Chapter III
The New Gothic in Charlotte's Novels

Charlotte Bronte, (1816 – 1855) replied in a letter (dated Nov 6th, 1847) to G.H. Lewes's criticism: "My work (The Professor) being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said it was original, faithful to nature but...I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in 'startling incident' and 'thrilling excitement', that it would never suit the circulating libraries..." Hence, maybe it was out of bitter desperation that Charlotte Bronte reverts to quite a plethora of sensational happenings in *Jane Eyre* (1847) --- happenings that could well be termed gothic as far as their extra natural traits were concerned. Thus, novels by Charlotte, like *Jane Eyre* or *Villette* were laced with quite a dose of Gothicism that brought the books closer to the hearts of the then-reading masses, thereby vouching for a considerable amount of popularity for them.

Like Caroline Helstone in *Shirley*, Charlotte, too was rather "wonderfully taken" with the preternatural bent of mind. "It seemed to open with such promise – such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded." (388) That probably explains why almost all her novels, even the fragment *Emma*, have at least something of the gothic in them. Each of Charlotte's novels is, in fact, a unit in itself. In each of them, the gothic unfolