of her picture of Cowan Bridge as an insult to her integrity.

The hard-line supporters of Charlotte may be represented by Margaret Lane, writing in "The Drug-Like Bronte Dream". "Everyone who has read "Jane Eyre" knows how appalling the experience of Cowan Bridge proved

to be ... I tremble to think what a scandal a modern Cowan Bridge would provoke today ... Fortunately for Charlotte and Emily, Mr Bronte removed them as soon as he realised that this charitable school ... was nothing but a death-trap".[1] Her comments on the Reverend Carus Wilson are more outspoken than those of Mrs Gaskell. "I think anyone who has read his books for children can see only too clearly the neurotic obsessed with power, going about his work with all the zeal of the unconscious sadist".[2]

Statements like these provoke an understandably resentful response from those who later experienced Casterton School as "a truly useful and noble institution".[3] Writing in 1959, to mark the centenary of the Reverend Carus Wilson's death, Jane Ewbank feels that Charlotte's intense grief at her sisters' deaths still make it "hardly fair that she should both blacken the character of the founder and denigrate his school in the novel which she wrote so many years later".[4] In his history of Casterton School, Geoffrey Sale continues in the same vein. "Sad though the early deaths of these talented children were, the School to which they were sent so young did not deserve to be pilloried as the prime cause of their pathetic ending".[5] Glowing tributes were paid to the school and Mr Wilson by devoted pupils. Emma Jane Worboise claims: "His works of love and mercy were manifold. He was thoroughly sincere and unostentatiously generous. A kinder man I never knew".[6] How is it possible to reconcile such contradictions?

The establishment of Cowan Bridge School

It is perhaps wise to begin with the facts about the school which do not provoke disagreement. The Reverend Carus Wilson planned the establishment for the daughters of "the really necessitous clergy"[7] and showed an enlightened awareness of the need for girls to be educated like their brothers, though not to the same high level. In the prospectus for Cowan Bridge he comments "Clergymen can send their sons to the University where ample scope is afforded for those bright talents which are so frequently found in an humble sphere of life. But hitherto no college, no liberal institution of learning (has been established) for their daughters, where they can reap those blessings their brethren enjoy".[8] An advertisement in the Leeds Intelligencer of December 4th, 1823, under the heading "Evangelical Philanthropy", mentions that the school would accommodate sixty pupils who would pay £14 per year for clothing, lodging, boarding and educating, and £1 at entrance towards books. Charitable subscriptions would be required to the amount of £250 per annum to defray the remaining expenses. The names of William Wilberforce and Hannah More among the school's list of patrons must have encouraged Mr Bronte to believe that his daughters would be receiving a very sound education in a worthwhile institution.

The purpose of the education provided was clearly spelt out in

accordance with accepted theory as propounded by Hannah More. Personal fulfilment might result from increased knowledge, but the main aim was to fit pupils for their position in society. "In all cases, the great object in view will be their intellectual and religious Improvement; and to give them that plain and useful Education which may best fit them to return with Respectability and Advantage to their own Homes, or to maintain themselves in the different stations of Life to which Providence may call them. If a more liberal education is required for any who may be sent to be educated as Teachers and Governesses, an extra charge will probably be made."[9]

The school was rapidly established in a "very desirable property"[10] at Cowan Bridge, in the parish of Tunstall, the Reverend Carus Wilson's own area of responsibility. The small village is an attractive place alongside the main Leeds to Kendal road. Mrs Gaskell describes it as follows: "It is prettily situated, just where the Leck-fells swoop into the plain, and by the course of the beck alder trees and willows and hazel bushes grow".[11] It is surrounded by high pasture fields and Mrs Gaskell is at a loss to understand how the situation could prove so unhealthy. (This was a fact later acknowledged by the school authorities when the school was moved to Casterton.) She comments that the air around was "sweet and thyme-scented" when she visited it in the summer of 1856, but adds prudently that "the site of a building intended for numbers should be chosen with far greater care than that of a private house, from the tendency to illness, both infectious and otherwise, produced by the congregation of people in close proximity."[12]

The original "long, low bow-windowed cottage" facing the River Leck was enlarged by the addition of a wing at right angles, stretching down towards the river. This contained school-rooms on the ground floor and dormitories above. Parallel to that, on the side of the building nearest the road, a covered verandah was built where the girls could take fresh air and exercise regardless of the weather. The garden, enclosed on three sides by these buildings, was divided up into small plots for cultivation by the pupils. The river formed a boundary on the fourth side.

According to the registers, the first pupils entered the school early in 1824: Sarah Bicker, who later died an exemplary death which was hailed with rejoicing by Mr Wilson, was the third pupil to be admitted, in February. By the 1st of July, when Maria and Elizabeth Bronte were admitted, the numbers had risen considerably. Charlotte Bronte joined them three weeks later and by 25th November, the date of Emily's arrival, there were 44 pupils, of whom, at the tender age of $6\frac{1}{4}$, Emily was the youngest. The

eldest girl at this time was Charlotte Hayne, aged 22, an orphan from the West Indies. There were at least four full-time staff in addition to the superintendent, which means that classes were unlikely to consist of more than ten or twelve girls, divided roughly according to age and ability. By the beginning of 1825, before the typhus epidemic, the number of pupils had risen to 51, though these numbers were soon to be considerably reduced by illness and death. The original target number for the school was sixty girls.

School routine, uniform and curriculum

The daily routine followed the programme described in "Jane Eyre". The rising bell rang at six a.m. From seven to eight o'clock there was Bible-reading and rote learning of hymns and texts. Breakfast of bread and milk or porridge and milk was served at eight o'clock and lessons followed from nine until twelve, when there was an hour for exercise before dinner. At this meal the pudding was served first, so that the girls would feel reasonably satisfied before embarking on the more expensive meat and vegetables. Afternoon lessons followed from two to five, when tea was served, again consisting of milk or coffee and dry bread. The evening routine varied according to age. Jane Eyre, as one of the younger pupils, mentions that after half an hour's recreation there was study, followed by oat-cake and water, prayers and bed. According to the school records, the older girls, who worked on from seven to eight o'clock, were given a supper of bread and milk before retiring.

As uniformity of appearance was insisted upon as much as possible, the girls' outer clothing was provided by the school. They were "plain straw cottage Bonnets"in summer, white frocks on Sundays and nankeen on other days. In winter, purple stuff frocks and purple cloth pelisses were provided. In addition, each pupil was required to bring with her a Bible and Prayer Book and a specified list of underclothes and personal accessories.

The curriculum was characteristic of the period. The prospectus points out that "the system of education comprehends History, Geography, the Use of Globes, Grammar, Writing and Arithmetic; all kinds of Needlework, and the nicer kinds of household-work, such as getting up fine linen, etc. If Accomplishments are required, an additional charge is made, for French, Music or Drawing of £3 a year each."[14] With Mrs Hannah More as one of the school's patrons it was obvious that the girls would not be encouraged to get ideas above their station by acquiring the more frivolous accomplishments such as dancing, or engaging in blue-stocking scientific investigations.

The methods of instruction as described by Charlotte in "Jane Eyre" relied heavily on rote-learning and repetition. It would appear that attentiveness, obedience, a retentive memory, neatness in dress and conformity in outlook would ensure success and approval. Like Jane Eyre, Charlotte seems to have found little difficulty in manifesting these qualities, though the conformity was merely outward, the result of rigid discipline. She was apparently never punished and was described as "a bright little thing"[15] by the superintendent, Miss Evans, in later recollections. Charlotte saw herself rather differently, as she wrote to her publisher W S Williams in November, 1849. "My career was a very quiet one. I was plodding and industrious, perhaps I was very grave, for I suffered to see my sisters perishing."[16]

The sufferings of Charlotte's eldest sister, Maria, who she claims was faithfully depicted as Helen Burns, show that severe penalties in humiliation and physical distress could be inflicted on the dreamy and disorganised, even if, like Maria, they were academically gifted, devout and idealistic. Open rebellion, of course, was out of the question because of the strict regime and the obligation of constant gratitude towards their benefactors,which was apparently firmly impressed on every pupil. Charlotte, however, with her fervent admiration for her sister and her strong awareness of injustice and hypocrisy, harboured critical and rebellious thoughts in spite of her outward conformity. This violent resentment only found expression over twenty years later in the 'Lowood' chapters of "Jane Eyre".

Allegations of physical neglect

It is here that facts are left behind and we have to rely on personal impressions and recollections which have created violent controversy. Charlotte Bronte's picture of the school implies that the Reverend Carus Wilson's regime was enforced with unnecessary harshness and austerity and that the physical needs of the pupils were so neglected that widespread illness eventually became inevitable. It is necessary to consider that the school had only just been founded (January 1824) when the Brontes were admitted. Strict economy would be necessary in domestic arrangements, as the school had yet to attract a large number of regular and generous patrons and the Reverend Carus Wilson felt obliged to exercise close supervision over expenses. Yet Mrs Gaskell, certainly a competent judge of domestic affairs, comments, "Although there was economy in providing for the household, there does not appear to have been any parsimony. The meat, flour, milk, etc, were contracted for but were of very fair quality; and the dietary, which has been shown to me in manuscript, was neither bad nor unwholesome ... Mr Wilson himself ordered the food and was anxious that

it should be of good quality."[17] It must be remembered, however, that Mrs Gaskell was investigating thirty years later when it was generally agreed that the domestic arrangements had been much improved.

The criticism was, in fact, not of the quality of the ingredients but of the almost criminal incompetence and negligence of the cook. The descriptions of the meals given in "Jane Eyre" and by Mrs Gaskell in "The Life of Charlotte Bronte" are peculiarly disgusting. The oatmeal porridge was frequently burnt, with "offensive fragments of other substances discoverable in it".[18] Jane Eyre comments about her first breakfast at Lowood: "The first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess; burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it."[19] The quality of the porridge is hardly surprising as, according to Mrs Gaskell, the water used in its preparation was taken from the rain tub, and the milk was often "bingy" - not sour, but contaminated by dirty utensils. The "hotch-potch" or left-over pie was described as particularly loathsome, showing the children's hatred of unidentifiable pieces of gristle or rubbery fat lurking in rancid stew. (The Brontes were fastidious eaters, used to carefully prepared, if simple, meals. Much later in life, Charlotte was to be found creeping secretly into the kitchen to remove the eyes from the potatoes which the old servant, Tabby, with her failing eyesight, had been unable to pick out). The bread and oatcakes at Cowan Bridge, which, it is said, were prepared from the same cereal and flour supplied to the Reverend Carus Wilson's own kitchen, would provide insufficient nourishment, especially when served in limited quantities.

Defenders of Cowan Bridge quote Carus Wilson's own testimony. "Having suffered myself at school from bad food, I was especially sensitive on this point ... Often, when quite unexpected, have I looked into the kitchen and sat down at meals with the pupils."[20] He comments that if the food had been disgusting the teachers would have complained, but they had their positions to think of, and, no doubt, like Miss Temple in "Jane Eyre", who produced a seed cake when entertaining Helen and Jane, they had it in their power to supply deficiencies occasionally.

In the controversy which followed the publication of Mrs Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Bronte" in 1857, several former pupils were moved to write to the Halifax Guardian praising the school regime and the excellence of the food and cooking. But without exception their experience dates from later than 1824-5. "EAF", having commented, "The cookery was excellent, and the food consequently far more palatable than that of many a private

family ..." adds, "I never saw or heard of the first cook and therefore cannot testify."[21] It seems obvious, then, that the new housekeeper who was pressed into service during the fever outbreak in 1825 instituted substantial improvements so that later "the food was so well-prepared that no-one could reasonably complain of it."[22] This would surely imply that, as the first cook was undoubtedly dismissed, the earlier complaints were at least partly justified.

Health and hygiene

Other health hazards were part of life at Cowan Bridge during this period. By modern standards the living conditions were overcrowded, ventilation was inadequate and sanitation deplorable. The girls slept two to a bed (which was the normal practice in English schools at that time) and washed with cold water in unheated dormitories. (There is no reference to the possibility of bathing.) The school had one privy which served about sixty people. Mrs Gaskell comments of the original building, "The windows do not open freely and widely; and the passage upstairs, leading to the bedrooms, is narrow and tortuous; altogether, smells would linger about the house and damp cling to it. But sanitary matters were little understood thirty years ago ..."[23]

A cause of more immediate suffering was the cold, for which the pupils' clothing was inadequate. In "Jane Eyre", Charlotte talks of the little girls, excluded from the warmth of the fire by the row of older girls lining the hearth "wrapping their starved areas in their pinafores." The Sundays spent at Tunstall Church seem to have been particularly freezing experiences. There was an exposed walk of two miles before the church was reached, then there were two services to sit through, with only a cold lunch of bread and meat to sustain the children. Apparently they walked in shoes rather than the pattens or clogs mentioned on the uniform list, and therefore had damp and cold feet which added to their misery. The day concluded with another windy and cold march back to the comparative comfort of school. No wonder that the girls suffered from "neglected colds" which "predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection".[24]

Death and disease

The infection referred to was the "low fever" or typhus, which struck the school in the spring of 1825 and which paradoxically may have preserved the lives of the younger Brontes, who were allowed freedom to wander outside with the other pupils who remained healthy, and were provided with liberal quantities of wholesome food by the new housekeeper.

Maria had already been taken home by Mr Bronte as soon as he was informed of her plight. She left the school on 14th February, "in ill health"[25] and by 6th May she was dead. Elizabeth escaped the fever but "fell into a decline"[26] in May and was sent home at the end of the month. The school authorities, alarmed by this second disaster, immediately evacuated Charlotte and Emily to the Reverend Carus Wilson's seaside home at Silverdale, where Mr Bronte met them on 1st June and took them home. Elizabeth died a fortnight later and Charlotte and Emily never returned to the school.

There is no doubt that Charlotte later believed the school to be directly responsible for the deaths of both her sisters. She felt that Maria, in particular, had been cruelly treated even when seriously ill, because her untidiness and dreaminess had infuriated Miss Andrews (the original of Miss Scatcherd in "Jane Eyre"). She is reported by Mrs Gaskell to have hauled the suffering Maria from bed when Maria had already had a blister applied to her side (a blister being a hot poultice designed to reduce pain and inflammation) for her chest complaint. Miss Andrews, in her annoyance at the girl's so-called laziness, is said to have left her lying on the dormitory floor, faint and trembling.

Little is known of Elizabeth's sufferings, except that she was clearly brave and uncomplaining and was praised by the superintendent, Miss Evans, for her exemplary conduct when she cut her head in an accident and was subsequently nursed in Miss Evans' own room. Indeed, a stoic endurance seemed the norm at Cowan Bridge for many of the pupils. Perhaps they felt that complaints would be in vain, and that they might even bring down suspicion and punishment from the authorities. Mrs F A Garland comments: "A somewhat Spartan discipline was perhaps necessary, and a Spartan tone was cultivated by the girls themselves. Girls would protest that they were well and faint as the words were uttered."[27]

Facts culled from the school registers speak for themselves. Between February and June 1825, eight pupils left the school on health grounds. At least two of these died within a few weeks of their departure and another was said to be "incapacitated by ill-health from further study."[28]

Arguments in defence of the school regime

Defenders of the school still adopt three main lines of argument about the ill-health of the pupils. First, there is the categorical denial of hardship and mismanagement summed up in the statement of Mr Carus Wilson in 1857. "I have been perfectly satisfied with mens

sana in conscia recti." I can most safely say that every charge is perfectly false."[29]

Secondly, and largely in contradiction of the previous argument, defenders quote the generally low standards of health at the time and claim that Cowan Bridge was no worse than other boarding schools. Outbreaks of fever were commonplace and it was claimed at Cowan Bridge that the 1825 epidemic had originated outside the school. The infection has been described by various terms, with "typhus" perhaps being the commonest expression used. At the same time, no distinction was made between typhus and typhoid fever, which are quite different diseases. Typhus is transmitted by the faeces of body lice and naturally flourishes in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. The sharing of beds (the usual practice in boarding schools at this time) and the inadequate washing facilities would no doubt make infestation likely. Typhoid, however, is caused by contaminated food and inadequate sanitation - also to be found at Cowan Bridge. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the claim that the fever did not originate in the school can carry much weight. There is a casual acceptance of ill-health even by comparatively modern writers like Jane Ewbank, who comments, "It is true that there were several epidemics of "low fever", probably a kind of influenza which spread into the school from the village. But what boarding school, even today, can boast that it does not have epidemics?"[30]

In his address to the Bronte Society on February 14th, 1925, Sir W H Hadow comments heartily on the strict physical regime at his own boarding school, which did him no harm. He is inclined (in a ploy familiar to all teachers) to shift the blame to the parent when children fail to adapt well to school life. In his view, Patrick Bronte was "an exceedingly bad father"[31] who did not see that his children were supervised or fed properly. In the famous mask episode described by Mrs Gaskell, when Mr Bronte encouraged his children to say what they really thought from behind the mask's concealment, Sir W H Hadow refers to his questions as "inept", implying that he shows no understanding of the infant mind. He also conjures up a "pathetic picture of these six little children going hand in hand across the moors with no-one to look after them".[32]

This leads on to the third approach which claims, perhaps with some justification, that the children were not strong enough to be sent to school in the first place. They had all suffered from measles and whooping cough in 1824, and there was some doubt about the fitness of

Maria and Elizabeth for admission in July. Their complete recovery was probably delayed as they spent hours cooped up with Aunt Branwell sewing their school outfits, not wandering in freedom in the fresh air like the younger ones. It is alleged that the two eldest girls were already tubercular and would probably have died in any case! In a paragraph rather tendentiously headed "Facts", Geoffrey Sale comments, "Life at Cowan Bridge was hard, even rigorous, a quality it shared with most similar schools of its day; to sensitive small children like the Brontes, it must have seemed doubly so."[33] This contradicts the previous argument that their father's indifference had inured them to a life of comparative neglect and hardship. He continues "No doubt the feeding, the heating, and above all, the situation were not all that could be desired. But in addition to being sensitive, the Brontes were indubitably consumptive, a state common enough among girls at the time, and doubly probable in the Bronte family since the father suffered from a chronic bronchitis which must surely have been tubercular in origin."[34] Here assumption is treated as truth, although the nervous insistence implied in "indubitably" and "surely" could indicate a lack of real conviction. "Sad though the early deaths of these talented children were, the school to which they were sent so young did not deserve to be pilloried as the prime cause of their pathetic ending."[35]

Yet, even granting the dubious assertion that Maria and Elizabeth were already tubercular, the Cowan Bridge regime offered them no chance of recovery. Antony Wohl in "Endangered Lives", explains that tuberculosis provides a sensitive index of living conditions in a community. In order to be controlled, it required long-term improvements in housing conditions, dietary standards and the quality of milk. When we recall the repeated complaints about the food and milk, and consider that girls developing tuberculosis continued to live in close proximity with their school-mates, even drinking from the same communal mug on occasion, it is almost impossible to assume that the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth were not largely the responsibility of the school. At home in Haworth their diet might have been very simple, but cleanliness and good cooking would at least have been assured. No fewer than six girls out of the nineteen who left during the Brontes' period at the school died before the end of the year. The counter-argument that no pupils actually died in the school seems remarkably superficial; it merely shows that the authorities were prudent enough to send sick girls home in time to avoid having corpses on the premises!

Some deaths did undoubtedly take place actually at Cowan Bridge during these early years. Winifred Gerin, in her biography of Charlotte, mentions that some pupils were buried in Tunstall Churchyard, their funerals being attended by their schoolmates wearing their best white dresses. The death of a pupil was far from being an unmitigated disaster to the Reverend Carus Wilson and those who shared his outlook. This can be seen from his observations on the death of Sarah Bicker. Sarah suffered from a very painful inflammation of the bowels, possibly tubercular in origin, and died in September 1826. In a conversation reported in "The Children's Friend" of December 1826, Sarah claimed in reply to Mr Wilson's questions that she was very happy to be facing death "because Jesus Christ died to save me and he will take me to heaven".[36] Mr Wilson adds, for the edification of his young readers, "I bless God that he has taken from us the child of whose salvation we have the best hope, and may her death be the means of rousing many of her school-fellows to seek the Lord while he may be found."[37]

Charlotte's presentation of Mr Carus Wilson

This leads us to the most bitter controversy of all; the truth or otherwise of Charlotte's portrait of the Reverend Carus Wilson, generally identified with Mr Brocklehurst in "Jane Eyre". Mrs Gaskell faced harsh condemnation and the threat of libel action because of some of her remarks. Writing in 1857, the Reverend H Shepheard, MA, then incumbent of Casterton, defended the school's "excellent and benevolent founder", claiming that Mrs Gaskell had produced "a libellous infringement upon the sacredness of personal character when drawing a picture which was merely intended for a portrait, while it had all the distortion of a caricature."[38]

All are agreed that Mr Carus Wilson was a dedicated evangelical. Formative influences were the teachings of the Reverend John Fawcett whose school he attended near Carlisle, and the death of his sister Agnes in 1810, when he was nineteen. This further impressed him with the urgency of the work of salvation, although we are told that he had been distributing tracts since the age of eight! He was fearless and zealous in his determination to confront others with the reality of sin and their need for God's forgiveness, and his sincerity apparently led to his being heard with respect by the riotous and profane.

With this zeal and devotion there went a belief in damnation for the unregenerate which was truly horrifying. Apparently humourless, Mr Carus Wilson regarded children as wayward creatures who could only be reclaimed by constant exhortation and firm discipline. Even an infant

should be taught to fear the fires of hell and to look forward to heaven as a place of blessed refuge where he could be with Jesus. The Reverend Carus Wilson was a severe judge, particularly of obvious faults such as promiscuity, drunkenness, profanity, laziness, untidiness and frivolity - often shown in women, he believed, as love of dress. He particularly warned against this as is shown by an article in his magazine "The Friendly Visitor" (1821 Vol III). Here the story is told of a maid who appropriated her mistress's housekeeping money to buy finery and committed suicide when faced with detection. Mr Wilson preferred a meek and quiet spirit to any elaborate adornment. The resemblance in attitude and language to the behaviour of Mr Brocklehurst when he complains about the girls' "top-knots" and curly hair in "Jane Eyre" is unmistakable, though Mr Brocklehurst's behaviour contains comic exaggeration. The girls, incidentally, are unimpressed and indicate their disrespect by covert grimaces.

Mr Carus Wilson seems, however, to have been relatively unaware of the sins of pretence and hyprocrisy. The exchanges reported in "Jane Eyre" between the young heroine and Mr Brocklehurst seem similar to those recorded in "The Children's Friend", Mr Wilson's improving magazine, except that again there is a wry humour present of which Mr Brocklehurst seems totally unaware. He professes to be shocked when Jane remarks that the best way to avoid hell-fire is to keep in good health and not die![39]

Mr Carus Wilsons's beliefs

In "The Children's Friend" many similar confrontations take place. Mr Carus Wilson feels confident in pronouncing on the eternal destination of some of his parishioners; he tells as a solemn warning the story of heedless Sarah, who, unchecked by her mother, fell into ways of depravity and drunkenness even on the Sabbath. When seized unexpectedly by a dread disease she called for Mr Wilson, who felt that, in spite of her repeated cries of "Oh, bless you!" he had "no decided testimony of her real conversion of heart". She was buried on the following Sunday, having spent the previous Sabbath "drinking and rioting". He concludes with an exhortation, "Now, my dear readers, flee youthful lusts" and urges immediate repentance, "for there is a day coming when his wrath will burn like an oven."[40] Again, there are remarkable similarities to the language of Mr Brocklehurst.

Crude details of physical suffering were also included in some of the stories in "The Children's Friend". In "Awful Accident"[41] we are told how, one Sunday morning, a "miserable boy" named Frank had sworn at his

mother and kicked her brutally. The mother had expressed her fear that God would punish him, and on the following day Frank's hand was severely damaged in a chaff cutter. Mr Wilson, summoned along with the doctor, was given the boy's glove to inspect. "I took up the glove to look at it, when three of the boy's fingers tumbled out of it, I need not say, to the horror both of the mother and myself ... This was God's way of pulling up a sinner in his mad career, and fearfully avenging a breach of the fifth commandment."[42]

If the possibly undesirable effects of such stories on the minds of sensitive children ever occurred to him, the Reverend Carus Wilson would no doubt have felt that even "shocking" tales were justified in the urgent work of salvation. He genuinely felt the need to help in the redemption of as many sinners as possible; the paramount importance of this was stressed in his instructions to his Sunday School teachers.[43]

He remained committed to evangelical work throughout his life, providing Bibles for soldiers who were setting out from Portsmouth to foreign parts. He frequently addressed them on their departure with "words which fell warm from his own heart upon hearts which,though as brave as lions , were then thoughtful and tender."[44]

Others who had come under his influence, particularly girls who were orphaned and had found a home at Casterton, regarded him with whole-hearted admiration and affection. Emma Worboise, an ex-pupil, in her novel "Thorneycroft Hall", remarks of a return visit to Casterton, "But best of all, there was my benefactor and friend, the Reverend William Carus Wilson, heartily welcoming one of his countless family, who, for a few brief hours, came back to the peaceful, holy home of her girlhood with her heart full of love and gratitude for all the kindness that had been showered upon her within those venerated walls".[45]

An assessment of the opposing views concerning Mr Carus Wilson

Could it be true then, that Charlotte Bronte, either through malice or prejudice, grossly misrepresented a Christian gentleman? A correspondent of the Halifax Guardian in 1857, seemed to feel this was so. "I do not think, tenderly as we would deal with the memory of the dead, that we ought to hesitate to rectify the errors they may have fallen into while living, in cases where the sacred interests of truth are involved; ... The character of the founder of that institution has been cruelly and falsely assailed, as all who know him will readily admit; but he will think it no dishonour to suffer for righeousness sake."[46] Carus Wilson himself commented, "I have not cared to notice the blows levelled at myself; they have never

given me any disturbance beyond the regret that any individuals could act such an unfounded and uncharitable part."[47]

It is obvious from the complacent tone of these remarks,and the readiness to issue a blanket condemnation of all criticism,that Mr Carus Wilson completely failed to recognise the emotions of fear, rage and resentment which his patronising and sanctimonious approach could stir up in intelligent children who had been brought up with a different religious outlook. Undoubtedly there must be prejudice and selectivity in Charlotte's account. She had watched her beloved eldest sister, whom she admired for her sincere, almost saintly religious commitment, harshly rebuked and punished, when ill and uncomplaining, for minor faults. She must have felt that anyone who seemed unaware of Maria's noble qualities because they were obscured by minor imperfections was an intolerant bigot. Her reaction was scorn, dislike and repressed defiance, emotions which later informed her portrait with a grim and satirical humour. Like Jane Eyre, she found relief in recounting the tale of her suffering and was ready to infuse gall and wormwood into the story.

The fact that both she and Mrs Gaskell were writers of fiction was adduced against them. Could they, it was argued, distinguish clearly between fiction and fact? Both Charlotte and Mrs Gaskell were capable of fine distinctions on this point. In her "Life of Charlotte Bronte" Mrs Gaskell states "She also said that she had not considered it necessary, in a work of fiction, to state every particular with the impartiality that might be required in a court of justice, nor to seek out motives and make allowances for human feelings, as she might have done, if dispassionately analysing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution. I believe she herself would have been glad of an opportunity to correct the over-strong impression which was made upon the public mind by her vivid picture, though even she, suffering her whole life long, both in heart and body, from the consequences of what happened there, might have been apt to the last, to take her deep belief in the facts for the facts themselves."[48]

In reviewing the differing reactions of those involved in the dispute of 1857, it is difficult not to contrast the balance and sensitivity displayed by Mrs Gaskell with the rather sanctimonious intolerance and defensive indignation of her opponents. Concern for truth is apparent in all that Mrs Gaskell writes, and she intersperses critical remarks with commendation. "So great was the amount of good that Mr Wilson did, by his constant, unwearied superintendence, that I

cannot help feeling sorry that, in his old age and declining health, the errors which he certainly committed should have been brought against him in a form which received such wonderful force from the touch of Miss Bronte's great genius."[49] Charlotte herself had told Mrs Gaskell "that she should not have written what she did of Lowood in "Jane Eyre" if she had thought the place would be so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge."[50]

It seems that there is much more willingness on the part of Charlotte Bronte and Mrs Gaskell to recognise the qualities of the opposition and to regret the more damaging aspects of the controversy than there is in the supporters of Mr Wilson who insist on disclaiming all culpability - not really a tenable position for a fallible human being.

The defenders of Mr Wilson reinforced their case by a letter in the Halifax Guardian during the controversy of 1857, purporting to come from "AH", the superintendent of Cowan Bridge in 1824-25. This lady was assumed to be the real-life equivalent of Miss Temple, whom Jane Eyre so much admired, and her word was therefore respected. She dismissed many of the allegations about insufficient and badly cooked food, commented that Charlotte had been a bright and happy pupil and suggested reasonably that the youth and delicacy of the Brontes had probably rendered them unsuited to boarding school life. In an article in The Bronte Society Transactions of 1975, "The Real Miss Temple", Brett Harrison revealed that in fact Anne Evans, Miss Temple's counterpart, had died in 1856 and the letter from the so-called superintendent came in fact from Miss Andrews, the original of Miss Scatcherd who had, of course, a vested interest in salvaging her own reputation as the persecutor of Helen Burns, and real-life tormentor of Maria Bronte.

It is also worthy of comment that Charlotte wrote to W S Williams of Smith, Elder in 1848, telling him that she had noticed an elderly clergyman reading the book who had immediately recognised Lowood as Cowan Bridge School, Mr Brocklehurst as the Reverend Carus Wilson and Miss Temple as Miss Evans. According to Charlotte, he exclaimed that Mr Wilson "deserved the chastisement he had got."[51] Charlotte was surprised, and to some extent regretted that the school was so immediately identified.

Origins of rebellion

What judgments can be made about the educational experience offered at Cowan Bridge? To Charlotte Bronte, it was an initiation into

suffering, and, far from encouraging the Christian virtue of resignation, it bred fierce resentment of unmerited wrongs. She saw the system as cruel and insensitive in its uncompromising attitude to individual weakness and its insistence on unquestioning conformity and obedience. She could not adopt the point of view of her admired elder sister who practised Christian forgiveness, although Charlotte was compelled to suppress her feelings of rage and hatred at the cruelties inflicted upon her. She expresses her rebellious impulses more freely in "Jane Eyre" when Jane, having witnessed the flogging of Helen Burns for some minor misdemeanour, finds herself quivering "with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger."[52] Later Jane tells her friend how she would react herself to such treatment. "And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her; if she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose."[53] She enlarges on her belief that it is essential to resist oppression: "If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way. ... when we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should - so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again."[54]

With a critical faculty remarkably well-developed for her age, Charlotte realised that those in authority were not always worthy of respect and she refused to subscribe to their limited and often hypocritical view of life. This aspect of her character will be examined more fully in later discussion of the teacher-pupil relationship. She co-operated whole-heartedly with a revered and sympathetic teacher, but instinctively opposed dictatorial pomposity. At Cowan Bridge, too, she realised the need to hide her more intense feelings and to win approval by apparent conformity.

In many ways the Cowan Bridge regime was bound to arouse feelings of resentment in most pupils. Constant complaints about minor faults in dress or deportment, frequent threats and severe punishments made covert rebellion likely among both pupils and staff. The staff condemned the disgusting food in front of pupils in "Jane Eyre" and Miss Temple offended Mr Brocklehurst by ordering bread and cheese for the pupils on her own initiative. The physical deprivation led to bullying among the pupils, when the older girls would demand food with menaces from the younger ones. Public and humiliating punishment bred resentment, but did little to reform the pupils. Helen Burns remained

untidy in spite of being forced to wear the label "slattern" which Jane removed in a fury and thrust into the fire. Mr Brocklehurst's regime, especially when enforced by teachers like Miss Scatcherd, led to an attitude of outward deference but of inward contempt and dislike, and, in children of spirit, made the questioning of authority inevitable in later life.

When the literary evidence is carefully examined and particularly when the tone of Mr Wilson's own writing is taken into consideration, there seems no doubt that Charlotte Bronte's picture of Cowan Bridge was true in essentials. It is natural that later pupils who had found the school a place of emotional security and refuge should defend their founder and the reformed institution, but, as Charlotte later remarked in a letter to Miss Wooler, "I understand it is very much altered for the better since those days; the accommodation, the diet, the discipline, the system of tuition, all are, I believe, entirely altered and greatly improved ..."[55] She did not, however, depart from her view that the school had a very "ricketty infancy" with Mr Carus Wilson in charge, and insisted that she felt the physical and emotional effects of her sojourn there throughout her life.

CHAPTER THREE

ROE HEAD: DIFFERING REACTIONS TO A MORE ENLIGHTENED REGIME

A discussion of Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, Mirfield, offers the opportunity to assess the effects on all three sisters of a very different establishment from Cowan Bridge. It will, however, be shown that even in this homely and pleasant institution conformity to the regime was difficult for Anne, impossible for Emily and distressing at first for Charlotte. The Brontes' experience also indicates that even apparently conformist pupils may be rejecting the system without open rebellion and that essentially well-disposed students might still be unsuited to institutional education. The need is therefore for enlightened individual guidance, flexibility of approach and perhaps for alternative provision for exceptionally gifted but socially awkward individuals. The Brontes' problems were not, however, typical; it will be suggested that the difficulties they encountered at Roe Head resulted largely from disturbing experiences in early childhood and from the restriction of the creative freedom the sisters had previously enjoyed.

Miss Wooler's small establishment offered a liberal and healthy regime with a refreshing lack of religious intolerance and class consciousness. Social pretension was not encouraged, as emphasis was placed on solid learning rather than on fashionable accomplishments, although the pupils were, in the main, from wealthy or well-connected families. Miss Wooler, an eminently sensible woman, made a firm but enlightened headmistress and her kindliness, together with the small number of pupils (ten when Charlotte arrived) made Roe Head seem like a family home rather than an institution.

Charlotte was to derive much benefit from her stay there as a pupil. Once she had overcome her initial uncertainty and homesickness and her anxiety and shame at being behind the others in some subjects, she committed herself wholeheartedly to the work and made excellent academic progress. Emily's brief three months sojourn was potentially disastrous, however. While not overtly rebellious, she was profoundly non-conformist in attitude, and her health was undermined through her intense longing for the freedom of the life at home. Like Charlotte, Anne adapted to the regime on the surface, acquired much useful knowledge, and won approval and a prize from Miss Wooler. She developed her considerable powers of stoical endurance in the face of keen homesickness, religious depression and eventual illness; her conformity, therefore, cost her considerable anguish and she

failed to find the same compensations as Charlotte had done in the alien school environment.

This second attempt to provide some formal education for the sisters was precipitated by the serious illness of Mr.Bronte in 1830. He developed congestion of the lungs and for a time his life was in danger. If he were to die, the Parsonage would obviously be required for his successor and Aunt Branwell would simply not have the resources to provide adequately for four children. The stark necessity of fitting the children to earn their own living was again forced on his attention. Friends rallied to Mr.Bronte's support. Charlotte's godparents, the Reverend and Mrs Atkinson who lived at Mirfield, offered to pay Charlotte's fees at Miss Wooler's new school at Roe Head, near their home. Miss Wooler was a personal acquaintance of Mrs Atkinson and her cousin, Elizabeth Firth, an old friend of the Brontes. Hence no anxiety was felt about the suitability of the school and Charlotte's welfare there.

Although Charlotte herself was reluctant to leave home, her sense of duty was already well in evidence, making her realise her responsibility to learn and to pass on her knowledge in turn to her younger sisters. In fact, her stay at Roe Head broadened her experience and stimulated her imagination with new scenes and images, as well as showing her the rewards of disciplined study and offering the chance of new friendships. At Roe Head her conformity was much more positive than her apparent acquiescence at Cowan Bridge; the regime suited her and her individual needs were thoughtfully considered.

Roe Head: its environment and associations

Roe Head is still in existence as a school for Catholic boys, run by the Verona fathers. It is a fine Georgian mansion, built in the first part of the eighteenth century by the Marriot family, whose descendants rented it out to Miss Wooler and her sisters in 1830. The house overlooks Kirklees Park which forms part of the ancient medieval woodland described as "Nunwood" in 'Shirley'. Charlotte shows full awareness of the area's romantic associations, commenting on the antiquity of the mighty oaks and mentioning the ruins of a nunnery which were to be found in the park, along with the alleged grave of Robin Hood who was reputed to have been bled to death by the treacherous prioress.

The immediate surroundings of Roe Head, then, were obviously likely to appeal to the Brontes' love of natural beauty and to stir their imaginations, though they could never offer the wild freedom and inspiration of the moors. In addition, Charlotte especially found

much to interest her in the dramatic accounts of the comparatively recent Luddite disturbances in local industrial settlements. A friend of her father (Rev. Hammond Robertson) and relations of her companions (the Taylors of the Red House, Gomersal) had played leading parts in some of the violent scenes which fired her imagination and later provided much of the material for "Shirley",

The house itself was healthily situated above the Calder Valley and had a pleasant garden, large enough for vigorous outdoor games. The downstairs rooms and bedrooms were well-appointed, but the third storey was little used and was reputed to be haunted, possibly by a nun. It is characteristic of Miss Wooler's good sense and her understanding of adolescent girls that she made little of the supposed ghost, and used to send any pupil who seemed morbidly interested in the subject upstairs on a simple errand, while the others were gathered downstairs in the evening. On these occasions no alarms were reported and nothing disturbing was seen. Much more terrifying, apparently, were Charlotte's occasional bed-time stories in the dormitory. The most memorable was apparently a graphic description of a somnambulist wandering along crumbling battlements over a raging sea; Charlotte herself became so involved in her tale that she screamed aloud and Miss Wooler, on her appearance, discovered that one of the other pupils "had been seized with violent palpitations".[1] After this, talking after lights out was forbidden and Charlotte had the good sense to desist. It is interesting to speculate on the punitive reaction such an episode would no doubt have stimulated at Cowan Bridge, possibly feeding the unhealthy excitement already aroused and encouraging resentment rather than voluntary cooperation.

Staffing: Miss Wooler and her sisters

Roe Head offered more than pleasant surroundings, interesting associations and new companions. The Wooler sisters, as indicated, provided competent and sensitive supervision under Margaret's direction.

Margaret Wooler's appearance was dignified and her life exemplary; she was a cultured woman of wide interests, tolerant outlook and kindly temperament. When Charlotte first joined the school, she was thirty-eight, mature enough to have formed her own ideas about a desirable and healthy regime for young girls and to have developed her own cultural interests to the full. In spite of her greater age, there were obvious similarities between herself and Miss Evans, the teacher at Cowan Bridge on whom "Miss Temple" was based. They were both imposing in their different ways, serious, well-informed and benevolent with a kindly interest in their pupils' individual welfare.

Miss Wooler, being her own mistress and having responsibility for fewer pupils, could afford a more relaxed and genial approach then Miss Temple. She would adapt lessons and meals to suit the requirements of individual pupils (both concessions being made to Charlotte) and handle minor disobedience without recourse to a formal system of punishment. Her approach to religion was also refreshing. Her personal self-denial and genuine faith made teaching by example a possibility, while Miss Temple, in spite of her own worthiness, was compelled to adhere, at least in part, to the sanctimonious and strictly evangelical approach of Mr Brocklehurst. It would seem that Charlotte's requirements for a good schoolmistress did not alter much. She should have natural dignity which would enable her to maintain order, the ability to impart both knowledge and enthusiasm for learning and a firm kindliness which recognised and responded appropriately to the needs of individual pupils. Very similar qualities, involving a combination of wide and sound knowledge, efficient organisation and control and the capacity to form good relationships with children are still specified as requirements for the effective teacher, in the recent Elton Report on "Discipline in Schools" [2] Such qualities win respect and thus encourage cooperation and conformity.

Miss Wooler's younger sisters helped her in running the school, each contributing her special skills. Miss Catherine, highly intelligent but apparently less likeable than Margaret, taught French, and Susan (Mrs Carter, wife of the Mirfield curate) taught drawing until December 1832. Miss Marianne gave general assistance until her marriage in 1836 and Miss Eliza, the youngest sister, was known as a well-organised teacher and a firm disciplinarian.

The School curriculum

Miss Wooler was a believer in the theories of Mrs Chapone who advocated a liberal and high-minded, rather than narrowly utilitarian, approach to education. She had been presented with a copy of Mrs Chapone's "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind" at the age of twelve and this had made a lasting impression. The curriculum included Ancient History, Modern History and Biography, English Grammar and Literature. In Literature the emphasis was placed particularly on Milton and Shakespeare. It was felt that Milton combined noble religious sentiment with imaginative description and accomplished versification, all of which must be elevating to the mind. Shakespeare was recommended as "the most perfect characteriser of men and manners"[3] and again as a historian whose plays would fit the various reigns

most durably in mind. Wide reading was encouraged, again in contrast to Cowan Bridge, where fictional works were subject to disapproval and where the grisly pamphlets of Carus Wilson provided the only legitimate light relief from study.

At Roe Head the girls also studied French, Geography, Natural History, Arithmetic, Drawing and Scripture. Charlotte (like Jane Eyre) was particularly attached to Bewick's illustrated volumes on Natural History and had a long-standing interest in pictures, both as observer and artist. Mary Taylor described how Charlotte would study pictures short-sightedly in the minutest detail and gladly explain to the others, if asked, what she saw in them. The pleasure and satisfaction she found in drawing, in its combination of imaginative and technical skills, is apparent not only in her own efforts but in the description of Jane Eyre's paintings, where she graphically expresses her romantic and escapist fantasies. As it is apparent that Charlotte denied herself the consolation of writing during this period, art would be particularly important to her.

Charlotte as a conformist pupil in an enlightened regime 1831-32

There was no need for Charlotte to nourish feelings of rebellion and defiance at Roe Head. Her physical, intellectual and, to some extent, emotional needs were met, though she still longed for the creative and physical freedom of home and the company of her brother and sisters. Fully aware of the privileges and responsibility of her position, she was a most earnest student, motivated by a sense of duty and anxious to excel. She found nothing to alienate her in the charitable Christianity of Miss Wooler and her family, so different from the hell-fire dogmatism of Carus Wilson. According to Ellen Nussey, leaping to Charlotte's defence when she was accused of irreligious attitudes in 'Jane Eyre', "No girl in the school was equal to Charlotte in Sunday lessons. Her acquaintance with Holy Writ surpassed others in this as in everything else."[4] Characteristically, it was the sublime literary passages, especially in Isaiah, in which she took most delight.

The advantages of Miss Wooler's flexible and individual approach to her scholars can be illustrated in her treatment of Charlotte's peculiarities. When she first arrived at Roe Head, she was discovered to be "well-read, but not well-grounded".[5] Mary Taylor later commented in a letter to Mrs Gaskell, "We thought her very ignorant for she had never learnt grammar at all, and very little Geography."[6] Having discovered these deficiencies Miss Wooler spoke privately to Charlotte, suggesting that she joined the second class for some time

until she could catch up with her contemporaries in the subjects mentioned. When, however, Charlotte's intense distress was apparent, Miss Wooler decided she would put her in the first class and allow her to remedy these deficiencies through private study.

This approach was, of course, highly successful, given Charlotte's attitude and ability; by the end of her first six months she had risen to the top of the first class and won the three main prizes. She spent every available moment on study, reading whenever possible. Ellen Nussey reinforces the point "When her conpanions were merry round the fire -- during the twilight, she would be kneeling close to the window, busy with her studies, and this would last so long she was accused of seeing in the dark."[7] She avoided joining in organised games, which held no appeal for her because of her physical feebleness and inability to see the ball. She preferred the pleasures of contemplating the sky and shadows from a quiet spot beneath the trees, and was apparently allowed to do this without comment. In addition, as she was not fond of meat, special portions were arranged for her at meal times if required. Tolerance of individual needs and preferences seems to have been the norm among both pupils and staff.

Another incident illustrates Miss Wooler's desire to make the most of her gifted pupil's abilities and Charlotte's earnest desire to please. To her great distress, Charlotte received a bad mark for an imperfectly prepared lesson when she failed to recall all the required information from a series of Blair's "Lectures on Belles Lettres" Miss Wooler had asked her to read. The task was so much more demanding than the work set for other pupils that they protested indignantly on her behalf. Miss Wooler, modifying her own rules on this occasion, withdrew the bad mark amidst general satisfaction. This responsiveness and ability to admit to a mistake, far from reducing Miss Wooler's standing in the eyes of her pupils, seemed to win their affectionate respect.

Although much of the material presented to the girls would seem inappropriate and drily factual to modern educators, it would seem that Miss Wooler's gifts as a teacher made up for most of these deficiencies. Mrs Gaskell is eloquent in her praise. Having explained that the pupils were allowed to work at their own rate, she continues, "When the girls were ready with their lessons they came to Miss Wooler to say them. She had a remarkable knack of making them feel interested in whatever they had to learn. They set to their studies, not as tasks to be got through, but with a healthy desire and thirst for knowledge, of which she had managed to make them

perceive the relishing savour. They did not leave off reading and learning as soon as the compulsory pressure of school was taken away. They had been taught to think, to analyse, to reject, to appreciate."[8] This was certainly true of Charlotte and her immediate friends, Ellen Nussey and Mary and Martha Taylor, though Charlotte, Mary and possibly Martha were students of exceptional calibre. Even Ellen, not a noted intellectual, wrote to Charlotte later asking for guidance in drawing up a reading programme which included many demanding works.

Miss Wooler's enlightenment was shown in this open-minded approach, almost the complete opposite of that of the Rev. Carus Wilson at Cowan Bridge. Whereas he insisted on unquestioning acceptance of dogma, Miss Wooler's pupils were encouraged to think independently and exercise discrimination. She was sufficiently self-assured to encourage discussion and, as has been shown, would occasionally acknowledge and rectify mistakes. Another enlightened feature for the period was the emphasis placed on healthy out door exercise. As the girls were well-fed and clothed and sensibly cared for, their excursions were not endurance tests like the winter walks at Cowan Bridge but enjoyable rambles about the countryside. Miss Wooler would accompany them, pointing out local features of interest and telling stories of the distress and poverty which followed the Napoleonic Wars, leading to the outbreaks of violence which gripped Charlotte's imagination. Miss Wooler's comparative unorthodoxy and rejection of the stereotype of the helpless female was shown on one occasion later, when members of the school were stranded on their way to an exhibition in Leeds. The harness snapped and the horse bolted, leaving staff and pupils marooned in their covered cart in the middle of the road. Miss Wooler organised the girls into pulling the cart home themselves, showing that initiative and muscle power were as acceptable as brain power in her pupils.

Charlotte's conformity and hard work enabled her to leave school with many achievements to her credit. She had won the approval and respect of Miss Wooler, as was later confirmed by the offer of a teaching post at the school. She had absorbed all that Miss Wooler could teach her in grammar and geography and had the necessary acquirements for a governess, including needlework, drawing and French. The depth and scope of her literary, historical and Biblical knowledge was exceptional. It had been possible for her to succeed in this way because Miss Wooler's socially tolerant but organised and challenging academic regime had suited her, and her individuality had been respected. She had managed to conquer her homesickness and to repress her creative longings. Although the conflict between the imaginary world of romance and that

of solid reality was to cause Charlotte intense anguish during her later stay at Roe Head, at this comparatively early stage of her adolescence the pleasures of learning and companionship largely compensated for the restrictions on imaginative expression. She was relieved and pleased that she had managed to do her duty and to achieve her ambition and on her last day at Roe Head, according to Ellen Nussey, expressed an uncharacteristic desire to be "out and out a schoolgirl".[9] She urged an energetic run around the front garden, in the hope of "meeting someone" or of earning a reproof, but nothing occurred and unfortunately "she had to leave school as calmly and quietly as she had there lived".[10] The contrast between this cheerful desire for a little mild rebellion and the repressed and anguished rage experienced at Cowan Bridge, emphasises the health and sanity of Miss Wooler's regime.

The permanent value of Charlotte's education at Roe Head

The influence of this second period of formal schooling on Charlotte was almost wholly beneficial in preparing her for the difficult task of earning a living and in helping her to cope with the realities of the outside world. Her capacity for formal academic study was developed and extended and her experience broadened by contact with another type of environment. Most valuable of all for her later years was the development of close ties with friends, who could help to sustain her through all the family tragedies which followed.

Charlotte's two closest friends at Roe Head were Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey. Mary's bracing advice and encouragement helped prompt Charlotte's momentous departure for Brussels, while Ellen provided devoted support and religious consolation in times of crisis and despair. Although Charlotte was eventually able to respond eagerly to their proferred friendship, she was not in general aware of how much she was liked and respected by her school-fellows. Martha Taylor, for example, very much regretted her departure [11] and seemed unaware of the intensity of Charlotte's longing for home. An unexpected visit from Branwell filled her with delighted satisfaction as they spent the day together talking endlessly and catching up on the Angrian saga. Not only was Charlotte exiled from Haworth and the family, but from sharing in their communal creative life in the "infernal world".[12] She had, however, passed the first endurance test with flying colours and had gained considerable personal satisfaction as she learned to conquer her irrational longings, "a lesson in self-suppression, which, in common with the heroines of her novels, she would often have to apply and which, suffer as she might, she would never forget."[13]

Emily as a pupil at Roe Head 1835: Secret rebellion

When Charlotte eventually returned as a teacher to Roe Head in 1835, feeling that, if she must teach, she could hardly be presented with a more congenial opportunity, Emily was allowed to accompany her. She was just seventeen and had never left home since her recall from Cowan Bridge ten years earlier. Having spent her childhood largely educating herself in the unrestricted freedom of the parsonage and the surrounding moors, and having found emotional and intellectual fulfilment in the creation of imaginary worlds, she was completely ill-equipped to cope with the routine of boarding school life. She found it difficult to switch from task to task according to the timetable; her study had been self-imposed and self-regulated. She had no wish to acquire what seemed to her a superficial knowledge of apparently unrelated facts; she preferred to investigate a subject in depth or to leave it alone. In particular she despised and rejected the approach of Mangnall's Questions, that repository of facts favoured by Miss Wooler for the teaching of history.

This text-book claimed to cover the major aspects of European history from Old Testament, Greek and Roman times to the most recent reigns of the English monarchs. It is full of resoundingly general statements which are almost meaningless or extremely arbitrary. For example, the revised edition of 1813 begins by asking, "What nation introduced regular government? The answer is "The Egyptians, in the time of Jacob; they first gave mankind the principles of civil order and to them we are indebted for the useful and elegant arts."[14] The questions How? or Why? which would naturally occur to anyone remotely interested are not addressed. The remorseless catalogue continues with question and answer following each other closely, with very few pauses for comment, illustration or light relief. The sentences are arranged in long paragraphs, which makes the information appear even more indigestible. Although the approach is factual, value judgements are implied and the occasional philosophical reflection is included. Having described the establishment of Imperial power in Rome, the writer refers to the fact that the city has been entered and despoiled by the modern French, concluding elegiacally "Thus are the mighty fallen!"[15]

Emily obviously regarded this approach as trivial and superficial and the reflective comments as banal. No doubt she was right, but Mangnall's Questions was intended merely to provide basic questions for discussion and a few facts as a stimulus to further study. In skilled hands this need not have proved valueless, especially if the references to

further reading, which were often included, were followed up. Emily however, was generally reticent and uncommunicative. She would have hesitated to express her strong reservations to Miss Wooler and to convey her sense of futility as she struggled to adapt to the school regime. Even the walks were of no real comfort to her. She was free to survey the landscape, but not to wander over it at will. She had to adapt herself to the gait of the other girls and to listen to their apparently insipid conversation when she was longing for the solitude of the moors and the freedom to retreat into her own creative world. Charlotte, finding her new role of teacher uncongenial, was also irritated to the point of fury by the pointless chatter of some of the girls and understood Emily's frustration and longing only too clearly.

A final irrelevance to Emily was Miss Wooler's insistence on cultivated and urbane manners in her pupils. Essentially tolerant and civilised, Miss Wooler was apparently too conventional to fully inspire Emily's affection. Emily dispised what she sometimes saw as the false veneer of politeness and social relationships, feeling that what mattered was the true expression of the essential personality. Something of this attitude can be deduced from her treatment of the Lintons in "Wuthering Heights" whose very politeness is seen as a lack of vitality. Catherine Earnshaw, like Emily herself, feels imprisoned in the surroundings of a conventionally pleasant household and longs for the rough freedom of the moors and the blast of the wind from the heights. However, Emily did not express her rebellion in open defiance. She retreated into herself, visibly pining for home.

Charlotte, desperately longing herself for the freedom to write in the midst of pressing tasks, fully understood Emily's distress. In her Memoirs of Ellis Bell prepared for the 1850 edition of her poems Charlotte explained her sister's homesickness: "My sister Emily loved the moors -- she found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best loved was liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it, she perished." She continued with a description of her sister's physical symptoms and her own alarm. "The change from her own home to school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindliest auspices) was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude -- In this struggle, her health was quickly broken; her white face, attenuated form and failing strength threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home, and

with this conviction obtained her recall."

There was no difficulty in persuading Mr. Bronte of the need for Emily's return. Memories of the Cowan Bridge disaster remained strong and the replacement of Emily by Anne was rapidly arranged. Profoundly unconventional and unusually gifted, at seventeen Emily had no wish to change. She wished to be "as God made her", an expression she was to use later, to the irritation of some of her companions, at the Hegers' school in Brussels. To push this position to its logical extreme is, in fact, to follow in the tradition of Rousseau and to share Wordsworth's view that Nature can teach us more about mankind and morality than all the books in existence. It implies rejection of conventional schooling, almost in its entirety. Therefore, although Emily was never censured for rudeness, disobedience or laziness, she was essentially a rebel. She had established her own goal of personal creative fulfilment and, in pursuit of this, was happy to remain at home contributing practically to household tasks. In Merton's theory of anomie which was propounded in the 1930s and is still used to categorise deviant behaviour, she could be described as 'rebellious' because she was rejecting both the means (normal schooling) and the ends (social and material success) of conventional society and replacing them with some alternative which had personal validity.

Yet it seems that no Bronte could escape from the demands of duty entirely. Although Emily's apparently intolerant rejection of conventional schooling could be seen as arrogant, she was in fact disappointed and humiliated by her inability to cope. She sympathised with Branwell, whose first attempt to make good away from home at the Royal Academy in London had never even begun and had to be explained away by stories of bad luck. While withdrawing even more resolutely into her imaginative and creative world, she continued to educate herself by reading, practising music and learning German and French. She was also renowned for her excellent baking and worked with a book propped up on the kitchen table. Through her own efforts she thus became capable of undertaking a teaching post later at Law Hill, near Halifax. With increased maturity she became capable of surviving for ten months in another formal school setting, the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. There were perhaps two main differences here which were crucial, and will be discussed more fully later. The first was that Charlotte and Emily were given individual attention and a more flexible regime as they were so much older than the other pupils. The second was that her aims were more clearly defined and circumscribed; she had to acquire a

knowledge of German and French in order to teach successfully. This study posed no threat to her cherished inner life and was to some extent a means of developing and enhancing it.

Anne as pupil 1835-6

In spite of her quiet and self-contained air, Anne had more definite ambitions than Emily and saw more clearly the advantages of a conventional education. Like her heroine Agnes Grey, also a younger sister, she longed to be financially independent and to earn her living as a teacher. Not only did she aim for self-sufficiency, she also wrote in her earliest poem 'Verses by Lady Geralda' that she longed for activity and wanted to roam the world "In search of fair renown."[17] She therefore went to Roe Head anxious to succeed and resolved to learn all she could.

She worked conscientiously and emerged with Miss Wooler's recommendation as capable of teaching English, history, geography, arithmetic, music, singing, drawing, French, German and Latin. She was the only sister to achieve competence in Latin, having shared Branwell's lessons at home; she was later to teach it to the young Robinsons at Thorp Green. In addition, she was awarded a prize for good conduct, inscribed by Miss Wooler and presented with her 'kind love'. This showed that her unhappiness at separation from home and Emily was suppressed under a quiet and conformist demeanour. The choice of volume Watt's 'On the Improvement of the Mind', an earnest and abstract work, showed perhaps that Miss Wooler had recognised the seriousness of Anne's desire to improve herself and equally illustrated the few concessions made to liveliness and entertainment in the text books of the period.

Anne did not seem to enjoy the consolationswhich Charlotte had found as a pupil. There is no record of a close friendship with any of her contemporaries, and the link between herself and Charlotte was affected by Charlotte's position as a teacher. Charlotte had too much integrity to treat her sister with any preference, and, as Anne struggled with her own feelings and tasks, she must have realised increasingly that Charlotte found the work frustrating and exhausting. She became even more aware of the need to succeed in order to justify Charlotte's sacrifice. This helped to increase the tension and anxiety she was already experiencing in matters of religion. Emily's close companionship and their direct contact with nature on the moors at Haworth had helped her to adopt a healthier Christian belief in God as a loving creator rather than a personal judge. With these sources of support withdrawn, she reverted to some of the morbid fears unwittingly instilled by Aunt Branwell's strict childhood training and came despairingly to

believe in her own damnation. Her religious crisis will be discussed more fully in a later chapter. Again, however, the enlightenment of Miss Wooler in allowing a Moravian minister to give Anne spiritual counsel is apparent, as is her motherly concern for her pupil when her health gave way under the strain of the struggle to conquer her feelings and to fit in with the regime.

In fact Anne developed a persistent influenza cold which alarmed the already miserable and overwrought Charlotte and led her, in an emotional outburst, to accuse Miss Wooler of neglect. She could not be rational about any threat of tuberculosis in a beloved sister, and also blamed herself for lack of awareness. Again, Miss Wooler's behaviour was exemplary. Although very distressed by Charlotte's accusations, she wrote immediately to Mr Bronte. Both sisters returned home before the end of the term, though Charlotte returned again after Christmas to continue her work as teacher.

As in later life, Anne had shown powers of stoical endurance. At this stage, it was not her natural response to question the system, though she felt its restrictive power keenly, as is shown in the poems relating to prisoners and separation in captivity which she wrote at this period. She missed Emily constantly and keenly; the consolation of Charlotte's presence was minimal at times. It seems likely, then, that Anne's ultimate failure to cope with school was due to anxiety and emotional deprivation rather than to any failure in Miss Wooler's regime. From her teachers' point of view, she made good progress and her conduct was excellent. In spite of her unhappiness, she would not be seen as a deviant pupil.

The problem of maladjustment

Anne's response to the pressures of conventional schooling highlights a problem still being discussed in relation to maladjusted or deviant girls. V.J.Furlong argues that to many researchers, particularly 'positivists' who assume deviance has specific external causes and symptoms, girls are "invisible."[18] As they are not much of a problem for teachers, they tend to be ignored. Yet they could be just as disaffected as boys, expressing their dissatisfaction through talking (or in Anne's case, writing) and never engaging in open challenge or confrontation. Certainly Anne showed two of the possible symptoms of maladjustment as outlined in the Underwood Committee report in 1955. These were nervous and organic disorders; nervous disorders were also manifested, of course, by Emily during her brief stay at Roe Head and by Charlotte during her time as teacher.

According to the psychodynamic theories of maladjustment, which, following Freud, lay great emphasis on early childhood experience, it would be surprising if the Bronte sisters had not shown symptoms of disturbance as they were deprived of their mother during early childhood. Mrs Bronte died when Anne was only twenty months old and Emily just over three years. Charlotte, who was just over five and a half, was the only child who had even a dim memory of her, playing with Branwell in the twilight. Not only did Anne and Emily suffer maternal deprivation during the critical dependency period, they did not really acquire an effective substitute. Stott[19] suggests that if parents are unwilling or unable to engage in close emotional relationships with their children this can also be classified as deprivation; although Miss Branwell was dutiful and loving in her own way, her nieces regarded her with respect rather than deep affection, though Anne, as the baby, was the object of her special care. Mr Bronte, missing his wife and unable to replace her (in spite of three proposals to ladies of his acquaintance) became more withdrawn and possibly more gloomy and eccentric as the years passed. Without, therefore, fully subscribing to the maternal deprivation theory, it does seem to offer some insight into the causes of the insecurity and anxiety which made the young Brontes distressed at separation from home and from each other. The theory also neatly fits the fact that Charlotte, who had passed the critical age of five when her mother died, was in fact the one who coped most satisfactorily at Roe Head, though allowances must also be made for innate differences of temperament.

It would seem that, for its period, Miss Wooler's school was an almost exemplary institution, though it shared in the disadvantages of the rather dryly academic system of study favoured at the time, and, by modern standards, washing and sleeping arrangements would be unhygienic. However, the level of personal concern shown by the staff and the bracing common sense of the regime ensured the happiness and well being of most of the pupils; the failure of the Brontes, especially Emily, to adapt completely successfully to life at Roe Head cannot realistically be blamed on the school, but rather attributed to the Bronte's unusual background and talents. For them all, conformity involved painful emotions and rigid self-suppression; in such an environment there were few grievances to encourage open rebellion and feelings of dissatisfaction caused guilt and anxiety which led eventually to emotional and physical collapse. It is arguable that pupils of their background and calibre would find it even more difficult to

settle into the more impersonal schools of today. They would possibly face academic frustration and social embarrassment through being different, while it seems likely that Emily's extreme reticence would be seen as a problem requiring psychological help. Miss Wooler's establishment seems in many ways ideal but, considering the extent of Emily's homesickness, it is possible to conclude that Rousseau and Wordsworth could have been right in insisting on freedom in natural surroundings as the essential educational experience for fostering creative genius. Roe Head certainly made clear Emily's inability, in her adolescent years,to fit herself for a conventional role in society, while showing that both Charlotte and Anne could conform at considerable personal cost.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PENSIONNAT HEGER: SUCCESSFUL CONFORMITY

It will be argued in this chapter that the experience of formal education is most valuable and rewarding when the needs of the pupil are satisfied by the institutional regime and positive motivation is encouraged by success. It has already been shown that the negative aspects of Charlotte and Emily's experiences at Cowan Bridge could be attributed almost entirely to the deficiencies of that institution, whereas the difficulties of Emily and Anne at Roe Head were largely the results of their own emotional insecurity and unresolved psychological conflicts.

How, then, are we to account for the unexpected success of the year's education at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels in 1842, particularly with regard to Emily? She was, of course, much older (twenty-three) and this time was determined to succeed. She struggled against what she saw as her own weakness; she rebelled against the tyranny of homesickness, determined to prepare herself for an independent career, even if it meant exile from Haworth for a time. Charlotte, after a period of governessing in 1841 confessed to Ellen Nussey that she had an irrational longing for flight, a desire to widen her experience and to exercise unused faculties, and a vehement impatience of restraint and monotonous work. It was this excitement, this feeling of justified adventure in the cause of self-improvement which made this educational experience potentially enjoyable.

Successful conformity is achieved when the needs of the student can be met without difficulty by the existing school regime. Pupils need clearly defined aims (in this case the acquisition of French and German in order to further their career prospects) and achievable goals (becoming competent to teach these subjects within a specified period.) There needs to be mutual respect between pupil and teacher and awareness and acceptance of these goals on both sides. There should also be no distraction from the main task through inadequate meeting of physical, social and special individual needs, nor through the imposition of unnecessary restrictions. In the Pensionnat Heger allowances were made for differences of nationality, religion and age; the Brontes were respected for their commitment to study and for their intelligence, and the final fortunate condition was the intellectual stimulus of M.Heger's excellent teaching. This meant that Emily was able to conform with less difficulty than previously. Charlotte in fact found the first period in Brussels delightful; she was emotionally and intellectually

satisfied because of her temperamental affinity with M.Heger.

The period of education in Brussels was nevertheless regarded as a practical investment which was justified by Charlotte and Emily's desire to become competent teachers rather than mere governesses. After various attempts at earning their living away from home, looking after the children of well-to-do families, Aunt Branwell's suggestion that they should set up their own school with her financial assistance appealed to all three sisters. It would satisfy their desire to exert themselves to earn an honourable living, but enable them to avoid the distress of separation and the self conscious torments of adjusting to a life among strangers, which had proved a problem for all of them. Emily hopefully remarked in her diary letter of 30th July, 1841, (her 23rd birthday) "I guess that at the time appointed for the opening of this paper (four years hence) Charlotte, Anne and I shall all be merrily seated in our own sitting room in some pleasant and flourishing seminary, having just gathered in for the midsummer holyday. Our debts will be paid off and we shall have cash in hand to a considerable amount."[1]

Although there was the possibility of taking over Miss Wooler's school at Dewsbury Moor that autumn, Charlotte was persuaded by Mary Taylor, who was already on the Continent, to consider this final period of education abroad. Mary's graphic description of the delights of Brussels had already aroused in Charlotte the "rebellious and absurd" emotions mentioned earlier. She longed for "wings such as wealth can furnish; and felt such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn "[2] that she admitted to Ellen, "a fire was kindled in my very heart which I could not quench"[3] However, as friends and even former employers (the Whites of Rawdon, for whom Charlotte had worked as governess in 1841) agreed on the desirability of wider accomplishments for a successful schoolmistress, Charlotte was able to reconcile duty with heartfelt desire for once and begin to make practical enquiries.

It was felt most desirable that this further period of education should be shared by two of the sisters, and it was agreed that Emily should accompany Charlotte as Anne might have opportunities later if their school was successfully established. On the recommendation of the Revd. Evan Jenkins, a clerical acquaintance of the Nusseys who was British chaplain in Brussels, Charlotte wrote to Zoe and Constantin Heger outlining their ambitions, admitting to their limited means and enquiring about the possibility of their becoming pupils at their boarding school. She could hardly have chosen a more responsive couple.

Both Zoe and Constantin Heger were teachers of commitment and

enthusiasm, particularly anxious to help cultured girls without money. M.Heger later told Mrs Gaskell that he and his wife were so impressed by "the simple earnest tone"[4] of Charlotte's letter that they agreed to charge only minimum fees, while providing all available extra tuition. The sisters themselves were determined to derive the utmost benefit from the experience. As Mrs Gaskell remarks: "They wanted learning. They came for learning. They would learn. Where they had a definite purpose to be achieved in intercourse with their fellows, they forgot themselves."[5]

Charlotte undoubtedly went to Brussels as a most enthusiastic and committed pupil. In the letter to Ellen Nussey already referred to she declares: "My plans for the future are bounded by this intention. If I once get to Brussels and if my health is spared, I will do my best to make the utmost of every advantage that shall come within my reach."

The Pensionnat Heger compared with other institutions

The Heger's school had been established by Zoe Parent (later Madame Heger) in 1830 when she bought the premises in the Rue d'Isabelle and determined to follow the example of her aunt, Anne-Marie Parent, a former nun who became a capable and respected school-mistress. Her marriage to Constantin Heger in 1836 did not cut short her career, as they were drawn together by their commitment to education and the school flourished under their management.

The school building is accurately depicted in both "Villette" and "The Professor" as a large house built at the end of the eighteenth century in a narrow street in a historic part of Brussels. It was arranged round an inner quadrangle, with entrance hall, refectory, schoolrooms and the Hegers' quarters on the ground floor and an oratory and dormitory above. The fourth side of the quadrangle was shut in by the buildings of the Athenee Royale, the young men's academy where M.Heger also taught. There was plenty of room for relaxation in the stone-flagged playground and in the high-walled garden with the gravel walks, ancient fruit trees and arbours shaded with vines and acacia Charlotte and Emily delighted in wandering in the garden at dusk, enjoying the privilege of walking in the quiet "allee defendue", which, as mature pupils, they were allowed to frequent along with the teachers.

In spite of the active distrust she later came to feel for Mme Heger, Charlotte herself in "Villette" praised the healthy and sensible regime she prescribed for her pupils, who flourished under her enlightened care. She commented "Nothing could be better than all Madame's arrangements for the physical well-being of her scholars --- her method

in these matters was easy, liberal, salutary and rational; many an austere English schoolmistress would do vastly well to imitate her."[6] She pointed out that lessons were well distributed throughout the day and that the subject matter was made as easy and painless to absorb as possible. Plenty of time for play and exercise kept the girls healthy and happy and the food was wholesome and abundant. The pupils were not forced to rush routine tasks, such as washing and dressing, in response to some insistent summons, and there were frequent holidays to provide breaks in routine.

It is interesting to compare the arrangements at the Pensionnat with those at Cowan Bridge less than twenty years before. The hours for morning lessons were identical, from nine until noon. However, it will be recalled that the luckless pupils at Cowan Bridge were summoned at six o'clock by the rising bell and that they had to face a gruelling session of Bible-reading and hymn-learning for an hour before breakfast. Afternoon lessons at the Pensionnat ended at four o'clock, as opposed to five at Cowan Bridge. The evening recreation was therefore longer in Brussels and preparation was limited to one hour. At Cowan Bridge the length of evening preparation varied according to age, but for the older pupils could extend from six to eight p.m. It would therefore be possible for senior girls at Cowan Bridge to study for two hours longer than their Brussels counterparts each day. At the Pensionnat the evening ended devoutly with the "lecture pieuse", a homily which was not compulsory for non-Catholics. This would roughly correspond with the morning Bible study at Cowan Bridge, but would surely be more acceptable at seven in the evening than as a pre-breakfast ordeal.

There were more diversions and entertainments at the Pensionnat Heger. After lunch each day the girls did fancy work for an hour which would be more diverting than the heavy mending and darning favoured at Cowan Bridge. In addition light literature was read to them while they worked. Obviously the enjoyment of such writing was seen as a legitimate form of recreation at the Pensionnat, rather than a dangerous indulgence which must be countered by further religious horror stories from the prolific pen of Carus Wilson. Although Charlotte found the Catholic religion "idolatrous"[7] and deplored much of it as hypocritical, more tolerance was shown in the Catholic boarding school than at Cowan Bridge. As Protestants, Charlotte and Emily were allowed to miss the "lecture pieuse" if they so wished, though characteristically they often attended to improve their French. At Cowan Bridge, neither staff nor pupils could escape from frequent religious exhortation.

No doubt the warmer climate in Brussels would encourage a more relaxed regime; certainly it would be possible to spend more time outside in pleasant surroundings. Nevertheless, the more civilised and permissive approach was achieved not only through less regimentation but through a less harsh and repressive system of discipline. There is no mention of corporal punishment; classes were kept in order by Madame's effective system of surveillance which, without causing open conflict, operated with ruthless efficiency. Pupils who caused trouble or teachers who could not maintain discipline would first be dealt with in private, and, if all else failed, would quietly and unobtrusively be removed from the establishment. While Charlotte, with her uncompromising integrity, despised this system, it ensured an ordered and superficially harmonious way of life where negative feelings were controlled. In addition, as at Miss Wooler's much smaller establishment, there was consideration of individual needs. This was apparent in the treatment of Charlotte and Emily who were given extra privileges, including a secluded corner of the dormitory for their use. The provision of curtained cubicles in the dormitory also showed Mme.Heger's awareness of the adolescent girls' need for relative privacy on occasions. By this time too the girls were sleeping in single beds.

An acceptable school environment

It is, in fact, remarkable that after their previous unhappy, almost disastrous experiences of school, Charlotte and Emily were able not only to survive with relative ease at the Pensionnat Heger but to acquire considerable knowledge while they were there. As already indicated, Mme Heger's liberal regime smoothed away anxiety and physical discomforts; in addition Charlotte and Emily were together for most of the time and able to communicate freely and privately among strangers. They made few contacts among their fellow-pupils because of the difference in age, nationality and outlook. The large number of day pupils (approximately eighty according to Mrs Gaskell) made them less noticeable during lesson time, but the special consideration shown them as the two most senior of the twelve boarders is reassuring.

By far the most important factor however, was the excellent instruction offered to them by M.Heger and the challenge of coming to terms with unfamiliar languages and cultures. They had a clearly defined, congenial and absorbing purpose. The teaching methods of M.Heger and the remarkable benefits both sisters gained from their studies under his direction will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5; at this stage it is sufficient to note that even Emily, who had found the conventional

curriculum of Roe Head profoundly unsatisfying, considered his instruction stimulating and worked "like a horse."[8] Mary Taylor, normally anxious about Charlotte's welfare, was able to write cheerfully to Ellen Nussey: "Charlotte and Emily are well; not only in health but in mind and hope. They are content with their present position and even gay and I think they do quite right not to return to England--"[9] Charlotte herself confirmed this impression; she was doing what she most enjoyed and the role of pupil suited her. "My present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared with that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too quickly."[10]

It seems that for a brief period at least, these gifted mature students had found the ideal environment for study. Although their lives were more restricted and they were bound to miss the freedom of the moors, the Pensionnat garden and occasional walks in the countryside provided opportunities for exercise,with time to observe and enjoy the beauty of flowers and trees and to share confidences or quiet contemplation. They were instructed, challenged and corrected but encouraged intelligently to explore literature in their own way and to write according to their own inspiration. Their individual temperaments and intellectual needs were thoughtfully considered by one who was capable of appreciating their deep interest in literature and their romantic enthusiasms.

The positive characteristics of the Pensionnat Heger are still to be found in successful modern schools. A calm and efficiently organised regime, concern for the pupils' individual welfare and physical health, an appropriate and carefully planned programme of study are all of prime importance. There can, however, be no substitute for well-informed and enthusiastic teachers, who, through their commitment to their subject, are able to stir up a kindred interest in their pupils and communicate new knowledge in ways which seem relevant and exciting. M.Heger was obviously such a teacher; his methods and their influence on Charlotte and Emily will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING TO WRITE: PLAY AND DISCIPLINE

The creative talents of Charlotte and Emily had already been fostered by a regime which met their needs and which encouraged neither rebellion nor anxious retreat. This, however, was not an institutional system. The unrestricted creative collaboration they had enjoyed in childhood had been stimulating and emotionally satisfying. There was no need to rebel against a regime which they had to a large extent established for themselves; the time and effort demanded for the fulfilment of other tasks only made their creative recreation more enjoyable. Later, when it became essential that they should channel their efforts into training themselves as teachers, they were fortunate enough to find an instructor with a passion for literature and the capacity to impose a rigorous academic discipline on their own writing. There was satisfaction in learning to conform on two levels; firstly, as already shown, it was their duty to study foreign literature in order to become competent linguists and, secondly, they were able to write for their own pleasure and to learn how to improve their performance from an expert. The creative impulse could be effectively channelled rather than seen as a self-indulgent distraction from study; whole hearted commitment to self-improvement was the result. This chapter will examine how both the early unrestricted creative writing and the later precise analytical but imaginative study of literature were approaches well suited to keen students of exceptional ability, and will suggest that they also have value even for less gifted pupils.

Early education

The Bronte children learned to read and write at an early age, encouraged by their father who believed that education was "the last and most intense and abiding fortune "[1] that a parent could give to his children. On admission to Cowan Bridge at $6\frac{1}{2}$ Emily was already able to read "very prettily," although Charlotte at 8 was said to read only tolerably" and to write "indifferently"[2] She had, however, already started on her writing career with a little book for Anne, carefully bound and illustrated, which showed some powers of observation and imagination in spite of the idiosyncratic spelling.

The abrupt termination of Charlotte and Emily's stay at Cowan Bridge and the disaster of their elder sisters' deaths led to a childhood where learning became largely voluntary, exciting and enjoyable. This almost ideal state of affairs was achieved because the children were allowed unrestricted access to the parsonage library and were free to pursue their own intellectual interests after certain routine tasks had

been completed. These were bed-making and tidying for the girls, followed by certain learning exercises set by their father, from Mangnall's questions or the Bible. After this they were free to read whatever appealed to them. Early favourites were Aesop's Fables and "The Arabian Nights" but their reading encompassed much more adult and unconventional fare, including not only Milton and Johnson but the poems of Byron and the work of the Elizabethan dramatists.

Blackwood's magazine, in which it was possible to follow current literary and political controversies, was avidly read by the children from an early age. Mr Bronte had soon formed the habit of discussing contemporary politics with them and had apparently treated the ten year old Maria as an intellectual equal. Charlotte described with excitement the arrival of the news of the Catholic emancipation bill in 1829, which was followed by animated discussion, and Branwell admitted that such occasions and arguments formed his chief delight in childhood. This type of education was particularly suited to Charlotte's nature. Like other children, she invented tales of enchantments and genii but she was also able to identify with the political figures of the day and discuss the morality of their ideas and actions. Imagination and experience were closely integrated. Winifred Gerin comments, "She did not turn away from the real world in distaste; she hugged it to her heart and integrated it into her dreams, investing the England of the early nineteenth century with all the magic of an Arabian Nights entertainment."[3]

The value of Mr. Bronte's educational regime

The success of this apparently free-ranging regime in fostering outstanding creative talent seems at first sight to confirm the views of more progressive educationists from Rousseau to the present. The children were positively encouraged to follow the bent of their own natures by a father who shared their passion for literature and politics. They sought knowledge for its own sake because it seemed relevant, exciting and important to them. The role of the teacher (Mr Bronte as supervisor) is compared by Pestalozzi to that of a gardener whose task is only to watch "lest any external force should injure or disturb."4

Moreover, cooperative interaction rather than competition was a positive spur to the children's creativity and imaginative development. It is well known that the momentous arrival of a box of toy soldiers for Branwell led the children to adopt their own heroes, and to create the imaginary kingdoms of Angria and Gondal, which were to preoccupy them for the next fifteen years. Charlotte illustrates how the stimulus of idle conversation, where the children chose their favourite islands

to rule, led to the writing of the play "The Islanders" and the enjoyable creation of "Emily's and my bed plays - - Bed plays means secret plays: they are very nice ones."[5] The heroes and heroines of these imaginary sagas were based on real life characters, with Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington featuring largely in the mythology of Branwell and Charlotte. The plots and intrigues bore some relation to those of contemporary public life, but the scenes and characters were infused with a Romantic glory and exaggeration which the children found richly satisfying. In one of her earliest stories, The Country of the Genii, Charlotte refers to the light which illuminates in "almost insufferable splendour" an enchanted palace of diamonds, rubies and emeralds which, illuminated with lamps too bright to behold, rises majestically from a barren desert. Her powerful, flawed heroes of course also reflect this Byronic influence.

At first the imaginary worlds seem to have given the young Brontes nothing but delight and satisfaction. Recollecting these invented pleasures during her period as a teacher at Roe Head, Charlotte writes:-

"We wove a web in childhood
A web of sunny air
We dug a spring in infancy
Of water pure and fair

We sowed in youth a mustard seed
We cut an almond rod
We are now grown up to riper age
Are they withered in the sod?" [6]

Adjusting to reality

At this later stage the tension between romantic imaginings and everyday reality was forcing itself inescapably on Charlotte's attention. The attainment of "riper age" brought into perspective the limitations of such an unrestricted education. As Charlotte concentrated on acquiring the systematic knowledge required of a future teacher she also tried to accustom herself to the limitations of convention. The violence of her frustration and the morbid intensity of her imagination is attested in her Roe Head journal. (1835-37)

Emily and Branwell were both unable to adjust satisfactorily or permanently to the demands of a mundane conventional existence. Emily found it very difficult, though not always impossible, to survive physically and emotionally away from Haworth; some of the more romantic theories about her death imply that it was at least accelerated by her

inability to come to terms with what she feared was the failure of her mystical poetic inspiration. Branwell's instability and nervousness were intensified by his habitual self-indulgence and his conscious adoption of the role of Byronic man of letters.

Some of the more pragmatic Bronte admirers see their creative self absorption as manifestly unhealthy. Mary Taylor's outspoken remark to Charlotte that she and her brother and sisters sounded to be "like potatoes growing in a cellar"[7] clearly carries this connotation. Rebecca Fraser, in her recent biography of Charlotte, does not espouse the conventional view that by allowing unrestricted reading Patrick Bronte was showing commendable tolerance and breadth of outlook. Having mentioned that Mr. Bronte's only recorded act of censorship was to burn some Ladies' Magazines which contained "foolish love stories" she comments, "He might perhaps have done better to have kept them from Byron."[8]

It was not, in my opinion, the unrestricted exposure to uncensored reading matter which was mainly responsible for the later problems encountered by the young Brontes, but the absence of clear guidelines which would have enabled them to classify and evaluate what they had read and relate it to their own experiences. No doubt Mr. Bronte agreed with the view expressed earlier by Milton in "Areopagitica", that a superior mind can find edification even in indifferent writing. This suggests that children should be left to browse at will; they will instinctively know what to study for enjoyment and what to reject. This seems an unrealistic view; even sensitive and intelligent children may be led astray by over-indulgence in one type of literature, especially romantic and escapist fantasy. Charlotte and Branwell, who had borne the full brunt of their sisters' distressing deaths, perhaps needed the consolations of escape more than the others. In creating their Angrian world, with its military heroes and dramatic battles, based on the exploits of the Duke of Wellington, and its passionate liaisons, centred on the Byronic figure of the Duke of Zamorna, Branwell and Charlotte gave their powerful imaginations full play. However, when at Roe Head, Charlotte herself was shocked by the hold that the Angrian dream had on her imagination, by her desperate need to desert the real world for her fantasy kingdom.

Mr Bronte's apparently uninvolved and uncritical encouragement of their literary and creative efforts allowed the young Brontes to prolong their fantasising beyond late adolescence. (Charlotte was twenty-one when she finished teaching at Roe Head and enjoyed writing further Angrian stories and collaborating with Branwell for at least another two years.) This permissive child-centred approach fitted them for one

career only, that of creative artist, a role which contemporary society denied to women, though it was seen as a possibility for Branwell, who enjoyed his role as aspiring painter and man of letters. It seems appropriate that children should be encouraged to write creatively and to explore the realms of fantasy while they are learning the art of self-expression, but that some critical evaluation of their efforts by a sympathetic adult should be gradually introduced, perhaps through discussing the realism of the characters and the morality and probability of their behaviour. The young Brontes collaborated enthusiastically and criticised each others'work, but, of course, they lacked the experience to edit, rewrite or modify for publication. In the Brontes' case the early freedom to read and write at leisure and without restraint was invaluable, but the necessary discipline was late in being imposed and was therefore difficult to accept.

Charlotte recognised her need for experienced guidance when she sent some of her poetry to Southey for comment. He replied sympathetically, accurately diagnosing her mental state: "The daydreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind, and in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without being fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be."[9] He thus reinforced the claims of duty,of which Charlotte herself was only too aware. She knew that she had to work for her living and that real life was, for the most part "as cool and unromantic as Monday morning."[10] In her reply to Southey, where she accepted the proofof his interest with gratitude, she pointed out, "I have endeavoured to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil -- I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I am teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewards me for the privation."[11]

Practical training and discipline

Mr Bronte had in fact borne practical considerations in mind in attempting to provide for the children's education. In this context it is interesting to note that the difference in the capacities of Maria and Elizabeth had already been catered for in the provision made for them at Cowan Bridge. For an extra £3 per year the girls could be taught "accomplishments" (i.e. French, Music and Drawing) which would fit them to become governesses. This amount was paid on behalf of Maria, Charlotte and Emily. Elizabeth, however, had apparently been cast in the role of future housekeeper. She was said by the school examiners

to cipher not at all and to read only a little on her admission to Cowan Bridge, though they are not noteworthy for generosity in their assessment of their pupils' achievements.

At home the girls did not live in unrestricted freedom, owing largely to the influence of Aunt Branwell. The household was noted for the punctuality and order of its arrangements. In addition to performing light household tasks, the girls were instructed for long hours in needlework, in which Charlotte appears to have become proficient. Emily became a capable housekeeper and an excellent bread-maker. All three were imbued with the idea of "duty" by a woman who practised what she preached and gave up the genial company and climate of her native Penzance to care for her sister's children in a bleak Yorkshire village.

Mr. Bronte's rather unVictorian emphasis on exercise and fresh air led him to allow the children to wander freely outside, where the moorland scenery fed their romantic imaginations with ideas of sublimity. However, the Romantic Wordsworthian idealisation of the child and the attribution to him of important moral insights or deep spiritual knowledge does not seem to have been characteristic of Mr.Bronte's approach. He delighted in his children's gifts but he always saw them as little adults to be formed rather than as beings set apart, adhering to the pre-Romantic view of childhood. He does not seem to have formulated views about appropriate behaviour for children, but to have encouraged them to become adult as quickly as possible, expecting them to fill their time with similar activities to himself - reading, writing, discussing ideas, walking on the moors and performing necessary domestic tasks. His willingness to discuss political issues with them, especially Maria, his assumption that they would read and enjoy adult periodicals and his readiness to let them enjoy the spirited arguments between himself and Aunt Branwell on contemporary issues all reinforce this approach.

The mask episode, where Mr. Bronte asked his children a series of questions to which they replied from behind a mask, presumably to encourage boldness in expressing their real thoughts, shows his interest in their mental development. He seems to have been delighted with the precocity and intelligence of their replies. Critics have suggested that here Mr. Bronte revealed his lack of understanding of children by expecting them to answer questions of a remarkably abstract nature. Anne, at the age of four, when asked what a child like herself most wanted (i.e. lacked) apparently replied, "Age and experience". Characteristically, the religious Maria is said to have given the opinion that the best mode of spending time was "by laying it out in

preparation for a happy eternity."[12]

Although Mr. Bronte was concerned about his children's moral and intellectual development, in general he paid less attention to their physical and emotional needs, which would be taken care of by the servants and Aunt Branwell. Their intellectual precocity and their intense creative life were encouraged by their social isolation and their lack of playfellows outside the family. Their actual experience of life outside the parsonage was very limited and, as Mrs Gaskell comments, "They have no other modes of thought than what were suggested to them by the fragments of clerical conversation that they overheard in the parlour, or the subjects of village and local interest they heard discussed in the kitchen."[13] It is no wonder that they took refuge in books.

Although the Brontes' creative writing was seen not as academic work but as imaginative play and as such was neither regulated nor criticised, they seemed instinctively to apply their own rules and standards. The minute writing of the magazines which emphasised their "secret" nature involved close attention, and the careful binding and labelling of the little books showed pride in achievement. Although concern over punctuation and spelling was sometimes abandoned in the urge to communicate freely, the children had instinctively grasped the idea that different styles of writing were appropriate for varying purposes. In setting exercises for them when Charlotte was eight, Mr. Bronte specified that only legible handwriting would be accepted in their new exercise books. In writing material for his Sunday School class he also encouraged scholastic effort. He pointed out that he had not made the stories too easy for them, as now that they were eight and could read quite well they could look up the more difficult words in a dictionary.

In spite of these disciplines, however, if the primary aim of education is to fit people to live successfully in contemporary society then the Brontes were clearly badly educated. They were all, to some extent, social misfits. In the case of his daughters, particularly Charlotte, Mr. Bronte was triumphantly vindicated, as they had the innate capacity to become great writers and the independence of spirit to defy convention. Branwell's education has repeatedly been criticised because in spite of his brilliance, he achieved only the unhappy distinction of dying dramatically in Byronic despair. Critics of Mr. Bronte bemoan the fact that Branwell was not sent to school, a somewhat unrealistic expectation in view of the traumatic experiences of

his sisters at Cowan Bridge. Branwell lacked the essential stability and self-discipline of his sisters, who were no doubt less indulged but from whom less was probably expected. This inequality could, in fact, have encouraged them to write with more freedom and enjoyment as they were less burdened by the family expectations of brilliant achievement and success. In the real everyday world they were forced to come to terms with the narrowness of their domestic sphere and their restricted future prospects and to face up to life's frustrations realistically.

The value of creative writing

Is there anything to be learned from an approach which makes creative self-expression the basis of most of our English teaching, considering its undoubted success in nurturing the Brontes' literary talents? Certainly many children have gained lasting pleasure and relief from being allowed to write down their thoughts and feelings without restriction. For therapeutic psychological purposes, for the fostering of deeper understanding in relationships, this could have value. As an academic discipline it is far more suspect. Evaluation of self-revelation at this level is impossible if one is not to forfeit the confidence of the writer, but, equally, bland approval of all offerings regardless of their banality or insipidity is intellectually dishonest. D.H.Lawrence comments on the absurdity of expecting everyone to be creatively gifted and refers to the cult of self-expression as "this foolery which means presumably incipient Tanagra figurines and Donatello plaques, incipient Iliads and Macbeths and Odes to the Nightingale: a world of infant prodigies"[14] Bantock, too, while acknowledging the benefit of "naturalistic progressivism's" emphasis on the arts, criticises the notion that creativity is largely endogenous and needs only opportunity and encouragement to flourish. In this he would probably part company with Frank Smith who argues "creativity is the essence of a child's mind, to be nurtured, not taught,"[15] and that "writing may be one of those activities that all children enjoy and enjoy learning to do better."[16] Both, however, seem to accept that undisciplined self-expression is not enough and Bantock refers scathingly to much creative writing by pupils as "outpourings which have been more remarkable for their becoming manifest than for their quality."[17] He also roundly condemns Professor Pring for suggesting that there is no need to insist that a child's view of the world should approximate to reality and that each child's thought system has its own validity. Professor Pring would certainly have sympathised with the Bronte's delight in their imaginative world. Bantock however, insists that a

child's limited view of the world may simply be wrong or misguided when measured against the reality of everyday life, and that it is both necessary and kind to correct his misconceptions at an early stage. He emphasises discipline rather than play in writing.

Charlotte and Emily were helped to harness their creative powers and were saved from being untaught (and possibly unpublished) geniuses by the timely provision of what Bantock calls "something on which to bite."[18] This was the broadening of the cultural outlook and the academic discipline provided by the teaching of M.Heger in Brussels.

M.Heger as teacher of literature

Tributes to M.Heger's skills as a teacher were generous and widespread after his death. The Belgian newspaper L'Independence' said of him. "He possessed a very special gift--- a kind of intellectual magnetism with children."[19] Frederika Macdonald, an enthusiastic ex-pupil remarked that a great number of women owed to him "their early introduction into the world of books and the ever-genial society of great minds."[20]

It was M.Heger's practice to read aloud a selected passage from an established author whom he considered worthy of imitation. Stimulus material for Charlotte and Emily included Victor Hugo's portrait of Mirabeau as orator and Millevoye's poetic reflections on "La Chute des Feuilles". After M.Heger had pointed out the admirable qualities of the original passage and referred to any weaknesses or defects, the pupils were invited to write their own essays on a related theme. The actual composition was to be submitted as a fair copy with wide margins to allow ample room for correction and comment and a rough copy was to be kept in the pupils' notebook.

It would perhaps be felt today that such a "literature-based" approach would be inappropriate for all but the more academic and perceptive pupils, but such was M.Heger's love of literature, his talent for exhibitionism as a reader and commentator and his authority over his pupils that many of them seem to have captured his own enthusiasm. His lessons were never boring, because of his volatile temperament as well as his gifts of exposition, and, although his choleric moods could be terrifying, he responded warmly and with concern to signs of genuine distress. His pupils might resent his criticism but they could not doubt his interest in their individual welfare.

M.Heger appeared to feel that the Brontes' knowledge of French was negligible on their arrival at the school. It is likely that their spoken French left much to be desired. Mrs Gaskell commented that they

would have as little mastery of conversation as other English girls who had only learnt the idiom and pronunciation from an English-woman. Their natural shyness would make speaking in French doubly difficult, and it seemed sensible at first to begin with basic grammar and translation exercises, with which M.Heger would have little to do. Apparently the need for these was soon outgrown, as Charlotte's "cahier" shows. There are very few corrections, which indicate a reasonable basic knowledge of written French. Emily, of course, was largely self-taught but as, in Charlotte's own words, she "worked like a horse" she was able to make up for earlier deficiencies. In fact, in some of her later essays Emily made fewer technical errors than Charlotte and something of her vigour and originality of expression was apparent even in a foreign language.

It became apparent to the Hegers that, with mature and committed pupils of this intellectual calibre, special methods would be appropriate. With characteristic flamboyance, M.Heger insisted they should write for him without consulting dictionary or grammar book, relying on their increasing familiarity with everyday and literary language to supply the necessary expressions. Mrs Gaskell tells us that "he determined to adapt a new method of instruction in the French language, of which they were to catch the spirit and rhythm rather from the ear and the heart as its noblest accents fell upon them, than by over-careful and anxious study of its grammatical rules." she adds dubiously, "It seems to me a daring experiment on the part of their teacher; but doubtless he knew his ground."[21]

Although M.Heger concentrated on fostering responsiveness to the living language, rather than on mere technicalities, he favoured a close analytical approach to the words on the page, or what he called "la charpente" (literally the timberwork) of a piece of writing. He instructed his pupils in the essential principles of good literature, stressing the need for aesthetic economy and balance, unity and verisimilitude. The language, he insisted, should be expressive but tightly disciplined, being logical and precise as well as sensuous and imaginative. He was an expert and perceptive commentator on the connotations of particular words, as is seen in his remarks on Charlotte's essays.

Charlotte's essay: 'Le Nid'

An early effort was 'Le Nid' written on April 30th, 1842 and reproduced in translation in an article by Lawrence J. Dessner in "Bronte Society Transactions."[22] He considers that it was written in "reputable but far from perfect French"[23] M.Heger corrected not only the

grammatical errors but amended any awkwardness of idiom or usage, responding perhaps to Charlotte's plea in the essay. "It is only that I don't know how to express the thoughts and feelings that such a simple object aroused in my mind."[24] His approach is extremely thorough and the significance of several expressions is fully analysed, especially when a mistaken impression is conveyed by an imperfect grasp of the French. Charlotte, arguing that the goodness of the Creator is expressed in nature, writes "Yet look at the smallest flowers, the puniest insect; you will see in the delicate petals, in the wings of gauze marvels (des traces) of that divine hand---" The word used is the French "des traces", which makes good sense in English when applied to the work of God's hand, but which in French generally related strictly to the study of animal footprints and therefore carried an inappropriate connotation. M.Heger suggests "les merveilles" instead.

It is interesting to note that Charlotte absorbed some of Heger's perfectionism in her search for "le mot juste". In her pictorial account of an icy winter evening in "Shirley" she used the word "reflets" applied to tints on the landscape. In a footnote she comments, "Find me an English word as good, Reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word, Reflections won't do,"[25] M.Heger also could not restrain himself from attempting to improve Charlotte's writing by adding details of his own. Many modern teachers, if confronted by writing which struck them as banal or insipid, would not interfere to this extent, feeling that the renewed effort and fresh ideas should be the pupil's own. In "Le Nid" Charlotte describes the bird's agitation as she approaches the nest and stretches out her hand towards the eggs. She writes, "The bird fluttered its wings but did not fly away; it was trying to defend its treasure." M.Heger emphasises the bird's panic and its touching courage by inserting. "With its beak open and gasping," at the beginning of the sentence."[26] This gives the pupil an illustration of a more dramatic approach and provides encouragement, as without example and direction it is difficult to improve significantly, and in rewriting without specific help it is possible to introduce new faults as well as new felicities of expression.

M.Heger's comments on "Le Nid" are entirely technical. Although Charlotte's reflections are essentially theological, there is no attempt at religious or philosophical discussion. He concentrates entirely on the principles of composition, commenting on her use of detail which he feels is sometimes either inappropriate or excessive in relation to the main theme. "You must sacrifice without pity everything that does not

contribute to clarity, verisimilitude and effect. Look with great suspicion on everything that sets off the main thought so that the impression you give is highly coloured, graphic ("pittoresque".) It is sufficient if the rest remain in its place but in the background. This is what gives to prose style, as to painting, unity, perspective and effect."[27]

He then goes on to recommend that she reads the fourteenth "Harmonie"of Lamartine, which he proposes that they will later analyse from the point of view of its details. This is "L'infine dans les creux", in which, having examined the sky's immensities, the poem's speaker turns, overwhelmed by his own insignificance, to the contemplation of the insects in the grass at his feet and is consoled by the thought that God's care comprehends both the stars and these humble creatures. In his opening stanzas the most extravagant visual effects are achieved by single-minded and exquisitely precise observation of the details of nature. Heger obviously felt that real originality and power of vision could only be achieved when the fantastic was firmly rooted in an accurate description of the natural and the mundane. This would be a valuable lesson for the sisters, with their natural tendencies to the escapist and the visionary. It is noticeable that both Charlotte and Emily apply these techniques in their writing; for example, the precise details of the tapping fir bough on the window pane and the soldered fastening hook securing the window all contribute to the culminating horror of Lockwood's dream of Catherine Linton at the beginning of "Wuthering Heights".

It should also be noted that M.Heger appears to accept that the study of literature can provide valuable insights for the creative artist. The reality of the urge for self-expression is clearly acknowledged; the emphasis is on preserving individuality and originality while studying the best masters and absorbing the riches of traditional literature. These ideas are expressed in his comments on another of Charlotte's literary essays.

"La Chute des Feuilles"

At first Charlotte appears to analyse the poem's appeal in a relatively straightforward fashion, establishing the "aim" (to express the emotions of a young man who knows that he has an incurable disease) and discussing the methods employed to convey these emotions effectively (the choice of Autumn as an appropriate season, and of a woodland scene because "it is in the woods that the ravages of Autumn are most visible"[28]) She comments on the skilfully balanced imagery but does

not proceed to close analysis as she is more fascinated by the creative process itself. She accepts the value of critically dismembering works of genius for "novices of literature" and feels that "this method (of study) is the only one which can lead them to an achievement in the smallest degree eligible."[29]

Having been somewhat dismissive of much contemporary poetry, she gives an impassioned description of the powerful impulse of genius behind "real poetry", which creates artistic unity because of its single-minded commitment to one over-mastering idea or emotion. She uses the Romantic image of a torrent, swollen by rain, hurled forward by the storm, which is unable to "turn from its impetuous course".[30] She insists that genius is an instinctive and emotional rather than an intellectual phenomenon and one senses the exhilaration and delight that Charlotte must have felt in giving free play to these thoughts, knowing that she would be likely to meet with an enthusiastic and understanding response. Indeed, M.Heger's approving comments litter the margin.[31]

His remarks at the end of the essay are copious and thoughtful, continuing the discussion as with an intellectual equal, but adopting the authoritative tone of a well-meaning and discriminating adviser. He senses Charlotte's need to submit her creative impulses to a wholesome rather than a restrictive discipline and argues that while genius is God-given it requires study and art to give it form, so that the inspiration can be conveyed effectively to others for their enjoyment and edification. He employs analogies to make his point more clearly. "Genius without study, without art, without the knowledge of what has been done is strength without the lever --- it is the sublime musician who has only an untuned piano to make the world hear the dulcet melody which resounds in his mind's ears."[32] He concludes with some implicit acknowledgement of Charlotte's creative ambitions, while emphasising his own viewpoint and insisting on the value of literary analyses and traditional learning. "Whether you are a poet or not, therefore, study form. If you are a poet, you will be more powerful - your work will live."[33] Even the person who cannot write poetry will be able, he argues, after such a course of study, to enjoy with discrimination its merits and charms.

Contemporary views on the value of studying literature

G.H.Bantock argues that close study of literature is inherently enriching. Good literature broadens the outlook by introducing new experience vicariously and deepens understanding by offering fresh insights into the mundane. He defends writing based on a literary stimulus, in contrast to the writing based on immediate contemporary

experience which is now increasingly hailed as more valid and useful. This is, he argues, an essentially restrictive approach, cramping the imagination and limiting awareness and sympathy to what is immediately accessible. He claims that important insights are being lost, and education is becoming culturally impoverished, as the emphasis on immediate relevance eliminates the eccentric or unusual and majority interests and mass culture dominate the scene.

In putting forward this argument G.H.Bantock ignores the transforming effect of the imagination on even mundane and unattractive surroundings. To many, Haworth moors are bleak and monotonously uninteresting. While describing them with close attention to physical detail, Emily Bronte could present them as a visionary land of escape where the human spirit could find liberty. In spite of their childhood fantasies based mainly on literary stimuli, the Brontes' mature novels were firmly grounded in their own experience of governessing, clerical life, schoolteaching, unrequited love, failure and drug addiction in a close relative and gossip about the wild families who lived in the isolated moorland farms. Books are invaluable for stimulating and enriching the imagination, but they are no substitute for real life experience, especially where creative writing is concerned. What is needed is balance and Bantock may well be right in thinking that the current emphasis on relevant writing for practical purposes in many English courses is too restrictive.[34] More imaginative pupils tend to find this relentless emphasis on everyday usefulness a little tedious. It seems therefore, that, while recognising the inappropriateness of a basically literary approach for non-academic children, we must not fail to develop their imaginative potential, even if the stimulus is their own restricted experiences, enhanced by sensitive literary treatment of similar themes.

For Charlotte and Emily Bronte the dichotomy between cultural enrichment and practical usefulness was not important. They could justify their Continental education as an exercise in teacher training; the more knowledge they could acquire, the more chance they would have of succeeding as teachers. Learning was therefore both a duty and a pleasure. If, as teachers, we can reach the stage where most, or even a minority, of our pupils feel this, we shall indeed have succeeded in creating a healthy balance between play and discipline.

Emily's essay: Le Papillon

As a fiercely independent creative artist, however, Emily had strong reservations when M.Heger first outlined his teaching methods to them and indicated that their main stimulus would be close study

of other writers. She protested directly, fearing that the work produced under such a regime would be essentially derivative. M.Heger, however, had no intention of inhibiting his pupils' originality. Although Emily's essay on "Le Papillon" deals with a similar theme to that touched on by Charlotte in "Le Nid", her approach is entirely different. She directly involves the reader from the beginning by assuming that he has shared her emotional experiences to some extent. "In one of those moods which sometimes lay hold on us---"[35] The philosophical question about the apparent evil and suffering at the heart of creation is expressed in concrete imagery almost throughout. The nightingale invites a "bullet in its breast" rather than the abstraction of death; the flies are "diminished in number every minute by swallows and fish;" the caterpillar, at first a disgusting "reptile" becomes a "poor insect" when crushed by her foot. The glory of the unimaginable heaven is symbolised by "a butterfly with large wings of gleaming gold and purple" and the final attacks of sin and death are presented as the pouring of "drops of poison" and the "throwing of the last dart." It could be argued that these images are not remarkable for their originality, but their accumulation in a well-balanced sentence of complex subordinate clauses which culminates in "the funeral pyre of a universe in flame "gives a satisfying and forceful impression. The power of evil and destruction has been fully realised and conveyed and the final reference to the "eternal realm of happiness and glory" therefore does not seem a weakly optimistic hope but a corrective certainty.

Writing as a response to literature

M.Heger always insisted that while he would suggest a theme he would never impose a subject. He told his pupils that before sitting down to write about a subject they should have thoughts and feelings about it, adding, "I cannot tell on what subject your heart and mind have been excited. I must leave that to you."[36] This approach is advocated by Frank Smith in "Writing and the Writer". He remarks that "writing is often a highly personal and emotionally charged activity."-- (it) can be an extension and reflection of all our efforts to develop and express ourselves in the world around us, to make sense of that world and to impose order on it."[37] He would therefore never impose a topic, but "assist a child with a theme"[38] He sees this as the ideal learning situation,with the adult helping the pupil to write and providing on the spot demonstrations,which are in effect what the child has demanded. This seems to tally closely with M.Heger's treatment of Charlotte and Emily.

The presentation of existing culture as outside and independent,

but as demanding an individual response involving both emotion and intellect, still persists, in spite of the prevailing pragmatism about communication rather than self-expression. It is interesting to note that G.C.S.E. marking criteria for English Literature specify the communication of an informed, sensitive and cogent personal response as a requirement for awarding the highest grades in some examinations. The kind of exercises which have been set have involved the study of poems and extracts which relate everyday experiences in an amusing or thoughtful way and ask for personal writing on a similar theme, for example a description of a village fete or an account of an accident in childhood. The fact that Heger's themes were much more profoundly philosophical and abstract, as suited his pupils' maturity and ability, does not obscure the basic similarity of the method.

In other ways M.Heger's approach anticipated modern ideas. He was concerned that his pupils should have a high level of commitment to self-improvement and be willing to rewrite and amend their work. Re-drafting is now seen as a constructive exercise leading to a more polished and satisfying finished product. In the same way, the pupils of M.Heger learnt to shape their writing in accordance with the demands and conventions of established practice. Yet, like modern teachers, M.Heger was not unduly pedantic; he frequently ignored punctuation mistakes, for example, if the sense was clear. Although he read out the best essays, this was not to encourage a narrowly competitive spirit; he was in favour of emulation and the fruitful exchange of ideas. Especially valued essays were re-copied for him to keep; by operating this system M.Heger was able to compare the achievements of several generations of pupils.

The value of M.Heger's training for the Brontes

For Charlotte and Emily, then, the close analysis and broader study of literature did nothing but good. It refined and channelled their wild imaginings and, in Charlotte's case at least, her tendency to excessive romanticism. Although she found herself unable to accept Southey's advice that literature should not be the business of a woman's life, or M.Heger's later implied judgement that it would be more appropriate to concentrate on teaching, she deliberately curbed her Angrian excesses and in a letter to Henry Nussey in 1841 had already renounced her romantic and "poetical" outlook. "At this age (twenty-five) it is time that the imagination should be pruned and trimmed - that the judgement should be cultivated - and a few at least of the countless illusions of early youth should be cleared away."[39]

It was this tension between the intense romantic longing for emotional fulfilment and the demands of convention, duty and the outside world which provided the motive power for "Jane Eyre". It is one of the main reasons for the novel's enduring appeal; the reader can identify with Jane's emotional struggles in a way that becomes impossible when confronted with the obsessive hatred and cruelty of Heathcliff or the demanding and egotistical love of Catherine Earnshaw. This tension persists throughout all Charlotte's novels. "Shirley" might appear at first to be "as cool and unromantic as Monday morning" but passion eventually triumphs in the face of opposition or neglect. It is in "Villette", where Charlotte is dealing directly with her Brussels experience that she resists the temptation to rewrite reality. Lucy is, it is true, granted the love of her master, but he is then removed from her. "The Professor", it could be argued, was unsuccessful because in it Charlotte attempted to transpose essentially Angrian characters[40] into a mundane Yorkshire environment and refused to allow Frances Henri the emotional intensities of Lucy Snowe. Her creative impulse was inhibited rather than disciplined here.

The essentially "modern" nature of the Brontes' education as writers

It would seem, then, that the education which fostered the Brontes' exceptional talents was in many ways exemplary from a modern standpoint. The conditions in which they worked as children were highly favourable. According to Frank Smith "The basis of learning to write is inventiveness, manifested through sensitivity in reading and experimentation in writing."[41] They were surrounded by "an environment of demonstrations"[42] which indicated that writing was interesting, enjoyable and important. Smith lists books, magazines, newspapers, letters, announcements, advertisements, programmes and catalogues as demonstrations of how writing is done and essential sources of convention for the prospective author.

It is also seen as a positive benefit that in early childhood the Brontes were given little formal teaching. Frank Smith claims rather radically and increasingly unfashionably that "writing and reading should not be taught at all. Not in any formal sense as subjects."[43] He then proceeds to describe fully exactly the kind of activities which foster writing and reading development; these were precisely the occupations the Bronte children habitually engaged in as their most satisfying and engrossing form of play. "Writing should be used to tell stories and to produce artifacts, books to be published, poems to be recited, songs to be sung, plays to be acted, letters to be delivered, programmes to be

consulted, newspapers to be distributed, advertisements to be displayed, complaints to be aired, ideas to be shared, worlds to be constructed and explored. Children should learn to write in the same manner that they learn to talk, without being aware that they are doing so, in the course of doing other things."[44]

He comments too on the value of children's collaboration in producing communal work and adds in conclusion that writing required nourishment and encouragement rather than a restraining regime. This caution should perhaps be borne in mind by the advocates of a more structured grammatical approach to English teaching (as in the Kingman Report). In their anxiety to avoid sloppiness and indiscipline they might well stifle spontaneity and creativity. In addition, the current willingness in some educational circles to subordinate the study of literature to the pursuit of technical competence in letter-writing, minute-taking, report-writing and related "skills" suggests a depressing utilitarianism which has all the dubious appeal of Gradgrind's exhortation on "Facts". It is indeed fortunate that the Brontes escaped from the repressive grasp of this kind of formal education. Under such a regime, it is likely that their creative impulses would have been expressed in justified rebellion.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BRONTES' RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK: A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THEIR VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

This chapter discusses the Brontes' independence of outlook and illustrates their refusal to accept the straitjacket of a narrowly intolerant Puritanical tradition. Nevertheless, as daughters of an evangelical clergyman of the established church, Charlotte, Emily and Anne remained outwardly faithful to the beliefs in which they had been reared, continuing to attend church, to accept God as a reality and to act according to high ideals of Christian duty. Theirs was not however, an uncritical conformity, nor did any of them enjoy a life-time of serene and untroubled faith. Anne was dogged by religious anxiety and fears of damnation, Charlotte by insecurity of faith and melancholia and Emily's mystical raptures were followed by despair at the failure of her heaven sent inspiration. In working through their emotional and spiritual problems they showed personal integrity and the capacity for radical and independent thought; all of them for example, could not believe that a wise and loving God would wilfully destroy or perpetually torment even the most hardened sinner. This disregard for religious orthodoxy enabled them to criticise both the doctrine and practice of the church to which they belonged and to cause further disquiet to their more traditional and conformist readers. Again, the modernity of their outlook is apparent, as is the relevance of their preoccupations to much current thinking in religious and moral education.

Charlotte's satiric presentation of the clergy

The sisters are unanimous in their rejection of religious intolerance and hypocrisy, which is often exemplified in the behaviour of the clergy. Charlotte gives humorously satirical but strongly critical descriptions of clergymen who display signs of bigotry or self-importance. The controversy which surrounded her portrayal of Mr Brocklehurst has already been discussed. She addresses herself in the preface to the second edition of "Jane Eyre" to those "whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry -- an insult to piety"[1] She spells out her challenge fully "Conventionality is not morality, self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns. These things and deeds are diametrically opposed."[2]

Mr Brocklehurst's unacceptability is made clear, not merely because he bullies and misjudges Jane and toadies to Mrs Reed, but because characters of undoubted worth and integrity express their reservations.

Helen Burns reassures Jane in her distress. "Mr Brocklehurst is not a God: nor is he even a great and admired man. He is little liked here."[3] She refers to the charge of deceit that Mr Brocklehurst has "weakly and pompously repeated at second-hand from Mrs Reed."[4] Miss Temple, a woman admired and loved by Jane, clearly shows her distaste for Mr Brocklehurst's approach. Without consulting him, she occasionally provides the hungry children with extra food and quietly defends them against his more absurd criticisms. She also publicly clears Jane from Mr Brocklehurst's accusations of deceit. The mature Jane's description of Mr Brocklehurst is scathingly amusing. She refers sarcastically to his being replaced on the governing body by "gentlemen of rather more enlarged and sympathising minds."[5] and comments ironically on the "sublime conclusion"[6] to his speech, when he compares Jane, a spiritual castaway, with the diseased cripples awaiting a cure at the pool of Bethesda. She also relishes the hypocrisy of the female Brocklehursts, whose elaborately curled hair and rich silk and velvet clothing effectively illustrate their "reverend relatives"[7] discourse on female vanity.

Mr Brocklehurst is undoubtedly Charlotte's clerical arch-villain but she is less than respectful to other members of the profession. In "Shirley", the curates, Donne, Malone and Sweeting are depicted as brash young men, full of self-importance, inconsiderate to their landladies and boringly obsessed with the trivia of ecclesiastical controversy.[8] William Farren, an honest worker who courageously expresses his views admits, "I'm stalled o't curates and so is t'wife, they've no manners; they talk to poor folk fair as if they thought they were beneath them."[9]

Mr Donne, narrow-minded and conceited, attempted to endear himself to his neighbours by adopting an affected Southern accent and by criticising the Yorkshire lack of refinement in speech and habits. He was amazed and discomfited when Shirley, incensed by this behaviour at a tea-party, turned him out of the house.

Malone, the Irish curate, was arrogant and socially inept but was redeemed to some extent by his physical courage and his capacity to provide amusement. Dapper Mr. Sweeting was seen as the most acceptable because of his kind, good-natured disposition and his gallantry to the ladies. Although the curates were sketched in satirically and presented to some extent as caricatures they were apparently recognisable individuals. The Reverend Arthur Nicholls, Charlotte's future husband, is said to have laughed aloud over the novel as he relished the astute presentation of his colleagues' vagaries. Obviously Charlotte's

domestic encounters with local clergymen prevented her from regarding them with undue reverence; indeed, she seems to rejoice in their humanity and fallibility. Mr Boultby who enjoys his food, and greedily grabs a handful of macaroons without acknowledgement is described as Mr Helstone's "vast, reverend and, on the whole, worthy friend."[10] Mr Helstone himself, Caroline's uncle, who proved a gallant lover but a repressive and a dictatorial guardian is given credit for his qualities. His combative courage and his decisive organisation are praised and he is constantly compared, almost affectionately, with an alert bird of prey.

The value of the church as an institution is recognised, in spite of the imperfections of its adherents. Having finished her survey of the church worthies gathered for the Whitsuntide walk in "Shirley", Charlotte comments that "it was a scene to bring joy and benefit to both rich and poor, the work first of God and then of the clergy. Let England's priests have their due; they are a faulty set in some respects, being only of common flesh and blood, like us all; but the land would be badly off without them; Britain would miss her church if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it!" [11]

The religion of St John Rivers

A less relaxed approach is adopted in Charlotte's analysis of St John Rivers in "Jane Eyre". Here is a man of undoubted spiritual power who emphasises the demands and obligations of Christianity and sets an example of rigorous self-denial. Jane admires him and is nearly won over by his demands that she surrender to his will by committing herself to a missionary's life in India. She is saved by his insistence on marriage which she is completely unable to contemplate because of her devotion to Rochester. There is a degree of ruthless egotism in St John's insistance that, as he has sacrificed his sexual and romantic passion for his eternal salvation, Jane should do the same. In recognising this, Jane is able to resist it. "I felt his imperfections and took courage."[12] As he continues to pursue his will inflexibly, Jane comments, "As a man, he would have wished to coerce me into obedience; it was only as a sincere Christian he bore so patiently with my perversity."[13] He reverts to the arguments of a Brocklehurst, although on this occasion they are employed with complete sincerity and with a nobler aim than the frightening of a recalcitrant child. "Refuse to be my wife and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith and are worse than infidels! "[14]

Jane has her reservations about his doctrines, feeling sad after hearing his stern and eloquent preaching, with its Calvanistic overtones.

She is sure that St John Rivers, for all his zeal, "has not found the peace of God which passeth understanding."[15] Nevertheless, in summing up the fate of the various characters at the end of the novel she acknowledges St John's superiority and rejoices in his assurance of salvation. "His is the ambition of the high master-spirit, which aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth."[16]

In analysing Jane's attitude to Christianity, Charlotte explores some of her own religious and psychological conflicts. She recognises the magnetism of a zealous and committed preacher and his capacity to induce religious fervour and self-abnegation; an almost ecstatic, implicitly sexual, surrender of the will. She distrusts religious emotionalism while recognising its power. In her emotional and spiritual crises she shows that Jane found it difficult to separate the demands of the man and the minister. "All men of talent... have their sublime moments when they subdue and rule. I felt veneration for St John - veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him - to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own."[17]

During her period of religious doubt at Roe Head, Charlotte was torn by the need to surrender herself to the ideal of duty, which she saw as the will of God, and her longing for sexual and emotional fulfilment. She saw her dependence on the fantasy world of Angria as an essential, but probably sinful form of self-indulgence and was dissatisfied with the results of her self-examination. "I kept trying to do right, checking wrong feelings, repressing wrong thoughts... but still ... I found myself going astray. If the doctrine of Calvin be true I am already an outcast."[18]

In writing of Jane's inner turmoil she would fully understand the temptation. A surrender to the apparently sanctified emotional and spiritual demands of St John Rivers would have provided a temporary solution to intense inner conflict, but would have led to a life of insecurity and unease where the spiritual benefits did not satisfy the emotional cravings. In talking to St.John's sister, Diana, Jane admits that if she married him she could imagine the "possibility of conceiving an inevitable, strange, torturing kind of love for him."[19] In that case, she asserts, her "lot would become unspeakably wretched."[20] She is saved from this commitment by the telepathetic communication of Rochester's need for her. Retreating from St John and reserving the right to interpret the divine will for herself, she communicates alone with God in prayer. "I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit, and my

soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving and lay down, unscared, enlightened."[21] Jane's human love is in this way given divine sanction and in her later marriage with Rochester both are able to acknowledge that God has "tempered judgement with mercy."[22]

In real life Charlotte was not able to achieve this resolution of her conflicts. Her own passion for a married man, Monsieur Heger, was neither reciprocated nor openly achnowledged. Consciously she regarded her devoted friendship for him as unexceptionable; it was his lack of response to her emotional letters rather than any religious scruples which forced her to recognise the hopelessness of her love. She was unable to satisfy her longings in any conventionally acceptable manner. Orthodox religious precepts did not suffice; indeed, as already indicated, they exacerbated the problem by convincing her of her extreme sinfulness. She dreaded Phariseeism above all else, but could not be sure that she was correct in her tendency to scorn the apparently self-righteous who might, in fact, be much better Christians than herself.

Phariseeism in the novels

Such doubts, however, were removed when she considered the more unsophisticated and obvious forms of hypocrisy, especially when they were accompanied by crude emotionalism. In "Shirley" the Ranters are discussed with scorn and condemned for their unbridled self-indulgence and sanctimonious self-importance. Moses Barraclough, "bellowing like a possessed bull"[23] attracts all the weaver girls to his meetings. He uses contributions for the local Wesleyan chapel to finance his drinking, while loudly thanking God that he is a "joined Methody."[24] Although "a preacher of the Gospel"[25] (self-appointed) he organises an attack on Robert Moore's workmen who are transporting the new weaving frames across Stillborough Moor. He justifies his involvement by alleging saintly motives. "I'm a very feeling man and when I see my brethren oppress'd, like my great namesake of old, I stand up for 'em."[26] He is dangerous because he foments violence, but is quelled with relative ease by Moore who is his intellectual and social superior. He is a relatively easy target for Charlotte's scorn and, because of his absurdity, arouses less revulsion in the reader than does a more accomplished or powerful hypocrite such as Brocklehurst.

Emily's religious outlook in "Wuthering Heights"

Emily is even more dismissive of Phariseeism. Joseph in "Wuthering Heights" is a powerful figure in spite of his absurdity, because of his hold over some of the main characters, especially Hindley and the young Hareton. He is, in the words of the sensible Ellen Dean, "the wearisomest self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake

the promises to himself and fling the curses on his neighbours."[27] He has "a knack of sermonising and pious discourse."[28] which is used to inflict lengthy torments on the luckless Heathcliff and Catherine on wet Sundays, when they endure a three-hour service in the freezing garrett. It is small wonder that they later rebel by forcefully rejecting Joseph's proferred Sunday reading, "The Helmet of Salvation" and "The Broad Way to Destruction", which Catherine refers to as 'lumber'[29] and hurls into the dog-kennel. Their punishment is confinement to the kitchen, where Joseph suggests "old Nick" will come to take them away. He takes an unholy delight in the progress of other souls towards damnation. He had little sympathy for Heathcliff as he struggled with his obsession over the dead Catherine, believing that "conscience had turned his heart to an earthly hell."[30] When Ellen called Joseph to see Heathcliff's corpse she recognised his repressed excitement and delight; " - the old sinner grinned in mockery. I thought he intended to cut a caper round the bed, but, suddenly composing himself, he fell on his knees and raised his hands..."[31]

Emily's abhorrence of sanctimonious sermonising is further illustrated in the account of Lockwood's first dream based on the "pious discourse of the Reverend Jabez Branderham."[32] In this nightmare, Lockwood endures an address of incredible length on four hundred and ninety possible sins before being denounced and excommunicated, as he grapples with Joseph and other religious worthies brandishing pilgrims' cudgels. The practice of conventional Christianity in "Wuthering Heights" is considered either comically disreputable (as in Joseph's case) or largely irrelevant, although Edgar Linton and Ellen Dean hold orthodox beliefs which provide them with consolation. Ellen compares Edgar's reaction to the loss of his wife with Hindley Earnshaw's rage and drunken despair. "Mr Linton was too good to be thoroughly unhappy long; - - He displayed the true courage of a loyal and faithful soul; he trusted God and God comforted him."[33] She later reports that "he died blissfully --- Kissing her cheek (the young Catherine's) he murmured, "I am going to her, and you, darling child, shall come to us;" and never stirred or spoke again; but continued that rapt, radiant gaze till his pulse imperceptibly stopped and his soul departed."[34] It could be argued that this is merely a piece of conventional Victorian piety, designed to make clear Edgar's lack of passion and originality. The verdict here depends on the overall view of Edgar Linton's merits. To Heathcliff admirers he is lacking in spirit, (and perhaps to Ellen Dean too, who is impatient with his infatuated devotion to Catherine in early visits

to Wuthering Heights.) Nevertheless, Emily Bronte presents him as a faithful lover, a fond father and an upright gentleman,inspiring affection and loyalty in his daughter and household. His attitudes cannot be dismissed with contempt.

In contrast, the household at Wuthering Heights is almost entirely godless under the successive regimes of Hindley and Heathcliff. Even the curate ceases to call, having been actively discouraged; by the date of Lockwood's arrival, the chapel at Gimmerton has fallen into disuse, as no incumbent can be found to minister to the dour local inhabitants in return for the inadequate accommodation and a pittance of twenty pounds per year. Heathcliff is buried "to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood"[35] without an officiating clergyman, having ignored Ellen's suggestion that he should seek spiritual counsel before his death. He insists to her, "I tell you I have nearly attained my heaven, and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me."[36]

Repeatedly in Wuthering Heights the reader is given varying personal views of heaven. The young Cathy argues with Linton Heathcliff over their differing ideas. Catherine wants to rock in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above, with birds pouring out music on every side --"and woods and sounding water and the whole world awake and wild with joy."[37] Linton prefers the peace of a hot July day, "lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming drowsily about among the bloom and the larks crying high up overhead and the blue sky and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly."[38] Both are earthly rather than spiritual visions. The older Catherine's earlier dream, where heaven does not seem to be her home and she is flung out to land on the top of Wuthering Heights, sobbing for joy, again emphasises rejection of the conventional view of eternal bliss.

The ending of the novel is ambivalent. Ellen Dean, superstitious yet sensible, recounts tales of Heathcliff and Catherine walking the moors or being seen at the window on rainy nights. These stories are dismissed by Lockwood, the other main narrator, in spite of his ghostly encounter with Catherine Linton in his nightmare at the opening of the novel. He rambles thoughtfully in the churchyard under the "benign sky",[39] contemplating the gravestones which are slowly being harmonised with the moorland surroundings by the encroaching heath , and finds it difficult to believe that anyone could ever imagine "unquiet slumbers for sleepers in that quiet earth."[40] Both views are presented with poetic intensity, yet neither is essentially Christian. Logically it would seem impossible for both Edgar and Heathcliff to be enjoying eternal bliss

with Cathy, yet the reader is unable to believe that either is hopelessly deluded. If it is legitimate to infer anything about Emily's religious views here, it would seem that each individual attains personal fulfilment after death through the intensity of his emotional longing and spiritual commitment to his own ideals. There is no reference to the morality of his earthly behaviour and to the strength of his earlier profession of religious belief. A religion of this kind, personal and emotional rather than theoretical and doctrinal, puts aside or transcends traditional Christianity without necessarily contradicting all its basic tenets.

Anne's religious search

Both Anne and Charlotte initially had more conventional views of the after life and suffered so intensely from morbid fears that they were driven in desperation to seek counsel from priests of other denominations, Anne from a Moravian bishop and Charlotte from a Roman Catholic father, when she was almost deranged with loneliness and melancholia in Brussels. This episode is powerfully described in "Villette" and shows how her insistent need overcame her somewhat bigoted disdain for Roman Catholicism; she was not, however, particularly affected by the spiritual advice offered, unlike Anne, who derived some permanent consolation from the beliefs expounded by Bishop de la Trobe.

On first impressions, Anne is much more obviously pious than either Emily or Charlotte. Her novels contain more improving homilies, presented without any satiric intention and indeed, with the hope of helping the reader. Mr Weston, the clergyman hero of "Agnes Grey", comforts and counsels old Nancy, who, like Anne herself, is aware of her sinfulness and concerned that she does not have enough faith to win redemption. Mr Weston is a thoughtful and interesting preacher, patient with his parishioners and actively concerned for their material as well as their spiritual welfare. (He lays out part of his own meagre stipend on coals for the poor.) In this novel, Anne, like Charlotte in "Jane Eyre", permits herself the vicarious fulfilment of a happy ending. Agnes Grey marries her serious but warm-hearted clergyman, as, in real life, Anne had probably hoped to marry her father's less sober but equally warm-hearted curate, William Weightman. In "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" Helen Huntingdon's religious advice to her busband, as he alternately revels in dissipation and regrets the consequences, verges on the sanctimonious: however, she is infuriating to him precisely because what she says is sensible and right.

Unlike Charlotte, Anne does not scathingly expose the hypocrisy of the would be elect, with their assumptions of spiritual supremacy; she

prefers to reveal the shallowness and frivolity of the stylish Mr Hatfield, Mr Weston's immediate superior. There is humour at her own expense; she owes Mr Hatfield a grudge for treating her as if she were invisible and nearly shutting her out of the carriage. She thoroughly enjoys giving a witty and sharply observant description of his appearance in church, stressing his dramatic entrance, his rich clothing and jewellery, his studied grace and artificial eloquence in the pulpit.

Mr Hatfield rushes to the church door to shake hands with the squire and is harshly critical of his flock, calling Nancy Brown "a canting old fool"[41] and delivering the occasional hell-fire sermon in the hope (expressed openly to the gentry) that "he had given the rascally people something to think about."[42] Like the curates in "Shirley", he is obsessed with ecclesiastical niceties and matters of church discipline, in fact with the external trappings of religion which are designed to confirm his superior status. He preaches frequently on "the duty of obedience to the clergy"[43] and on "the reprehensible presumption of individuals who attempted to think for themselves in matters of religion."[44]

Unlike Mr Hatfield, Anne Bronte believed it was natural and right for everyone to work out her own personal religious philosophy within the framework of a very broad Christianity. (She would, however, have insisted on the need for this framework, unlike those modern educators who argue that a child should evolve his or her own religious philosophy from a bewildering variety of world faiths and political creeds and whose approach will be examined later.) The freedom to modify existing doctrines meant, for Anne, spiritual survival as opposed to crushing despair. As the youngest and most delicate child, she had been reared with great care by her Aunt Branwell and imbued with Methodist doctrines which emphasised the supreme importance of salvation by faith. While this was meant to be a doctrine of hope and joy, implying that salvation was open to all, it could be distorted by a negative and gloomy emphasis on the horrifying alternatives to salvation if faith were denied. Such an approach made the would-be Christian powerless; good works without faith were not enough, yet faith could not be obtained by effort. Aunt Branwell would seem to have stressed this dilemma, and her approach would obviously have permitted little argument. Anne was young, impressionable and docile. Miss Branwell a determined and conscientious woman who was bent on securing her nieces' eternal welfare. Winifred Gerin comments:"To Aunt Branwell, the Everlasting Fire was a furnace of very real substance and combustible power; the likelihood of an infant falling into it was just as great as of her falling into

the nursery fire."[45] The grief and despair occasioned by the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth would possibly be less damaging to Anne, as the youngest child, than to Charlotte and Branwell, who were closer in age and experience, but their sudden departure and the rituals surrounding their burial must have made a deep impression on her in infancy. As she grew older Anne would listen quietly to Aunt Branwell, but, with characteristic independence, would begin to formulate her own ideas, encouraged perhaps by Charlotte's satirical comments on the absurdity of the "mad Methodist magazines -- full of frenzied fanaticism" which formed her aunt's favourite reading.[46]

To perceive the intensity of Anne Bronte's torment as she struggled to come to terms with her early religious training is to become fully aware of the evils of indoctrination and the dangers of an education left in the hands of narrowly dogmatic, though often personally worthy, individuals. The humanist who insists that religious education should be a dispassionate and factual analysis of the beliefs held by different groups in society, with the pupils left to evaluate them or ignore them as they wish, could gain much ammunition from an account of Anne Bronte's experiences. Miss Branwell chose the following heartening text for her niece's sampler: Proverbs 3 verses 9 - 18. "My child, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

This reflected the alleged view of John Wesley, based on the practice of his own mother, that a child should be trained and broken in almost like an animal. It was moral training rather than the acquisition of knowledge which mattered; and, in the tradition of Hannah More, moral training involved Christian indoctrination and coercion if necessary. Wesley urged, "Break their wills betimes; begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pains it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child."[47] Of course, Aunt Branwell had no need to resort to force with Anne, who, sensitive and anxious to be good, very easily developed an overwhelming sense of his own sinfulness. Even in childhood she was moved by the poetry of Cowper, feeling intense sympathy for him in his religious despair and sharing his anxiety about her own salvation.[48] As she grew older, Anne recognised that there were alternative versions of Christianity which emphasised joy and freedom. Under Emily's guidance, she became aware of the beauty of the created world; she developed a protective love for animals and took delight in long wanderings on the moors. She must also gradually have become aware that Mr Bronte, though evangelical in outlook, regarded the doctrine of

predestination as abhorrent. He made this clear when discussing his requirements for a new curate with the Rev.J.C.Franks, saying that he could never feel comfortable with a colleague who held this "appalling doctrine."[49]

Anne undoubtedly felt the same, and, after much suffering, borne mostly in resolute silence though expressed in her poetry, won through to a more consoling and enlightened view of religion. Overcome by the strain of her tormented inner life while at Roe Head, she succumbed to physical illness; faced with the possibility of death, she found no consolation in conventional belief and asked to see the Moravian minister from Mirfield. The Moravian approach was gentler, more passive and mystical, yet in some senses more realistic, achknowledging that even true believers retained the capacity to sin and were prey to old temptations. After the appearance of Mrs Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Bronte" in 1857, James de la Trobe, the minister involved, wrote to William Scruton, a later biographer of the Brontes, giving an account of his meeting with Anne. He convinced her that salvation was a free gift from God and attempted to replace her terror of judgement by trust in a gospel of mercy and love. She was given permission to think for herself (which had previously been seen as manifesting the sin of pride) and to accept her own view of the sinner's eternal destiny.

Hopes of the after-life

This guidance, coming from a respected figure with wisdom and authority, gave her hope at a time of great need and undoubtedly contributed to her physical recovery. She came to believe, along with Charlotte, that a loving God would never willingly destroy his creatures, even if they wilfully rejected him. This theory is triumphantly expounded by Helen Huntingdon after the death of her husband in "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall". Helen has argued with her aunt, when contemplating marriage to Arthur, that even if he is a reprobate there is no such thing as eternal damnation, only a purging process which will enable him to be eventually reconciled with God. At his death, he is entirely unregenerate. He remains selfish and demanding; in his terror he is abject, but unable to pray or repent; he criticises his wife while expecting her to be sacrificially committed to his welfare. Helen clearly recognises the baseness of his behaviour and her deadened feelings towards him, but cannot bear to believe that this wretched human being will not ultimately, even after much suffering, obtain forgiveness and blessing.

Charlotte, too, won through to this kind of belief. She also expressed her confidence in divine love in the words of the dying Helen

Burns. "I am sure there is a future state: I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving. God is my father, God is my friend; I love Him; I believe He loves me."[50] After Branwell's death,even though she recognised "the emptiness of his whole existence - - all his errors - - to speak plainly - - all his vices,"[51] she had to believe he had been forgiven and was at rest.

To Emily concepts of salvation and damnation seemed largely irrelevant. Her deeply personal religion was evolved in solitary contemplation which has often been called mystical. John Greenwood, the Haworth stationer, described a memorable encounter with her as she returned from a walk on the moors when "her countenance was lit up with a divine light".[52] Emily found total satisfaction in these transfiguring revelations. She knew the truth of her own religion and was satisfied by the presence of "the God within".[53] The joy she experienced came in heightened awareness of the presence of God within her and without, in the grandeur and beauty of the universe. This experience transcended conventional religion. The rapture experienced in exalted moments on earth was her heaven; the conventional glories reserved for the virtuous left her unmoved, as they did Heathcliff.

Her father apparently recognised the unconventionality of Emily's religion without comment. She never taught in Sunday School as did her sisters, appeared irregularly at church and refused to discuss her beliefs with anyone, agreeing laconically with Mary Taylor when she remarked that one's religion was a matter between oneself and God. Mr Bronte shared Emily's love of nature, believing himself that it was possible to worship God the Creator on the moors. As a result, Emily was untouched by the religious anxieties of Charlotte and Anne.

Yet she suffered her own form of torment through the failure of the mystical inspiration on which she relied for spiritual fulfilment. Various explanations are offered for its apparent absence during the last year of her life. Rosemary Hartill suggests that[54] her inspiration could never flow so freely after the violation of her privacy when Charlotte read her poems and persuaded her to join in the publishing venture; Emily, it is argued, expected her work to be received with critical incomprehension, and when this did in fact happen, perhaps felt that she had betrayed her vision by making it public. Winifred Gerin, however, believes that Emily wrote because she was driven by an inner compulsion and was relatively unaffected by the responses of others; she argues that it was her physically exhausting care of Branwell and her increasing awareness of the weakness and evil inherent in

human nature which drove her to exhaustion and despair. The second view seems preferable to me; it seems to afford a more balanced view of Emily's humanity and to avoid the necessity of making Charlotte the scapegoat for her suffering.

The metaphor of imprisonment, so frequently used by Emily, powerfully expresses her torment when shut away in her own despair. Writing as Fernando de Samara immured in the Gaaldine Prison Caves, she envisages her death as one of anguished suffering.

"Enough that this departing breath
Will pass in anguish worse than death."[55]

It does seem that in those final months Emily felt increasingly cut off from those around her. After Branwell's burial she never went out onto the moors again; her reaction to her increasing weakness and pain was to scornfully ignore all symptoms, which rendered discussion and treatment of her illness impossible. Charlotte, while marvelling at her courage, was reduced to impotent despair. The theory which most plausibly fits the facts is that Emily, not entirely of her own volition, was retreating from a life she found unbearable without the consolation of her mystical revelations, the source of her creative inspiration. This view is reinforced by the imagery of escape from bondage found in poems such as "There let thy bleeding branch atone"[56] where the image is of a captive bird soaring to freedom.

Nevertheless, there were elements of struggle. As Emily's vision of heaven was really a continuation and intensification of her happiest moments on earth, there was reluctance to leave the beauty of that world behind. Charlotte, unable to come to terms fully with Emily's death, felt she had been torn from them in suffering and "had turned her dying eyes reluctantly from the pleasant sun."[57] In going through her remaining manuscripts she found little of explanation or comfort. She realised the incomprehension and critical comment which would greet the full revelation of Emily's religious attitudes and adopted a reticence which her sister would undoubtedly have commended. Winifred Gerin's perceptive comments on Charlotte's dilemma effectively sum up Emily's religious philosophy. "But how explain to a hide-bound generation that Emily had revelations of a spiritual life animating nature of which she believed herself a part? That she regarded her material life as a fatal severance from the universal soul to which she yearned to be reunited? That she saw death as a deliverance not from a private grief, or as an evasion of an intolerable reality, but as the ultimate crown of life, by which her "spirit's bliss" could be attained? To will her own death was an act of daring which could not

be admitted to others without condign reprobation. A clergyman's daughter should know her duty better than to hold direct communion with God." [58]

Independence in matters of belief

It is obvious that the Bronte sisters shared one very important assumption about religious belief. While accepting the basic doctrine of the existence of God, they quietly reserved the right to exercise independent judgement about many other aspects of faith. They were unimpressed by the authority of the church as such, recognising the fallibility and prejudice of its clergy and the hypocrisy of some of its more vocal adherents. This made them distrust the authoritarian and paternalistic Roman Catholic tradition, as well as the emotional individualism of the non-conformists. It has been shown, however, that Charlotte and Anne did seek religious consolation from the church while Emily relied on her intuitive awareness of spiritual realities. Their attitude in matters of religion was, in fact, characteristic of their general approach to authority. They were willing to respect existing institutions and to submit to what they saw as legitimate demands, but individual conscience was paramount and they rejected with indignation, but without fuss, what seemed to them wrong or absurd. They may in this context be described as constructive rebels, attempting to question and modify rather than to destroy the established system.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION: SOME CONTEMPORARY AND VICTORIAN APPROACHES

The primacy of individual conscience is now readily accepted in matters of religion. Indeed, religious education poses problems in schools precisely because many teachers subscribe to a basic Christian morality, but are conscientiously unable to expound Christian doctrine with personal conviction in a society which offers freedom of worship to many different faiths. Understandably, teachers fear charges of indoctrination and bias if they place too much emphasis on Christian ideals and commitment in this context. It is, however, generally felt that children need some sort of moral training so that, in the words of the Dorset Curriculum Policy Statement, they may develop "a reasoned set of social and moral values applicable to issues in contemporary society."[1]

The question of indoctrination

It will be argued in this chapter that the Bronte sisters, especially Anne, were in favour of positive religious and moral training, but not of indoctrination. They were as reluctant as many modern teachers to force their beliefs on uncomprehending or hostile pupils, believing that such attempts were, at best, ineffective and, at worst, extremely destructive. To define indoctrination is notoriously difficult. To some parents and teachers, the expectation that children will attend a specifically Christian act of worship is unacceptable in a secular society. Those who feel this could be classed as indoctrination may, of course, exercise their right to opt out, though in practice very few elect to do so. In many schools with children of mixed social origins and different faiths, an assembly based on generally accepted ethical principles, with no specifically religious teaching, is the only feasible option; few parents are likely to object to this and many express general approval. The Durham report argues in 1970: "To press for acceptance of a particular faith or belief system is the duty and privilege of the churches and other similar religious bodies. It is certainly not the task of a teacher in a country school. If he is to press for commitment, it is commitment to the religious quest, to the search for meaning, purpose and value which is open to all men."[2]

What then in fact constitutes indoctrination? It certainly must involve the presentation of one viewpoint as the only true and valid one and offer dogmatic statements instead of tentative hypotheses. Mr Brocklehurst, for example,asserts categorically: "All liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone."[3] To argue with such a statement is only to prove one's completely unregenerate

condition. Indoctrination therefore denies intellectual freedom and as such has no place in a liberal education.

Perhaps even more importantly, it demands a surrender of the will. It has already been shown how St.John Rivers, in his burning sincerity, makes powerful attempts to override Jane's will in what he firmly believes to be her own best interest - unconditional surrender to the will of God. Having ascertained that she wishes to do what is right, he argues forcefully for the course of action he believes in. The strength of the indoctrinator lies in his own absolute conviction that he is right and in his belief in the support of a Divine power. "Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a unmutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire."[4] Such belief in the necessity for obedience leads in unscrupulous hands to the imposition of harsh punishments on the non-conformist. Mr Brocklehurst thinks it is perfectly acceptable to publicly humiliate and traduce Jane Eyre and to leave her standing on a stool in public disgrace for half an hour. Although he might appear to be sanctimoniously concerned for her eternal welfare, he is in fact anxious to prevent the contamination of the rest of his flock. Current political issues, including the Muslim death sentence passed on Salman Rushdie for writing "The Satanic Verses" and the recent purge of dissidents in China, re-emphasise the brutality which can result from both religious and secular dogmatism when it is openly questioned. The imposition of outward conformity through harsh punishments is, of course, one of the least successful forms of indoctrination, at least for spirited and intelligent pupils. It has been shown, for example, that the Lowood regime in "Jane Eyre" did not succeed in converting many of the pupils to evangelical Christianity, as they expressed secret contempt, defiance and amusement when Mr.Brocklehurst harangued them. Also, the most genuine Christian among them, Helen Burns, was exposed to criticism and rejection by upholders of the regime. However, if the aim is simply to make pupils conform and express adherence to the prevailing value system, even if they secretly discount it whenever possible, this kind of indoctrination appears to work very well.

A generally more successful method of achieving the complete surrender of the individual will is to induce a state of fervid emotion, often by conscious psychological manipulation of large groups of people. The outstanding example in recent times is, of course, Hitler's charismatic oratory which succeeded in winning over large numbers of intelligent and civilised people to a self-glorifying regime of

fanatical intolerance. Yet examples do not need to be so extreme; modern pop stars and popular evangelists adopt similar techniques to build up suspense and excitement and to encourage excessive devotion. As we have seen, the Brontes themselves treated the tub-thumping of preachers like Moses Barraclough and Jabes Branderham with a mixture of scorn and amusement. The methods adopted to secure "conversions" are seen by them as laughable, yet deplorable, bringing the whole Christian message into disrepute. However, as open expression of religious commitment is now both unfashionable, and potentially embarrassing, fundamentalism of this kind is unlikely to gain a firm hold in a secular state school today.

There are, however, other forms of indoctrination which are less public and more insidious. The passing on of prejudiced or false information can permanently modify attitudes and is one reason why the rigorous checking of facts and the clear distinguishing of fact from opinion is so crucial in education. In "Jane Eyre" Charlotte Bronte shows how adults can collude to indoctrinate other children against a new arrival. Jane grasps that Mrs Reed can continue to exercise power over her at Lowood by poisoning Mr Brocklehurst's mind against her. "I dimly perceived that she was already obliterating hope from the new phase of existence which she destined me to enter. I felt - - that she was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path; I saw myself transformed under Mr.Brocklehurst's eyes, into an artful noxious child, and what could I do to remedy the injury?"[5] The public expression of Mr.Brocklehurst's prejudice has already been described.

The idea of passing on information about individual pupils from school to school or from school to employers in the form of profiles or records of achievement is widely accepted today. The pupils are consulted and it is commonly assumed that the highest professional standards of fairness and objectivity will be preserved, but prejudiced observations can creep in. Teachers of incoming thirteen year olds in senior comprehensive schools are often surprised, when talking with Middle School colleagues, to discover that reasonably behaved and conscientious pupils were rebellious nuisances before transfer, or that present problem girls were well-motivated in a different environment. It is probably advisable to confront new classes without preconceptions and to consult the records later.

The various forms of indoctrination and their many undesirable aspects are therefore obvious and it is no wonder that the word arouses fear and alarm in the minds of many parents. In avoiding it, however, other problems become apparent. If religious education is seen primarily

as the purveying of information about various cultural backgrounds and belief systems it will simply become a branch of social studies - enlightening but theoretical. If the need for the personal evaluation of each belief system is excluded and the religious demand for some form of allegiance is ignored, the pupil learns that the only possible approach is one of open-mindedness; she might come to feel herself to be morally and intellectually superior because she is unwilling to commit herself to one belief system. In this way the crude proselytising which has been rightly rejected on behalf of Christianity or Islam is carried on in a less obtrusive way by the agnostic himself, and "the only acceptable standpoint is a tolerant non-acceptance."[6]

The religious quest

In the earlier quotation from the Durham report, emphasis was placed on the search for meaning, purpose and value in life and on the responsibility of the teacher to emphasise the importance of this "religious quest". While it is difficult to disagree with the spirit of these remarks, there is perhaps something rather optimistic in the belief that many in our present materialistic and acquisitive society will be consciously committed to the search for meaning in life. Often the personal search for meaning begins from questioning the established view as in the case of the Brontes. If this is not clearly or emphatically presented, questions will rarely arise.

Another great incentive to thinking seriously about the purpose of life is the awareness of death. The problem which baffled the mind of the young Jane Eyre is rarely discussed with any deep anxiety or involvement outside religious circles nowadays. "And then my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell - - and it shuddered."[7] In rejecting the morbidity and sentimentality of the Victorians, we have failed to come to terms with death, which, in the mind of the modern child, must be something unfortunate and remote which occasionally happens to other people.

Such a bland and reassuring approach would clearly have been of no use to the Brontes in childhood. In spite of the negative and doctrinaire approach of much Christian teaching, they lived in a world which acknowledged the existence of the non-material and provided clear spiritual guidelines. They struggled with doctrinal problems which perhaps seem remote and theoretical to us today, but they showed the persistence, integrity and thoughtfulness needed to evolve a personal philosophy. These qualities should still be fostered to enable pupils to come to terms with life.

The modern pupil, in a secular school, is unlikely to turn to a conventional pastor for guidance, unless she is already from a religious background. Yet an interest in the non-material exists and solutions to personal problems are often sought in popular psychology, dream interpretation, palm-reading, astrology and the like. The claim is always that these are not taken seriously but they stir up avid interest nonethe less. The point here is that religious education, whether specifically Christian or otherwise, should attempt to meet emotional and spiritual needs, and if it is no more than doctrine or history it is unlikely to do this.

The role of the committed teacher

It is at this point that the discussion focuses on the role of the teacher. It is argued that in these enlightened times a committed Christian teacher can set a personal example and recommend his faith without being guilty of indoctrination in any form. Brian Wakeman in "Personal, Social and Moral Education" asserts that there is a "modern mythological concept of neutrality in the classroom."[8] and that, in what is still a society based on the Christian code of morality, Christianity should have a fair hearing and provide the missing spiritual dimension in a pupil's experience. "If we present the evidence of a variety of opinions on controversial issues, argue our own Christian beliefs but allow our pupils their proper right to think for themselves - we are being thoroughly professional; we need also to be thoroughly Christian."[9] This would seem to be a view all the Brontes, even Emily, would have upheld.

In developing his ideas, Mr. Wakeman places some emphasis on the idea of revealed truth, showing the limitations of a personal philosophy based merely on individual preference and opinion. It is possible to formulate generally acceptable moral principles to be practised in our society, but he believes that these should be adopted not because they guarantee human welfare and cooperation but because God demands it. He claims the validity of Christian faith is proved in experience and asks only "rational submission to a superior mind,"[10] which of course demands a belief in the existence of God.

There are, however, rather disquieting references which remind us of the arguments used by religious conformists when Charlotte and Anne were formulating their own personal beliefs. Mr.Wakeman argues that it is necessary to accept the existence of human sinfulness, which he defines as the principle of pride and selfishness, the human insistence on pursuing one's own way. Although the ideas are much less crudely expressed, and there is no suggestion of a harsh and punitive

approach, this view of the power of sin over children echoes the beliefs of Mr.Brocklehurst. Mr.Wakeman is convinced that the Christian doctrine of redemption is needed "to defeat the power of evil over children who need an integrated view of life, not just a personal search for some meaning, but a search for the truth."[11] Yet what is perceived as truth can never be infallibly established, nor be the same in different countries at different historical periods. All three Bronte sisters sought their own version of the truth and put the claims of orthodoxy aside.

The problem is a perennial one. I am not personally convinced that it is possible to teach small children that truth is relative or that values are a matter of choice. There is no argument about the need to train them to conform to acceptable social norms; even the most permissive parents believe children should eventually learn to control their bodily functions, dress and feed themselves and adapt to the social demands of playgroup or infants' class. Children have to be shown that certain attitudes and forms of behaviour are acceptable and that others are not. In other words, they have to develop a primitive belief system; it is unfair to expect them to cope with life without social or moral guidelines. If the parents are actively committed to some religious or political system of belief, this framework will also be provided; for the rest, it would seem reasonable to give the kind of liberal, humanitarian, tolerantly Christian instruction which still prevails in many of the more traditional primary schools.

It is essential, though, to present this as a working philosophy of life rather than as a version of revealed truth. This would imply that the maturing individual can modify her beliefs through experience and greater insight. It is also surely wrong to demand some form of religious commitment from everyone or to presume to evaluate an individual's spiritual condition. The profound reticence of the Bronte sisters on matters of personal belief has been repeatedly stressed; all would have felt it unwarrantably insensitive and condescending to enquire into the condition of another person's soul. However, the possibility of religious commitment should not be ignored and can be introduced through dramatic and interesting presentation of the life of Christ and the founders of other religions. The stories of heroes and heroines with the courage to show their commitment could also inspire children, whether the dedication is to an abstract ideal such as freedom, or to a personal God.

Moral autonomy

This brings us back to the question of moral autonomy. As we have

seen, the Bronte sisters assumed the right to modify their basic Christian beliefs in accordance with their own consciences. It is unlikely that they would have agreed with Brian Wakeman's view. "Moral autonomy, so highly praised by many thinkers, is the very activity which shuts us out from the life of God. When we choose our own way rather than God's way we separate ourselves from the benefits of the kingdom of God."[12] (It was precisely this view of Christianity as an imposed set of beliefs it was one's duty to accept which caused Anne in particular so much distress.) Nevertheless, it is true that the role of autonomy, although desirable, can be too thoughtlessly accepted. It is often seen as a freedom from authority and traditional values which ignores the complexity of the moral decisions a young person has to make. It also assumes "an individual self-determination that can rarely be sustained."[13] If autonomy is interpreted in these ways it could provide a formula for social disintegration; a more constructive view is that moral autonomy implies "having a consistent and integrated set of values that are defensible and are truly one's own. The values and the integrated sense of purpose that go with them are thoroughly assimilated. They don't get overruled at the next change of fashion or when one is under pressure."[14]

This kind of autonomy also demands a strong sense of personal identity and purpose which confers emotional stability. In pursuing the goal of moral autonomy, then, it is necessary to take some rules for granted at first, though with increasing maturity a person may question the principles behind them or their universal application. These rules and principles should be integrated into conduct rather than theoretically accepted. Yet the achievement of moral autonomy does demand a capacity and willingness for reflective and critical thinking about complex issues which many people find too confusing or demanding to undertake for long. There are times when we all need authoritative guidance, but it is surely vital for the moral health of society that thinking individuals should be constantly criticising and evaluating authoritarian pronouncements and defending the right to dissent. The Brontes again set an outstanding example here.

There are of course, practical advantages to a strictly authoritarian approach to morality, even though conformity might be achieved at the expense of considerable personal frustration. In an article on intolerance and authoritarianism in religion, prompted by the excommunication of the Lord Chancellor from the Scottish Free Presbyterian Church, William Rees-Mogg wondered how such an admirable character could have emerged from such a narrow and bigoted religious

background. He concluded that the acceptance of a very strict religious discipline (regardless of its irrationality or dogmatism) tended to produce orderly, honest and "useful citizens"[15] quoting as an example the apparent imperviousness of strictly orthodox Jews and Mormons to the "crack" epidemic causing concern in the United States. William Rees-Mogg himself, brought up as an unorthodox and liberated Catholic, feels he has had the best of both worlds. He is sure that modern Catholicism is an improvement on the older version, just as modern Christians must share Charlotte Bronte's view that Mr.Brocklehurst's cant is totally unacceptable. He rejoices in the abolition of the "over-sensitive pseudo deity"[16] who threatened the sinner with hell-fire, but he is not sure that the church is as effective in forming conscience as it was. He asks: "At what step along the road to religious liberation do we lose the vital ability of religion to form personal character and stability?"[17] He argues that a liberalism which does not even attempt the formation of the ideal religious character is bound to fail, and, by implication, that modern education is now possibly too permissive.

The need for moral training: Anne Bronte's approach

In this context it is useful to consider how positive attitudes can be inculcated without reverting to religious dogmatism. Anne Bronte insisted on the need for active moral training, even if this meant introducing children to the "snares and pitfalls of life."[18] Subjected to prudish criticism for depicting "morbid and brutal"[19] scenes in "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall", she justified herself in a forthright and remarkably unVictorian manner, "Oh, reader, if there were less of this delicate concealement of facts - this whispering "Peace, peace" when there is no peace, there would be less of sin and misery to the young of both sexes who are left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience."[20] Her heroine, Helen Huntingdon, seemed to share something of Hannah More's belief in the essential sinfulness of humanity; nor did she assume her own child was likely to be morally or intellectually superior to others, unlike many doting parents, for example, the Bloomfields in "Agnes Grey". When Gilbert Markham argued that little Arthur should be encouraged to develop independence and to face and overcome temptation, Helen pointed out that talking of "noble resistance"[21] was all very well, but most people readily succumbed to temptation. Why should her son be different? It would be better to protect and shield him until he was more mature. In this way Anne, through her heroine, decisively rejected the Wordsworthean Romantic view of the child as a little seer or visionary, with superior insight, who should be left to develop in his own way, deriving inspiration and guidance from his

natural surroundings and childish pursuits and enjoying solitary contemplation.

Anne was very concerned about the influence of undesirable companions and bad example on children. Unfortunately the bad example was often set by parents. Mr Bloomfield shouts coarse abuse at his children in "Agnes Grey", Uncle Robson kicks the dog and laughs when little Tom suggests he should kick his governess instead. He is quite happy for Tom to torture young birds, but, with casual brutality, remarks that he must be careful not to spoil his trousers with their remains. In spite of parental indifference or hostility, Anne never gave up her attempts to instil a more sensitive and considerate attitude in her pupils. Reflecting her real life experience with the little Inghams of Blake Hall, she makes Agnes Grey reason with young Tom about the pain and suffering he will cause the young birds. When this fails, she (in Brocklehurst style) threatens him with similar treatment after death, a prospect he readily discounts. She is determined, however, to deny him his perverse satisfaction and destroys the nestlings humanely by dropping a large stone on them.

In "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall", Helen Huntingdon was finally convinced she should leave her depraved husband because of his corrupting influence on their son, whom he encouraged to curse and drink from the tender age of four. The little boy enjoyed the laughter and approval of his father's drunken guests and rapidly acquired a taste for wine and spirits. In spite of the disapproval of her neighbours, who claimed she would make him into a milksop, Helen conditioned Arthur to dislike alcoholic drinks. She did this skilfully, not by forbidding the child to touch them, as she realised this would increase their desirability, but by allowing him his usual quantity of wine. This, however was surreptitiously treated with a small amount of tartar emetic, to make the child feel rather sick and miserable after each glass. Arthur was urged to have his "treat" even when he had begun to destest it. The same regime was adopted with spirits and water and, in addition, unpolluted wine and water was offered whenever the child was ill, rendering it disagreeable through association with sickness. This proved most effective, so that Arthur shrank away from wine whenever it was offered. In this way he was deliberately trained to avoid undesirable stimulants and drunken behaviour.

In undertaking this positive training, Anne Bronte's heroine was considerably in advance of her time. Experience has proved that the tolerant, liberal approach to alcohol consumption by young people is no longer readily acceptable and efforts have recently been made in

schools, with some success, to illustrate the adverse effects of alcohol and drug addiction through the use of videos, literature and discussion with interested agencies, such as the police. This is helping to dissipate the aura of glamour and romance surrounding drink, and certainly leading to more responsible attitudes about drink and driving among the young. Anne Bronte, with the example of Branwell before her, did not hesitate to depict scenes of drunken despair and to indoctrinate against alcohol abuse,which she saw as an unmitigated evil. She was aware that moderate consumption of alcohol is impossible for some people and presented Helen's treatment of little Arthur with approval, even though it involved an element of deception. It must surely be right to train children to observe rules which will prevent them from harming themselves physically. It is when we talk of moral damage that the issues become more complicated.

The problem of moral contamination preoccupied Anne Bronte. She had seen the corrupting effect of Mrs Robinson's flirtatious behaviour on Branwell at Thorp Green and was concerned that she herself would lose her integrity when surrounded by such weakness. "I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded and all my better faculties be sunk at last beneath the harmful influence of such a mode of life."[22] This concern is still relevant today. While we hesitate to write off individual children as evil influences on their companions, we nevertheless acknowledge that pupils lead each other astray and that some are very easily changed for the worse by undesirable friends. In Anne's view, as in her heroine's, the child should be protected and sheltered, if necessary in comparative isolation, until he is sufficiently secure morally to resist such influences.

It is significant that the child referred to here is young Arthur in "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall". Helen Huntingdon argues vehemently with Gilbert Markham on the offensive distinctions made between boys and girls. Girls are treated as fragile creatures to be protected from the knowledge of vice, but boys are expected to become little men of the world and to face up to reality. She dismisses as trite the simile of the young oak tree becoming more firmly established in its struggle against the storm, which Gilbert had ventured to use of the young boy approaching maturity. Helen would have both boys and girls "benefit from the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good and require no experimental proof to teach them the evils of transgression." [23]

There is much to commend in Helen Huntingdon's approach to her child's education. She is reasonably detached in her assessment of her son's abilities and disposition, seeing that he is quick to understand and warm-hearted in his responses, but that he will need firm guidance. She offers abundant time, attention and love and a reasonably well-organised regime. Nevertheless, she does not always conform to the expectations of the local community, and, as young Arthur is deprived of playmates, there is the suggestion that he might become a misfit. However, he is an appealing child, fond of animals and natural history and gaining delight from books which he reads with "wonderful fluency"[24] at the age of five. He grows up under the care of his mother and stepfather Gilbert Markham to become "a fine young man who has realised his mother's brightest expectations."[25]

In all Helen's approach is surprisingly modern in its child-centred emphasis and its recognition of the need for emotional security. In her emphatic rejection of sex-stereotyping and unsuitable companionship for her son, Helen does not share the uncertainties of some modern parents who are perhaps over-concerned that their child should be "normal" and socially acceptable. Arthur must be trained to conform to Helen's values; she was convinced of their rightness and had no hesitation in enforcing them. To Anne Bronte, as to Helen, the practice of leaving young people to choose a personal value system for themselves when they are considered old enough would be dangerously irresponsible. They lived in a period when the doctrines of Christianity were accorded respect, if not obedience, and where moral values were seen as absolute and established rather than relative or subjective. Nevertheless, people behaved badly then, as now. It followed that the main aim of moral and religious education was pragmatic, not philosophical. The child's mind should not be opened to diverse views of morality, but he should be trained to discriminate between right and wrong and to choose the right by an effort of will.

This is surely an approach worth considering today as we struggle with the complexities of moral education in an essentially non-religious culture. It is necessary to set objective standards of good and bad behaviour and to establish clear guiding principles as to what is right and wrong. However, in a society where right and wrong are a constant subject of debate or where a moral yardstick is regarded as unnecessary in making important practical decisions, such a training could be seen as out moded, restrictive and irrelevant. Nevertheless, it seems that an enlightened consensus does exist over basic issues of right and wrong in our society, though there are many controversial

areas, for example, in medical ethics. The basic moral principles should be clearly defined and presented as rules of conduct, not as theories or subjects for debate. To urge children to decide for themselves on what principles they will base their behaviour when they lack the knowledge and experience to do so is to leave them in a moral vacuum.

Religion is a different, though related issue. Here the emphasis should be on belief, choice and voluntary commitment so that pupils learn it is possible to be moral without being religious and, unfortunately, religious without being moral, though in many admirable examples the two qualities of character have reinforced each other. The Brontes have much to teach us in showing the pressing need for moral training while maintaining some degree of religious tolerance.

The Brontes' views on the effectiveness of moral education

To what extent can character be improved or altered through moral education? All the Brontes seem to be agreed that mere preaching and exhortation are ineffective, especially when offered by a bigoted or hypocritical person. As we have seen, examples of religious fanatics or less than perfect clergymen abound in their novels. On the other hand, timely education or advice from a respected figure such as Miss Temple or Mr Weston in "Agnes Grey" could be effective.

While moral training might not always succeed in achieving the desired results, all three sisters indicate that the lack of it is potentially disastrous. John Reed in "Jane Eyre", removed from school for long periods by his over-indulgent mother, is a conceited and boorish bully who dies young after squandering much of the family wealth. In "Wuthering Heights" the decisive influence of education is also clearly illustrated. The crucial first step in Hindley's campaign to degrade Heathcliff is to deprive him of the instruction of the curate and put him to hard labour on the farm. In his turn, Heathcliff degrades the young Hareton, teaching him to call his father "Devil Daddy", to throw stones and spit. "The boy was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit, - - never led a single step towards virtue or guarded by a single precept against vice."[26] Catherine is appalled when she first meets her brutish cousin, but eventually civilises him through offering her friendship and love and teaching him to read and write.

All the Brontes are realists, though, about what their attempts at training can and cannot achieve. Charlotte is impatient and apt to condemn her pupils; her strictures on the narrow-minded Belgian girls in "Villette" and her intolerant description of some of Miss Wooler's

pupils as "bulls of Bashan"[27] shows her contempt for coarseness and stupidity and her belief that these basic defects are unlikely to be remedied through the exertions of any teacher. She does, however, in "Jane Eyre" make her heroine adopt a more tolerant attitude towards the rather frivolous but amenable Adele. Anne is the most dogged and persistent in her belief that even the most unpromising children can be humanised to some extent, though she recognises they will never fully adopt her scale of values.

Emily recognises and accepts the essential differences in human nature but feels that education and training can have a decisive influence on individual destiny. Heathcliff, talking to Hareton and his own son,Linton, shows the possibilities. The feeble and self-centred Linton, through education and training, has been considerably improved and resembles "tin polished to ape a service of silver".[28] The naturally impressive Hareton, ignorant and uncouth through neglect, is compared with "gold, put to the use of paving stones."[29]

Three main points emerge about the Brontes' approach to moral education, in summary. Firstly, they believe that training is essential for all children, even the most sensitive, intelligent and well-disposed, so that their admirable qualities can be fully developed and not wasted through neglect; it is equally important that less well-endowed children are carefully educated, as they are easily led into weakness and moral confusion by undesirable companions. Secondly, good teaching can only be permanently effective if the teacher is seen as consistently exemplifying the values she professes to uphold and is regarded with respect and affection. Thirdly, the Brontes accept the existence of objective standards of right behaviour, which involve concern for others and adherence to the basic principles of Christianity.

Nevertheless, the sisters recognised the complexity of the problems involved; characteristically they questioned the established attitudes of their own period. Distinctions have to be made between wholesome discipline and rigid repression, enlightened guidance and narrow dogmatism. They did not believe in education for mere conformity, recognising that weaker characters, strictly reared in narrow doctrines are likely to become obedient and law-abiding citizens, but unlikely to protest against injustice or tyranny. Conformity to existing standards and practices should ideally be the result of positive commitment following independent thought. Similarly they felt that questioning of established practices should not automatically be discouraged. We are still struggling to find satisfactory answers to the problems confronted by the Brontes, to achieve a healthy balance between adherence

to an authoritative religious tradition and the freedom to decide for ourselves what is right. Their strength lay in their capacity to question the prevailing myths of their culture and in their willingness to reject the spurious elements in conventional, nominally Christian, morality while remaining faithful to its most valuable insights. Again the relevance of their preoccupations and the comparative modernity of their solutions afford insights into contemporary issues in education.

Precept into practice: the Brontes as teachers

Having analysed the Brontes' ideas on religious and moral education, it seems appropriate to look briefly at their approach when they became practising teachers or governesses. Although all three were anxious to succeed to achieve financial independence, only Anne envisaged any deep satisfaction from the process of instruction. She was naturally fond of children, and hoped for a trusting affection in return for diligent care.

Unfortunately, it is apparent that in her treatment of her younger pupils in particular, Anne set her expectations unrealistically high. Diligent, sensitive, and studiously intelligent herself, she was taken aback by her pupils' lack of interest in their studies and their indifference to her disapproval. Her difficulties have been realistically chronicled in "Agnes Grey". The little Bloomfields, based on the Inghams of Blake Hall, are persistently disobedient and idle, knowing instinctively that their governess is held in low esteem by their indulgent parents and that her values are not shared by the rest of the family. They are convinced of their own superiority and know that the governess has no power to punish them effectively. Hence Mary Ann, a model of mindless obstinacy, elects to lie like a log on the floor rather than repeat her lessons. Agnes resorts to moral exhortation (which is ignored) and appeals to her better nature and imagination (which is rejected as irrelevant.) Like her heroine, Anne was unable to motivate such reluctant pupils. She could not adapt her lessons to their needs and interests because of rigid parental attitudes which forbade practical activities and play. Thoughtfulness, patience, sensitivity and idealism were not enough; indeed they were positive disadvantages. Her pupils' rebellions were almost invariably successful, and she, like Agnes, was disappointed to be dismissed from her first post. She managed better with the Robinson girls of Thorp Green, who ignored her advice and exhortation but turned to her later when in trouble, belatedly appreciating her value.

It has been mentioned earlier that Charlotte was intensely unhappy

and frustrated while teaching for Miss Wooler, in spite of her respect and affection for that enlightened headmistress. Her rebellion against the constraints of teaching was far from the constructively questioning attitude she had shown as a pupil. In addition to comparing her pupils with bulls of Bashan she refers with immoderate contempt to "the idleness, the apathy and the most asinine stupidity of these fat-headed oafs."[30] It is possible that the apparent laziness and lack of cooperation were a form of inarticulate rebellion against the imposition of inappropriate and uncongenial tasks by one who had written off many of her pupils in advance. Muriel Spark, when discussing the Brontes as teachers, enquires whether these children were indeed too stupid to sense Miss Bronte's withering scorn under her assumed air of patience, and to be adversely affected by it. In fact, she feels compelled to speak up for the Brontes' much-maligned pupils. "I suggest that if anything could equal the misfortune of their lot as teachers it was the lot of their respective pupils."[31]

The Elton report insists that an essential quality for the aspiring teacher is "the potential ability to form good relationships with children based on mutual respect."[32] On the whole, in spite of occasional exceptions with older pupils, Charlotte and Anne failed to feel that respect, though they were both capable of inspiring it. Emily, however, tended to inspire apprehension bordering on terror. She was too eccentric, self-absorbed and remote to relate successfully to most children and made no secret of the fact that she preferred animals. It is not surprising that her brief stay at Law Hill School, Halifax, was not a success. The sisters found themselves in the role of somewhat frustrated enforcers of discipline, expecting conformity to a code of conduct which many of their pupils failed to recognise or understand. In their turn they rejected what seemed to them the somewhat superficial and frivolous values of conventional society. All three eventually found the constraints of teaching too much to bear and retreated to write out their conflicts in their novels, leaving practical moral training to others.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"THE WOMAN QUESTION" IN THE BRONTE NOVELS

There is no doubt that the Brontes were essentially feminist writers and as such rebels against the conventions of their time. In their novels, women of spirit and independence struggle to find fulfilment in the world which unthinkingly assigns them a subordinate role and which narrowly restricts their social and mental horizons. The sisters were surprised to discover that their powerful and truthful depictions of emotional suffering were regarded as "coarse"[1] and that their heroines were seen as rebellious and unwomanly. Yet in analysing the Brontes' treatment of female frustration it is apparent that even now some of their more radical assumptions still challenge existing attitudes in education.

Financial self-sufficiency

With the current emphasis on pragmatism in education, teachers are constantly being exhorted to produce technologically literate individuals who can earn their own living by meeting the needs of industry. The emphasis is on independence and self-help for all, but the position of women in the labour-market is still full of ambiguities. A century and a half after Charlotte, Anne, and for a short period, Emily faced the trials of governessing and teaching in order to gain a small measure of financial independence, the average female wage is still only 75% of that of the average male, in spite of the 1970 Equal Pay Act. The inference is still that most women can fall back on a male bread-winner for support in times of need and that their income is supplementary rather than basic to the family economy. This argument has in fact been used to justify redundancies in the clothing industry in the 1980s.[2]

In her survey "Women and Education" Eileen Byrne comments that in many cases marriage is seen as a "terminal occupation for girls" and quotes with approval a Swedish report of 1975: "The school should promote equality between the sexes - - counteracting in its work the traditional attitudes to sex roles - - It should assume that men and women will play the same role in the future, that preparation for the parental role is just as important for boys as for girls and that girls have just as much reason to be interested in careers as boys." [3]

Anne and Charlotte Bronte were arguing along these lines in the 1840s. Self respect demanded that they should attempt to maintain themselves and exercise their talents. Agnes Grey reflects: "How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; - - to exercise my unused faculties; to try my own powers; to earn my own maintenance and something to comfort and help my father, mother and

sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing - -"[4] Three of Charlotte's heroines have no choice but to earn their subsistence, and other women in the novels find refuge from emotional disaster in paid work. In "Shirley" Mrs Pryor turns to governessing after the torments of her misguided marriage; in "The Tenant of Wildfall Hall" Helen Graham partly supports herself and her son by painting landscapes after her flight from Arthur Huntingdon. Jane Eyre, still deeply shaken emotionally after her parting from Mr.Rochester, is thankful for her humble occupation as a schoolmistress. She takes herself to task for her depression after her first day of work; "Meantime, let me ask myself one question. Which is better? - - To have surrendered to temptation - - to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles - - or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England?"[5]

When Charlotte contrasts slavery and freedom in this way, she is primarily referring to freedom from moral guilt and from a degrading submission to sensuality. However, having just read the poignant account of Jane's solitary and destitute wanderings, the reader cannot fail to realise that "freedom" might offer merely the likelihood of dying from starvation. Charlotte repeatedly emphasises the powerlessness of the impecunious female. When Jane Eyre finally inherits her uncle's fortune her chief delight lies in the power it gives her to bestow freedom on other women. "Now the wealth did not weigh on me; now it was not a mere bequest of coin - it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment."[6] She longs to save her newly-discovered cousins, Diana and Mary Rivers, from a governess's life of servitude among strangers. Her triumphant return to Rochester, as a result of her intuitive recognition of his desperate need for help, is rendered all the more convincing because she can now see herself as his social as well as his moral equal. "I told you, sir, I am independent as well as rich: I am my own mistress."[7] She has gained her freedom; in making the deliberate choice to restrict her prospects by marrying Rochester, she is conferring rather than receiving a benefit.

Similarly, in "Shirley", money enables the heroine to adopt a powerful role while retaining her feminine attractiveness. She delights in calling herself "Captain Keeldar" and in discussing business with Robert Moore whom she saves from financial difficulties. Her independence makes it much easier to resist pressures from her worldly and insensitive uncle about when and whom she must marry. However, in spite of her privileged position, she is aware of other women's difficulties and, when making her will, she arranges that Caroline and

the Misses Sympson should have money left them to ease their passage through life and ensure self-sufficiency.

Emotional independence

Personal independence, then, depends on the possession of inherited wealth or of marketable skills. Even now, when divorce is commonplace and unmarried motherhood more socially acceptable, many girls are not seriously preparing for careers which will provide financial self-sufficiency. Eileen Byrne has campaigned over the years against "the domestic syndrone" which encourages girls, particularly the less academic, to concentrate on home economics and parentcraft and to veer away from more technical options. She sees this as depriving them of the educational base needed for further business or industrial training, and points out that even the supposedly work-orientated concentration on keyboard skills simply provides a passport into a low-paid clerical job with few promotion prospects. By accepting this mode of employment, a young woman is ensuring that remaining single is an undesirable option financially; she needs her own family or a husband to subsidise her income. If she does marry, her job is likely to be rated as less important than her husband's because she earns less. This leads to an unplanned career structure and an increased readiness to abandon paid employment in response to perceived family needs, an attitude which is still seen as responsible and appropriate, and which is, of course, reinforced by the general lack of adequate child care facilities. Charlotte Bronte was ahead of her time in showing married women as financially self-sufficient through work; both Frances Grimsworth in "The Professor" and Madame Beck in "Villette" combine the running of a boarding school with family life. As in earlier days, for modern girls financial independence makes emotional independence possible.

It is to be hoped that the National Curriculum, with its emphasis on equal opportunities, will at least help to combat the sex-stereotyping of particular subjects. It will be most beneficial if boys can be prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood and if girls can develop a practical interest and competence in technical subjects. In this way, further progress should be made towards weakening occupational stereotypes which are still pervasive and thus towards providing equal financial rewards. (It is interesting to note that even when a conscious effort is being made to break down stereotypes, posters recruiting girls to the masculine world of engineering frequently depict attractive blondes for whom modelling is clearly a viable second career!)

The Perils of spinsterhood

The possibility, indeed likelihood, of having to support herself

as an old maid was always present in Charlotte Bronte's mind. Being more ambitious and more in touch with the wider world than her sisters, she was perhaps more aware of the ridicule which such ladies sometimes provoked from men. In "Shirley", Robert Moore laughs at Miss Mann's Medusa like stare, and the benignant and saintly Miss Ainley is described as hideous. The young servant Martha claims all old maids are selfish, not realising that they might long for a family to care for. Caroline Helstone, suffering from unrequited love and lack of meaningful activity as a distraction, fears for her future. "I cannot believe that existence was - - meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many."[8] She doesn't blame men directly, but feels they should do more to improve the position of spinsters when "the marriage market is overstocked" and refrain from ridiculing young ladies who "scheme, plot and dress to ensnare husbands."[9] She reflects, "I believe single women should have more to do - - better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now - -. The brothers of these (unmarried) girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do; their sisters have no earthly employment but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting, and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better."[10]

Desperate to escape from her restricted life of suffering, Caroline begs to be allowed to seek paid employment, but receives a robust and chauvinistic response from her uncle. He is willing to gratify her "caprice" for a change of scene by paying for a new frock and a visit to a watering-place, but he tells her she is "unfit" (i.e. unqualified) for a situation as governess. He is to some extent responsible for this, having refused to allow her to learn French, as he regards most French writings as "frivolous and highly injurious in their tendency to weak female minds."[11] Mr Helstone feels it would reflect on his capacity as a provider if a dependent female were to seek to earn her own living. Genuinely perplexed by these foibles, he forbids governessing and urges Caroline to go away and amuse herself. "What with - my doll?"[12] she reflects rebelliously as she leaves the room.

The inadequacy and heartlessness of a system which prepares women for marriage and domesticity and little else is illustrated here. Male patronage becomes essential and ensures continuing dependence. The more conventional are encouraged to see a spinster as emotionally deprived and as a social failure. It requires courage of a high order to refuse even the most inappropriate proposal of marriage in such

circumstances. No doubt few would openly agree now with the views expressed by a writer in the Saturday Review in 1857. "Marriage is woman's profession and to this life her training - that of dependence - is modelled. A woman with no husband has failed in business."[13] Nevertheless, much attention is still given in girls' teenage magazines to the essential task of securing a man. Parents are still concerned about a son-in-law's prospects as a provider, and girls still see themselves very much as nurturers and carers, which accounts for the popularity (and low pay) of such careers as nannying, nursery and hotel work,

Female passivity - a continuing ideal

Recent research confirms these impressions. The OECD report "Girls and Women in Education" shows that even from infancy girls are treated differently from boys, encouraged to be more clinging and less independent, treated as fragile rather than robust, protected and cherished and given "a head start towards helplessness."[14] They are pressurised to be "feminine" rather than to achieve and tend still to be rewarded for the feminine traits of sweetness, neatness and obedience. These attitudes are often encouraged in infants' schools where conformist girls tend to be rewarded with the teacher's generalised approval. It has been shown that while boys demand more of the teacher's attention and tend to be disruptive, acquiescent girls are allowed to remain in closer proximity to the teacher and sometimes "over-helped" with tasks in a way which encourages later dependence rather than autonomy. Low-achieving boys tend to be challenged and stimulated whereas low achievement is more readily tolerated in girls.

It is interesting to contrast this with the independence encouraged in all the young Brontes a hundred and fifty years ago. Sex-stereotyping and adult direction were significantly absent in the creative activities which mattered most to them, although subject differentiation was present in their more formal curriculum, where the girls were instructed in domestic skills while Branwell studied the classics with his father. (If French was regarded as frivolous by Puritans like Mr.Helstone, the classical languages were seen as too demanding, which certainly limited female linguistic options.) However, Anne acquired the rudiments of Latin at some stage, possibly when the older children were needing less attention and Mr Bronte had time to spare or more likely through studying Branwell's text-books. Having been given this intellectual freedom,it is no wonder that the girls were

taken aback by the conventional attitudes of those around them when they emerged into the world, and that Charlotte scorned the products of conventional seminaries.

The results of the stereotyping openly canvassed in Victorian times and implicit in present attitudes can be summed up as follows. "Boys and girls are conditioned (largely unconsciously) by teachers as well as parents to behave in sex-stereotyped ways at school, to re-interpret the messages of the media to reinforce their own stereotypes and to interpret the reactions of teachers in ways that will provide further reinforcement."[15]

The "normative" approach

This "normative" approach, based on traditional assumptions about the nature of women, makes achievement more difficult for girls at any level though obviously more opportunities exist for talented girls in the professions and business than were available in the time of the Brontes. Many women prefer to regard these opportunities as fulfilling all the necessary criteria for equality. High achievers believe that, if they have succeeded against the odds, other women should be able to do so; others claim that they can happily accept dependence in return for the protection and support of a suitable male. For most women there seems to be some element of contradiction between being sexually attractive and being an alleged feminist in pursuit of career success. This dilemma is particularly apparent in adolescence when future roles are being determined. In the OECD report, it is pointed out that the adolescent task of preparing for a career and for personal independence is essentially male orientated and there is an extra problem for girls in reconciling the academic demands of school with those of the wider culture which approves of a more dependent feminine role. A "fear of success" has been documented by Horner when questioning intelligent women. Girls tend to be influenced by anxiety, particularly when in competition with boys, and have been known in mixed classes, to under-achieve from fear of alienating less intelligent boy-friends. This perpetuated the traditional belief that the really clever woman puts the preservation of her partner's fragile self-esteem above her own need for achievement. Such women follow the beliefs of Mrs Ellis, who wrote in 1862,"As women, therefore, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men."[16]

Others believed that no pretence about natural limitations was likely to be necessary. In "Shirley", the belief in the innate mental inferiority of females is described by Charlotte Bronte with a mixture of humour and indignation. Joe Scott, a devoted husband, was

nevertheless a bigoted believer in women's lack of political insight, business acumen and numerical skills. He refuses to discuss politics with Shirley. "I cannot argue where I cannot be comprehended."[17] He claims scornfully that Caroline Helstone was not only unable to do a small calculation but could not understand Robert Moore's patient explanation of the method. It is still unfortunately true that being hopeless at Maths is regarded as acceptably feminine, whereas fewer girls would perhaps be ready to confess to incompetence in Home Economics.

Another approach has concentrated on acquired rather than inherited traits. It accepts the existence of cultural differences between the sexes, but is relatively open-minded about their origins. In emphasising the differences between the sexes rather than their similarities, it encourages the continuing dominance of the male culture which is seen as the desirable norm. This is unfortunate for the less obviously aggressive male as well as for the achievement orientated woman, who tries to become more like the male stereotype. The Brontes themselves acknowledged that female achievers are often seen as having male characteristics by assuming apparently male pseudonyms, in the hope that they would be taken seriously as writers, and not be judged by pre-conceived ideas as to what was appropriate for women.

The rewards and penalties for conventional women

There are immediate rewards and satisfactions for women who are prepared to emphasise their overtly "feminine" qualities and to accept by implication a more passive and subordinate role. In return for their apparent submission to this ideal, attractive young women may enjoy a series of romantic involvements and flattering attentions and experience all the delights of flirtation and conquest. Ginevra Fanshawe, in "Villette", is presented as a frivolous and superficial girl of this type who wearies and irritates Lucy Snowe with her stories of amorous success, though we are left in no doubt of the quality of her future husband, the foppish and probably dissipated Count de Hamal. However, the length of this delightful period of freedom must be carefully calculated; in "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" Anne Bronte shows that Jane Wilson's belief in her superior merits and attractiveness causes her to become an embittered spinster at last.

In spite of their belief in the possibility of mutual and rewarding love, all three sisters show that marriage can be oppressive and restrictive, whether or not romantic attraction existed in the first place. Catherine Earnshaw finds marriage to the devoted Edgar Linton intolerably confining. Rosalie Murray, in "Agnes Grey", who marries for money and position, comes to hate and dread her husband and

desperately summons her ex-governess for company and consolation. Mrs Pryor, in "Shirley", who in her loneliness as a governess is attracted by the handsome but treacherous and cruel James Halstone, warns Caroline emphatically against the illusory delights of romance. She compares marriage with a marsh; romantic novels, she argues, "show you only the green tempting surface and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath."[18] Similarly, the gloomy and unpleasant Mrs Yorke is in the habit of quoting warning examples, "blood-red lights which she hangs out to scare young ladies from matrimony."[19] Her daughter, Rose, is however in the habit of thinking for herself. She announces that she will learn domestic skills because they will be useful, but insists that she must later fully exercise her faculties and God given talents. She argues that it is her duty to trade with her gifts. "Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will not deposit it in a broken- spouted teapot and shut it up in a china closet amongst the tea-things. I will not commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose - - - and least of all, mother, will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry and ham on the shelves of the larder."[20]

Women's need for personal fulfilment

Like Rose Yorke (whose equivalent in real life was Charlotte's friend Mary Taylor who pursued an enterprising career in New Zealand) the Bronte sisters wanted to develop their talents. Charlotte especially longed for travel in search of richer experience and broader horizons. However, they realised that domestic responsibilities must first be dealt with; they discharged these with competence to claim the rest of the time for their own writing and learning. Charlotte put the claims of family devotion and loyalty above her own need for self-expression and escape; when she felt she had selfishly acted against her conscience in returning to Brussels she saw her intense suffering as a merited punishment. Similarly she felt a man should perform his duty in the wider sphere of business; it was Branwell's singular failure to maintain himself with any credit or respectability, as well as his moral weakness, which caused her to be so bitterly disappointed in him. The sisters adopted an enlightened approach which is now theoretically accepted by many but practised only by the minority; they believed that both men and women, having fulfilled their varying responsibilities, were equally entitled to personal fulfilment as they were equal as human beings.

This is also the view put forward by modern feminist educators. It is necessary to challenge forcefully the "normative" approach which

assumes that "men and women are immutably different as between the sexes, but homogeneous within each sex."[21] The "equal but different" approach is dangerously misleading, showing all men (by implication) as logical reasoners and all women as intuitive pragmatists. This view was put forward by Havelock Ellis in 1934 who alleged that "the two halves of the race are compensatory in their unlikeness."[22] This overlooks the enormous differences in class, intelligence, wealth, cultural and geographical background which divide the population, and also dismisses the needs of a significant minority of the "untypical" of both sexes, who might include some of the most original and talented individuals. Conventional sex stereotyping is damaging as it limits human potential. Far from tacitly accepting it, schools should be actively working against it. The Australian schools commission of 1974 believed that "if schools fail to confront with analysis sex stereotypes conveyed through the mass media and their own curricula and organisation, they limit the options of both boys and girls and assist the procedures through which messages of inferiority and dependence are passed to girls because they are female."[23]

Changing views of women's role

It has, of course, been noted by historians that the idea of a woman's duty changes to suit the needs of society. In war-time it suddenly became possible for women to take over men's jobs on the land, in factories and in the professions and to combine working outside the home with family responsibilities. When the conquering heroes returned, jobs were required for them and women were expected to return quietly to a nurturing and supportive role, having tasted the pleasures of independence. With the labour shortages now predicted for the near future it is likely that the older married woman will again be much sought after through the provision of retraining courses and the lure of later retirement and more money in old age.

When women's assistance is required, their qualities are recognised and their roles are redefined. It is amusing to see that Mr Helstone, who patronised Caroline with the offer of a new frock instead of a job, regards Shirley and herself as capable of guarding the house when a Luddite attack on the nearby mill is planned. He addresses Shirley by her light-hearted nickname of "The Captain", admitting that "you bear a well-tempered, mettlesome heart under your girl's ribbon-sash" and he entrusts her with his pistols and the carving-knife, which Shirley can imagine using "if goaded by certain exigencies."[24]

In general, Bronte heroines assume a basic attitude of equality and show a healthy lack of subservience to men. Frances Henri in "The Professor" smiles triumphantly when Crimsworth is forced

to acknowledge her writing talent, and she insists on retaining her teaching employment after marriage. Helen Graham asserts her independence by leaving the debauched Huntingdon and maintaining herself and her son largely through the sale of her paintings. She returns only to nurse him through his final illness and to strive for his salvation through exhortations to repentance. Jane Eyre asserts her equality with Rochester in the well-known proposal scene, in spite of her plainness and poverty, "Do you think that because I am poor, obscure, plain and little I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! I have as much soul as you and full as much heart! - - I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities or even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit, just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet, equal - as we are!"[25] It is the Brontes' rebellious insistence on asserting their rights as human beings, while also fulfilling their duties as women, which so disturbed conventional Victorians. Charlotte felt strongly that men did not appreciate women's potential. In "Shirley" her heroine remarks, "The cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel, their bad woman almost always a fiend."[26]

As a result, women are most inadequately represented in literature. Shirley is humorous about Milton's presentation of Eve; she claims that his Eve, being incurably domestic, must be based on his cook and compares her activities with those of her own housekeeper Mrs Gill, making custards in the cool dairy in the height of summer. Shirley's own version of Eve is of a female Titan:- "The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, - the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, - the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence which could bring forth a Messiah."[27] She is therefore God's daughter in her own right, rather than a beautiful but morally frail companion created to meet Adam's need. She is a source of strength, life and courage and is noted for endurance -she does not cower away at the sight of God but talks with Him "face to face". The stress is on the fact that women are the source of male vitality and therefore both powerful and impressive, worthy of admiration rather than patronage. They are equal in God's sight. The implication is that each person should be considered as a moral being, irrespective of sex, and that individual greatness is possible for both men and women.

The bi-cultural approach in education

In other words, Charlotte Bronte would have favoured the modern "bi-cultural" approach in education. This is the model favoured by the writers of the OECD report on "Girls and Women in Education" which envisages compatibility between important aspects of the male and female cultures and stresses the common ground shared by individuals regardless of their sex. The emphasis here is on pupils as learners of a common body of knowledge or as developers of generally useful skills. It has already been suggested that the writing which formed the core of the Brontes' early educational experience was engaged in with little awareness of sexual differences in outlook or approach; they were all equally inspired by the arrival of Branwell's toy soldiers, which all four saw as imaginary characters rather than as military toys. Sexual relationships, as depicted in the sisters' novels, are based on warm involvement with a kindred spirit rather than on a more superficial or showy physical attraction which emphasises the differences between the sexes. Agnes Grey reverences the Christian kindness and superior mind of Mr Weston among many who are inferior; Lucy Snowe and Frances Henri enjoy intellectual discussion with their masters; Heathcliff and Catherine are almost literally inseparable and passionately assert their unity. Heathcliff desperately mourns Cathy: "I cannot live without my life; I cannot live without my soul,"[28] while Cathy tells Nelly, "I am Heathcliff."[29] This is the closeness of kinship rather than the attraction of opposites. This is further emphasised in the novels of Charlotte and Anne by the constructive partnerships between hero and heroine who delight in a shared enterprise, for example, running a school.

On the "woman question" the Brontes were certainly modern in outlook, believing that the sexes should be given equal opportunities in education and strongly resisting the restrictive stereotyping which limits female potential. All three recognised the need for financial independence and worthwhile occupation for women regardless of their marriage prospects. Above all, all three never gave up striving to develop their own powers to the full for personal satisfaction rather than for literary fame or social approval. They subscribed instinctively to the belief in education for personal growth and fulfilment for both sexes which is surely the basis of a liberal and enlightened system. In this way they rebelled wholeheartedly against the conventions of their era.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION: THE CONTINUING TENSION BETWEEN REBELLION AND CONFORMITY IN EDUCATION

A study of the educational development of the Bronte sisters leads to an increasing awareness of the constant tension between the needs of the individual and those of the social system to which she belongs.

Education is a process of self-development but also of adjustment to outside demands. Through it we learn to integrate ourselves with the existing system as far as possible; if this proves too difficult, we reject the system (through resistance or withdrawal) or attempt to alter it to suit our needs. Even the most enlightened and well-administered regime does not suit everyone all the time; the aim of the educator should be to establish a system which strikes a balance between reinforcing social imperatives and meeting individual needs.

Educators who believe in the essential goodness of humanity will tend to stress education for personal fulfilment and allow children to develop without undue restraint, believing that adults reared in this way will in fact contribute positively to society. In the present context, Mr Bronte represents this kind of approach. Educators who feel that children are wilful, selfish and even sinful will concentrate on training them to conform to established and absolute standards of behaviour. It has been established that Mr. Carus Wilson expected this kind of conformity from the pupils at Cowan Bridge.

There is necessarily, in all but the most unstructured and permissive institutions, an insistent pressure on the pupils to accept the prevailing values and existing norms of behaviour as represented by the school. It is therefore essential that these values are enlightened and that the school inculcates a civilised code of behaviour; it must contain and guide pupils without repressing them and it must be sufficiently adaptable to respond to the changing needs of society and to those of exceptional individuals.

It has been argued that Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head and the Pensionnat Heger at Brussels began at least to approach this ideal.

Inevitably, though, even in excellent institutions, some pupils will be temperamentally unsuited to aspects of the regime and will question some of its values. It is the duty of the educator to see that, if possible, the positive aspects of the system are widely recognised by the pupils and that the benefits of cooperation outweigh the disadvantages. The educational process has clearly failed to some extent if attitudes are allowed to harden and a pupil emerges either as an automatic rebel or as an unthinking conformist. However,

even the apparently well-adjusted individual is not necessarily a civilised or fully responsible human being; it all depends, as indicated, on the quality of the regime into which she has integrated herself. Rebellion is not only an inevitable part of growing up; it can also be a valid and constructive protest against an unjust and insensitive system.

Constructive rebellion

The Brontes were not really well-adjusted members of Victorian society, although they often made dutiful efforts to conform. The issues which prompted them to rebellion would, however, seem appropriate in modern times. They protested against repressive, intolerant and even cruel interpretations of Christian doctrine and ideals, and questioned prevailing social conventions. Anne, in particular, objected to the crude callousness and moral depravity of some members of the esteemed upper classes, and protested against the corrupting effect of much apparently sophisticated behaviour; This is illustrated in the discussion of "Agnes Grey" and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" in Chapter Seven. In addition, all three sisters unhesitatingly rejected the restrictive feminine stereotype of the period. Their insights were perceptive and their questionings dangerously outspoken.

They were, in fact, constructive rebels who also chose to protest on behalf of others. Charlotte's outburst against Miss Wooler before she and Anne left Roe Head in 1836 was inspired by her fear that Anne's health had been neglected; when Tabby, the old servant at Haworth, broke her leg, all three girls went on hunger strike to prevent her removal from the parsonage. The sisters also protested when their academic progress seemed threatened. It has been shown in Chapter Five that Emily argued with M.Heger over his teaching methods, fearing a restrictive literary regime and that Charlotte, at fourteen, urged Miss Wooler to allow her to start in the upper class and make up the gaps in her knowledge through independent study. These examples show how rebellion can be constructively channelled to stimulate creativity and to enhance achievement.

Unfortunately, on the negative side, the Brontes' educational experiences also show how pupils can suffer under repressive and inappropriate systems, as at Cowan Bridge, when disenchantment and covert rebellion are encouraged. It is also apparent, from their own efforts as teachers, that even highly intelligent and well-meaning women can fail to be really successful as teachers and to bring out the best in their charges. After reflecting on their struggles, it seems relevant to mention several key factors which encourage positive

conformity in girls' education. Positive conformity would imply willing cooperation and even commitment by pupils, on the understanding that constructive questioning of the educational process would be allowed and even encouraged, and that modifications in practice might well result.

Factors encouraging positive conformity in girls' education

Shared values

For education to be successful, it must be highly valued by both the student and society. Charlotte and Emily acquitted themselves superbly in Brussels because they both realised, in their different ways, that this was a unique and unrepeatable opportunity. They were fortunate that this attitude was fully shared at home and that investment in education was given high priority. For pupils to be really well-motivated, it is important that there is no serious conflict between the outlook of the family and the values of the school or of the privately employed instructor. There must also be recognition of the important role of the teacher and respect for her authority, both by parents and by society. If teachers are ill-paid and regarded merely as child-minders or trainers of the work-force, the whole system is undermined.

Negotiated curriculum

In addition, the education offered must be appropriate to individual needs and therefore generally stimulating and enjoyable. The Brontes were most successful when institutional education was modified slightly to suit their requirements, as in Brussels, and they were able to negotiate some aspects of their own curriculum so that it suited their aptitudes and abilities. The value of this approach is now, of course, widely recognised, with time for individual consultation built into many study programmes. However, this sort of discussion and compromise is impossible without good teacher-pupil relationships based on mutual trust and respect. It has been shown how these form the basis of a successful institution, for example at Roe Head, and that they can help to modify the rigours of a less favourable regime, as depicted in "Jane Eyre" at Lowood. To argue for a negotiated curriculum is not to support the over-indulgence sometimes involved in a completely pupil-centred approach. As indicated in Chapter Five, where the Brontes' literary education with M.Heger was examined, discipline is necessary as well as enjoyment. Patience and application is required in order to master skills, and a willingness by pupils to accept guidance from those with greater knowledge and experience is essential for successful progress.

Avoiding the stereotype

Stereotyped social attitudes about what is seen as appropriate behaviour for men and women can also frustrate and handicap independent and capable girls who wish to pursue demanding careers. Many of these restrictive attitudes are based on unexamined assumptions which are never clearly expressed, but they exert a powerful influence at a crucial stage where girls are anxious for social approval and the emotional support of the peer group. Any suggestion that it is unfeminine for girls to be socially assertive and intellectually capable, particularly in science and technology, should be strenuously resisted. Girls should also be encouraged to take on organisational and leadership roles in school. For these reasons, there are strong arguments in favour of single-sex education during these formative adolescent years.

Examining and questioning the moral orthodoxy

The rejection of the religious bigotry encountered by the Brontes, while most welcome, has left some schools rather uncertain about the requirements of moral and religious education. It is likely that many modern secular schools are not giving children a clearly defined moral code against which to measure their beliefs and behaviour. If pupils are to question constructively, they must have some system to challenge which claims to influence behaviour as well as to offer a theoretical set of beliefs or values. If there is no definite assertion of moral imperatives as well as social requirements and no firmly enforced code of conduct, pupils can drift into a state of moral anarchy and indifference towards the needs of others in the wider community, questioning any rule which causes them personal inconvenience.

Meeting the special needs of the able

The possession of exceptional talent is sometimes likely to encourage rebellion, or negative withdrawal through boredom. Charlotte and Emily, in particular, were frustrated by the stupidity and mediocrity of their companions and later, their pupils. While such apparent arrogance and intolerance can be infuriating and arouse resentment, it is necessary that teachers should be able to recognise its cause and respond appropriately. This again emphasises the importance of retaining the flexibility to cater for individual needs and abilities within a well-organised system.

The Brontes were of course, exceptionally creative individuals. In spite of their disciplined approach, their thirst for knowledge and their respect for education they were not, as has been shown, complete conformists and were unable to accept many of the values of contemporary society. Effective education should produce individuals who are not

only able to achieve their personal goals and to function effectively in society but also to channel their non-conformist instincts towards beneficial reform. For this reason, the present fashion for a largely skills based approach to education, with its emphasis on preparing for the world of employment, should be viewed with some caution in case it over-stresses the importance of the system at the expense of the individual. The chief aim of education must remain the development of each pupil's potential. Ultimately, the emphasis should be on the need for personal growth rather than on the need to be useful to society, though in the most effective systems these aims will be complementary.

A continuing dilemma for modern girls

As has been shown, the Brontes found that the approach which concentrated on fulfilment of their personal intellectual needs was the only successful one for them. While they attempted to conform and to prepare themselves for their role as teachers or governesses in Victorian society, they were rebelling not only against rigid institutional frameworks but also against the narrow ideas about morality and the role of women held by many of their contemporaries. It is arguable that girls today face an even more difficult situation. On leaving school, they are presented with conflicting images of womanhood. They are expected to develop qualities of feminine unselfishness and subservience and enhance their sexual attractiveness, but they must also be able to earn an independent living when required and exercise their academic and practical talents in what is still, in many respects, a man's world.

An effective education encourages girls to become aware of these rival claims, to establish a personal system of priorities and possibly to achieve some kind of compromise between the need for personal independence and the establishment of close family ties. It is essential, though, that they should continue to question a system which gives them little practical help in solving this basic dilemma, and which makes it easier for men than for women to achieve success without breaking the rules imposed by convention. In the end, the Brontes, in spite of their strong sense of duty and iron self-discipline, broke the rules through adopting male pseudonyms and writing outspoken novels which shocked the conventional. They directed their rebellious impulses into works of abiding interest which helped to explore the tensions which existed in their own lives and which we are still struggling to resolve.

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    3) There is no Saviour but Jesus Christ - how shall children believe without an instructor?
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(quoted from Southey's Life of Wesley.)
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Sweet are thy strains, Celestial Bard
And oft in childhood's years
I've read them o'er and o'er again
With floods of silent tears.
The language of my inmost heart
I traced in every line;
My sins, my sorrows, hopes and fears
Were there - and only mine.
Yet, should thy darkest fears be true,
If Heaven be so severe,
That such a soul as thine is lost -
Oh! how shall I appear?

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5. Charlotte Bronte: Jane Eyre p 386
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Note : When used in the Bibliography or references, B.S.T. is the abbreviation for Bronte Society Transactions.

APPENDIX

Ch. Brontë March 30, 1843

Exercise in style corrected by her professor, M. Constantin Heger.

Original manuscript in the possession of the Heger family.

THE FALL OF THE LEAVES

WHAT IMPRESSION does one receive on reading the piece entitled "The fall of the leaves"? It is not easy to answer this question clearly in a single reply, for one does not always feel the same impression. The first time one reads one experiences a vivacious impression; the second time, and always afterwards, a sad one.

Why does this difference arise and how can a lament so touching produce a sentiment rather lively than sad? I am not sure, but it seems to me that the first time, one experiences the joy of a miner who has just found a diamond of great price and the second time, one yields to the soft melancholy of the listener to a plaintive song. Whence comes this double impression? What is the source of this influence whose power is proved by the vivid emotions which it excites in us?

To search for the cause which produces such a remarkable effect, is a useful labour, first, because it exercises the mind in reasoning and secondly because it can lead us to an advantageous end The mechanic who sees an ingenious piece of machinery examines carefully all its parts, he tries to perceive the principles which have regulated its construction; and we, when we see a perfect work of the mind, can we not make the same examination and by dissecting the details try to discover the secret of their union? It is by study that the mechanic learns to invent, and by employing a similar method, can we not reach a similar end? Nevertheless since this last result is not altogether certain, let us not flatter ourselves too much with the hope of succeeding in it, for fear of finding ourselves in the position of the German student who thought he was learning to create, when he learned to dissect.

What aim was Millevoye proposing to himself in writing "The fall of the leaves"? He was proposing to express by written words* *in* what a young man experiences who, still young, feels within himself *developing within him* the warnings and the signs of a near and inevitable death. Of what warning, signs, exterior *the fatal germ* means has he availed himself to develop the idea which he has conceived? Has he not first set himself to think what time and *should* place he should choose in order that the beginning shall be the *why*

just prelude to all that was to follow? In choosing Autumn as the time has he not said to himself "I choose it because it is the season consecrated to melancholy, when the leaves fall, the flowers fade, the days shorten and the brief twilights announce long dark nights? In choosing a wood for his scene has he not recalled that it is in the woods that the ravages of Autumn are the most visible; it is there that the earth veils itself in leaves which the trees have thrown down, that the last flowers appear pale and languishing between the ivy and the dank moss carpeting the roots of the old trees, that the winds, the sombre winds of the South, make heard

good
isn't it also this wind which ripens poets and yellowed leaves

sketched

their saddest sighs? Having thus prepared his canvas and traced the first rough outlines of his sketch, has he not then carefully sought out those details and collected those images, suitable to make his main idea stand out clearly? Has he not carefully weighed each thought, considered thoroughly each accessory, skilfully balanced and adjusted each part of the great Whole in

a breeze sighs. The South winds complain shriek wail groan

sin in nothing

such a way that their union will present no sin against the master-

the art of writing

principle* of composition, the principle of Unity? Is that really the procedure which Millevoye followed? Is that the method which all great poets follow?

> *Chers enfants d'Apollon, âmes faites de feu!*
> "Souls made of fire and children of the Sun?"
> *Chers enfants d'Apollon, de feu comme leur père!*

Alas! I know not: it is for these great spirits alone to reply,

obscure

but there is one thing which I know well, because the assurance of it depends more on reason than on genius, it is that for novices in literature, for those who wish to imitate the great masters, this

could

method is the only one which can lead them to an achievement in

why?

(?) the smallest degree eligible: perhaps in following it they will never find anything but lead in their crucibles, but perhaps also if the sleeping spark of genius takes fire during the operation, a new light will illumine their minds, the true secret of Alchemy

barbarism pointed out before!

will reveal itself and their lead will transmute itself into gold.

Nevertheless, although I dare not dogmatise on a subject

very

so far beyond my range, perhaps I shall be permitted to speculate

suggests a comparison

on it a little. There are so many verses and so few poems, one is so often bored by reading extravagant nonsense which speaks only of flowers, scents, birds, rays of sunshine, or else of insensate passions or outrageous sentiments which do not touch the sensibility of the reader because they have never moved the heart of the writer; one is so tired of all these insipidities, one is so firmly

persuaded that man demands to satisfy the needs of his soul something other than the scent of flowers or the dreams of folly, that when one encounters what is really needed, wholesome and substantial nourishment, true and vigorous feeling expressed in simple and natural language, it is as if one heard the voice of a friend, one finds in oneself the echo of every word; one tells oneself it is well worth while to search for the origin of sounds so significant and so agreeable.

very good very true

I believe that all real poetry is only the faithful impression of something which happens or has happened in the soul of the poet; to compose a poem on a grand scale, an epic or a tragedy, of course design, learning and reason are all necessary, but, to write a little fugitive piece such as "The fall of the leaves," is anything else needed beside genius, co-operating with some sentiment,

which dominates

not clear

affection or passion? If, for instance, the sentiment possessing for *the soul* the moment the empire of our mind is sorrow, will not the genius sharpen the sorrow and the sorrow purify the genius? Together, will they not be like a cut diamond for which language is only the

very good

wax on which they stamp their imprint? I believe that genius, thus awakened, has no need to seek out details, that it scarcely pauses to reflect, that it never thinks of unity: I believe that the details come naturally without search by the poet, that inspiration takes the place of reflection and as for unity, I think there is no unity so perfect as that which results from a heart filled with a single idea; it would be as impossible for the torrent, swollen by

excellent

rains, hurled forward by the storm, to turn from its impetuous course, as for the man, moved by passion, broken by grief, to quit voluntarily his sorrow or his joy and to speak of matters which are foreign to them. The nature of genius is related to that of instinct; its operation (1) is both simple and marvellous; the man of genius produces, without labour and by a single effort, results to which the man without genius however learned, however persevering he may be, could never attain. The empire of genius is not confined within the limits of intelligence; it is above all in the heart that this king of the spirit has established his throne and it is in sharpening sensibility, in giving a great vivacity to the passions, a keen force to the affections, that he announces his presence and shows his power. If Millevoye had been a cold, phlegmatic, insensitive man, it would not matter if he possessed the learning of a hundred academies, the wisdom of a thousand philosophers, he could never have composed "The fall of the

(1) *a possible operation. but the fate of such a product would be that of all natural products—it is gold—others will fashion the gold in ingots. Virgil-Ennius—Plautus-Molière—Daubentin-Buffon.—C.H.*

no matter

leaves." The sense of affliction, feeble in his thought, would have been feebler still in his written words. But it is time for me to cease, and I perceive that I have as yet said nothing; *of the subject I wished to treat* I have attacked only the first point of my thesis *At the beginning of my thesis, I found in myself an* I have sinned in spite of myself, when I began I had the firm *idea, a conviction which insisted on being expressed—my conscience* intention of following the plan without allowing myself to stray. *demanded it—and conscience must be obeyed. I return now to my subject.*

* Words scored out on original.

OBSERVATIONS (by M. Heger).

Work does not make a poet: man does not make his own genius, he receives it from heaven—that is incontestable.

Machinery does not create force; machinery regulates its employment and multiplies by a hundred its effect.

Man does not know what genius is, it is a gift from heaven, it is something divine, one might say. It is the same with force, but imagine two men of the same strength, one without a lever, one with a lever. The first will raise a weight of a thousand pounds, the second, making the same effort, will uproot a plane tree.

Is a lever nothing?

Without a voice, there can be no singer—doubtless—but there can be no singer either without art, without study, without imitation.

Nature makes the painter—but what would he be all the same without the study of perspective—of the art of colours.—C.H. What artistic value would his pictures have, how long would they last.

Compare: wine—grapes—winepress uncultivated land—vigorous shoots—bitter fruit food—for the culinary art one does not improvise a dinner—but without a cook.

Without study, there is no art. Without art, no effect on men, since art is the summation of all that the centuries bequeath to us, of all that man has found beautiful, of all that he has found worthy to be saved from oblivion.

Genius without study, without art, without the knowledge of what has already been done, is strength without the lever, it is Demosthenes, a sublime orator, stammering and getting himself hissed; it is the soul which sings within, and cannot express its interior song save in a rough and raucous voice; it is the sublime musician who has only an untuned piano on which to make the world hear the dulcet melody which resounds in his mind's ears.

Certainly the lapidary does not make the diamond, but without the lapidary the finest of diamonds is a mere pebble.

Whether you are a poet or not, therefore, study form—If you are a poet, you will be more powerful—your works will live—If the contrary is the case, you will not create poetry, but you will enjoy with discrimination its merit and charm.

Ch. Brontë Le 30 mars 1843.

Devoir de style corrigé par son professeur M. Constantin Heger.

Manuscrit original appartenant à la Famille Heger.

LA CHUTE DES FEUILLES

QUELLE IMPRESSION ressent-on à la lecture du morceau intitulé "la chute des feuilles"? Ce n'est pas facile d'éclaircir cette question en une seule réponse, parce qu'on ne ressent pas toujours la même impression. La prémière fois qu'on le lit on éprouve une impression vive; la seconde fois, et toujours après, une impression triste.

Pourquoi cette différence et comment une plainte si touchante peut-elle produire un sentiment plutôt vif que triste? Je ne sais pas trop bien mais il me semble que la première fois, on éprouve la joie d'un mineur qui vient de trouver un diamant de grand prix et que la seconde fois, on se livre à la douce melancholie de celui qui écoute un air plaintif. D'où vient cette double impression? Quelle est la source de cette influence dont la force est prouvée par les émotions vives et variées qu'elle excite chez nous?

Rechercher la cause qui produit un effet si remarquable, c'est faire un travail utile, d'abord, parcequ'il exerce l'esprit au raisonnement et ensuite parcequ'il peut nous conduire à un but avantageux. Le mécanicien qui voit une œuvre ingénieuse, en examine bien toutes les parties, il tâche d'approfondir les principes qui en ont réglé la construction; et nous, lorsque nous voyons un ouvrage parfait de l'esprit, ne pouvons nous pas faire le même examen et en disséquant les détails essayer de découvrir le secret de leur union? C'est par l'étude que le mécanicien apprend à inventer, et en employant un pareil moyen, ne pouvons nous pas atteindre à un pareil but? Pourtant, puisque ce dernier résultat n'est pas bien certain, ne nous flattons pas trop d'y réussir, de peur de nous trouver dans la position de cet étudiant allemand qui croyait apprendre à créer, en apprenant à disséquer.

Que s'est proposé Millevoye en écrivant la chute des feuilles? Il s'est proposé d'exprimer par des paroles écrites* ce qu'éprouve un homme, qui, jeune encore, sent chez lui les présages et les signes d'une mort prochaine et inevitable. De quels moyens s'est-il servis pour developper l'idée qu'il avait conçue? Ne s'est-il pas d'abord mis à penser quelle époque et quelle scène il fallait choisir afin que le commencement soit le juste prelude de

en symptômes

se developper en lui le germe fatal

présages, signes, } extérieurs

fût

pourquoi?

tout ce qui doit suivre ? En choisissant l'Automne pour époque ne s'est il pas dit " je le choisis parceque c'est la saison consacrée à la melancholie, où les feuilles tombent, les fleurs se flétrissent, les jours se raccourcissent et les crépuscules brefs annoncent des nuits longues et sombres ? En choisissant un bois pour scène ne s'est-il pas rappelé que c'est dans les bois que les ravages de l'Automne sont les plus visibles ; c'est là que la terre se voile des feuilles que les arbres ont jetées, que les dernières fleurs apparaissent pâles et languissantes entre le lierre et la mousse humide tapissant les racines des vieux arbres, que les vents, les sombres Autans, font entendre leurs plus mornes soupirs ? Ayant ainsi préparé son canevas et tracé (*arrêté*) les premiers rudes contours de son esquisse, n'a-t-il pas soigneusement cherché les détails, rassemblé les images, propres à faire ressortir son idée principale ? N'a-t-il pas bien pesé chaque pensée, bien considéré chaque accessoire, bien mesuré et ajusté chaque partie du grand Tout de manière que leur réunion ne presentât nul péché (*péchât en rien*) contre le maître-principe (*l'art d'écrire*) de la composition, le principe de l'Unité ? Est-ce bien là le procédé qui suivit Millevoye ? Est-ce la méthode qui suivent tous les grand poètes ?

bon
n'est-ce pas
aussi a ce vent
qui moissonne
les hommes
poétes et les
feuilles jaunies

le zèphire
soupire les
autans se
plaignent
grondent
hurlent râlent
mugissent.
C.H.

Chers enfants d'Apollon, âmes faites de feu !
" Souls made of fire and children of the Sun ? "
Chers enfants d'Apollon, de feu comme leur père !

Hélàs ! je ne sais pas : c'est à ces grands esprits seuls de répondre, mais il y a une chose que je sais bien, parce que l'assurance en, depend (*obscur*) plutôt de la raison que du génie, c'est que pour les novices en littérature, pour ceux qui veulent imiter les grands maîtres, cette méthode c'est la seule qui peut (*puisse*) les conduire à un but tant soit peu éligible : peut-être (*pourquoi ?*) en la suivant ne trouveront-ils jamais que du plomb dans leurs creusets, peutêtre aussi si l'étincelle dormante de génie s'allume pendant l'opération, une nouvelle lumière éclairera leurs esprits, le vrai secret de l'Alchimie se révélera et leur plomb se transmuera (*barbarisme déjà signalé !*) en or.

(?)

Cependant, quoique je n'ose pas dogmatiser sur un sujet tellement (*fort*) au-delà de ma portée, on me permettra d'y speculer (*appelle comparaison*) un peu. Il y a tant de vers et si peu de poèmes, on s'ennuie si souvent de la lecture d'extravagances qui ne parlent que de fleurs de parfums, d'oiseaux, de rayons de soleil, ou bien de passions insensées ou de sentiments outrées qui ne touchent pas la sensibilité du lecteur parcequ'ils n'ont jamais ému le coeur de l'écrivain ; on est si fatigué de toutes ces insipidités, on est si bien persuadé que l'homme demande pour satisfaire aux besoins de son âme autre chose que l'arome des fleurs ou les rêves de la

folie, que lorsqu'on rencontre ce qu'il lui faut une nourriture saine et solide, un sentiment vrai et vigoureux exprimé dans un langage simple et naturel, c'est comme si on entendit une voix d'ami, on se trouve en soi l'echo de chaque mot ; on se dit qu'il vaut bien la peine de rechercher l'origine de sons si graves et si doux.

très bon très juste

Je crois que toute poésie réelle n'est que l'empreinte fidèle de quelque chose qui se passe ou qui s'est passé dans l'âme du poète ; pour composer un grand poème, une épopée ou une tragédie, sans doute, il faut un plan, de l'érudition et du raisonnement, mais, pour écrire un petit poème fugitif tel que "La chute des feuilles," faut-il autre chose que le génie, coopérant avec un sentiment, une affection ou une passion quelconque? Si, par exemple, le senti-

pas clair

ment possédant pour le moment l'empire de l'esprit, est le chagrin, n'est-ce pas que le génie aiguise le chagrin et que le chagrin purifie le génie? ensemble, ne sont-ils comme un diamant gravé pour qui le langage n'est que la cire où ils estampent leur empreinte? Je crois que le génie, ainsi eveillé, n'a pas besoin de chercher des détails, qu'il ne s'arrête guère pour refléchir, qu'il ne pense pas à l'unité : je crois que les détails viennent tout naturellement sans que le poète les cherche, que l'inspiration tient la place de la réflexion et quant à l'unité, je pense qu'il n'y a pas d'unité plus parfaite que celle qui resulte d'un coeur rempli d'une seule idée : il serait aussi impossible pour le torrent, gonflé de pluies, lancé par la tempête, de détourner son cours impétueux, que pour l'homme, ému de passion, brisé de douleur, de quitter volontairement son chagrin ou sa joie et de parler des choses qui leur sont étrangères. La nature de génie tient à celle d'instinct ; son opération est à la fois simple et merveilleuse ; l'homme de génie

très bon

excellent

(1) (1) *opération*

produit, sans travail et comme par un seul effort, des résultats *possible, mais il en sera de ce produit là comme de tous les produits* auxquels l'homme sans génie quelque savant, quelque persévérant *naturels—C'est de l'or—d'autres la façonneront cet or en barres. Virgile-* qu'il soit ne pourrait jamais atteindre. L'empire de génie ne se *Ennius—Plaute-Molière—Daubenton-Buffon—C H.* borne pas à l'intelligence ; c'est surtout dans le coeur que ce roi spirituel a établi son trône et c'est en aiguisant la sensibilité, en donnant une grande vivacité aux passions, un vif élan aux affections qu'il annonce sa présence et démontre sa force. Si Millevoye

très juste

peu importe qu'il

avait été un homme froid, flegmatique, insensible, n'importe, s'il *eût*

avait possédé l'instruction de cent académies, la sagesse de mille philosophes, il n'aurait jamais composé "La chute des feuilles." L'impression de douleur, faible dans sa pensée, aurait été plus faible encore dans ses paroles écrites. Mais il est temps que je m'arrête et je m'aperçois que je n'ai encore rien dit ; *du sujet que*

je veux traiter
je n'ai entamé que la première question de ma thèse ; j'ai péché *tout au début de ma thèse, j'ai trouvé en moi une idée, une conviction*
malgré moi, au commencement j'avais bien l'intention de suivre *qui voulait se faire jour—c'était une exigence de ma conscience—et la*
le cadre sans m'en écarter.
conscience veut être obéie. Je reviens maintenant à mon sujet.

* Words scored out on original.

OBSERVATION.

Le travail ne fait pas le poète : l'homme ne fait pas son génie, il le reçoit du ciel—c'est incontestable.

La mécanique ne crée pas la force ; elle en eigle l'emploi elle en centuple l'effet.

L'homme ne sait pas ce que c'est que le génie, c'est un don du ciel, c'est quelque chose de divin dit-il. Il en est de même de la force. Mais supposez deux hommes de même force, l'un sans levier, l'autre avec un levier. Le 1.er soulèvera 1,000 livres, le second en faisant même effort, déracinera un platane.

Le levier n'est-il rien ?

Sans voix point de chanteur—sans doute—mais point de chanteur aussi sans art, sans étude, sans imitation.

La nature fait le peintre—que serait-il cependant sans l'étude de la perspective—de l'art des couleurs.—C.H. Combien vaudraient, combien dureraient ses tableaux.

comparez--vin--raisin—pressoir terre inculte—jets vigoureux—fruits âpes. mets—pour l'art culinaire on n'improvise pas un dîner mais sans cuisinier.

Sans l'étude point d'art. Sans art, point d'effet sur les hommes, puisque l'art est le résumé de ce que tous les siècles nous léguent, de tout ce que l'homme a trouvé beau, de ce qui a fait effet sur l'homme, de tout ce qu'il a trouvé digne d'être sauvé de l'oubli.

Le génie sans l'étude sans l'art, sans la connaissance de ce qui a été fait, c'est la force sans le levier, c'est Démosthène sublime orateur qui bégaie et se fait siffler ; c'est l'âme qui chante au-dedans, et qui n'a pour exprimer son chant intérieur, qu'une voix rude et inculte ; c'est le sublime musicien enfin qui n'a qu'un piano discors pour faire entendre au monde la suave mélodie qu'il entend résonner en lui.

Certes la lapidaire ne fait pas le diamant, mais sans le lapidaire le plus beau diamant est un caillou.

Poëte ou non étudiez donc la forme—Poëte vous serez plus puissant—vos œuvres vivront—Dans le cas contraire, vous ne ferez pas de poésie, mais vous en savourerez le mérite et le charme.

Charlotte Bronte's "Le Nid,"
An Unpublished Manuscript. English Translation

When I was young, I liked very much to walk in a certain lane of a certain wood, either because it was lonely, or because I used to find there, in its season, the violet jasmine.

I remember a little discovery I made in that lane, one day in April 18... what does the year matter? The weather was mild, Spring had begun to open the flowers and to turn purple the sensitive buds hidden in them.

In the light foliage of a locust tree I saw a nest, and in the nest a bird, I do not know what kind; I only saw its head and its large, moist, and brilliant eye which seemed to be watching my every movement. The scene was framed in a wreath of pale green leaves and flowers white as snow. I approached; the frightened bird moved and I caught a glimpse of two eggs, pure as two pearls, half-hidden in the nest. I reached out as if to take them. (With its beak opened and gasping,) the bird fluttered its wings but did not fly away: it was trying to defend its treasure; its resistance, weak but intrepid, stopped me and overcame my cupidity.

It seems that I am speaking of a trifle: a bird's nest! It's only that I don't know how to express the thoughts and feelings that such a simple object aroused in my mind. Continuing my walk, I pondered the causes which had inflamed a creature, usually so timid and shy, with so much courage. I thought about the paternal goodness which shines in all God's works, about the infinite benevolence which has provided all His creatures with effective means of self-preservation. Very common these reflections, very worn, yet they will always be true.

I often visited that nest; at the end of fifteen days I saw no eggs. The young birds, escaped from their narrow prison, continually asked for the food their mother was happy to bring them. Often, while watching the untiring care of that bird for her young, I said to myself, miracles have not ceased. Everywhere on earth, always, one sees God present in His works. The bird's nest is but a line, a word in the huge book that Nature opens for the instruction of the entire human race, a book whose every page abounds with proof of the existence of God.

If the Atheist would study this book, he would soon find a remedy for the ulcer of scepticism which is eating at his heart. You say

that there are no more marvels on earth because God no longer shows Himself in a tabernacle of clouds or in a pillar of fire; yet look at the smallest flower, the puniest insect; you will see, in the delicate petals, in the wings of gauze, (marvels) of that divine hand which engraved the severe law of the Hebrews on tablets of stone, of the same all-powerful hand which gave to the mountains their foundations and to the seas their bounds.

Emily Bronte's "Le Papillon"

English Translation

In one of those moods which sometimes lay hold on use, when the world of imagination suffers the blight of winter; when the light of life seems to go out and existence becomes a barren desert in which we wander exposed to all the tempests which blow, without hope of rest or shelter - in one of those dark moods I was walking one evening on the confines of a forest. It was summer; the sun was still shining high in the west and the air echoed with songs of birds: everything seemed happy, but for me, it was only a semblance. I sat down at the foot of an old oak, among the branches of which the nightingale had just begun his vespers. "Poor fool," I said to myself. "Is it to guide a bullet to your breast or a boy to your little ones that you are singing so loud and clear? Hush this untimely melody, stay on your nest; to-morrow, perhaps, it will be empty." But why address myself to you alone? All creation is equally insane. There are those flies playing above the stream, swallows and fish diminishing their number each minute: these will become in their turn, the prey of some tyrant of air or water and man for his amusement or for his needs will kill their murderers. Nature is an inexplicable puzzle, life exists on a principle of destruction; every creature must be the relentless instrument of death to the others, or himself cease to live. Nevertheless, we celebrate the day of our birth, and we praise God that we entered such a world. In the course of my soliloquy I picked a flower by my side. It was pretty and newly opened, but an ugly caterpillar had hidden himself among the petals and already they were drawing up and withering. "Sad image of the earth and its inhabitants!" I exclaimed. "This worm lives only by destroying the plant which protects him; why was he created and why was man created? he torments, he kills, he devours; he suffers, dies, is devoured - that's his whole story. It is true that there is a heaven for the saint, but the saint leaves enough misery here below to sadden him even before the throne of God."

I threw the flower to the ground; at that moment the universe appeared to me a vast machine constructed only to bring forth evil: I almost doubted the goodness of God for not annihilating man on the day of his first sin. "The world should have been destroyed," I said, "crushed, just as I crush this reptile, which has done nothing during his life but make everything he touches as disgusting as himself." I

has scarcely taken my foot off the poor insect when, like a censuring angel sent from heaven, there fluttered through the trees a butterfly with large wings of gleaming gold and purple: it shone only a moment before my eyes, then, rising among the leaves, it vanished into the blue skies above. I was silent, but an inner voice said to me, "Let not the creature judge his creator, here is a symbol of the world to come; just as the ugly caterpiller is the beginning of the splendid butterfly, this globe is the embryo of a new heaven and of a new earth whose meagerest beauty infinitely surpasses mortal imagination. When you see the glorious outcome of what now seems to you so mean, how you will despise your blind presumption in blaming Omniscience for not having destroyed nature in its infancy."

God is the God of justice and mercy; then, assuredly, each pain that he inflicts on His creatures, be they human or animal, rational or irrational, each suffering of our unhappy nature is only a seed for that divine harvest which will be gathered when sin having spent its last drop of poison, death having thrown its last dart, both will expire on the funeral pyre of a universe in flame, and will leave their former victims to an eternal realm of happiness and glory.

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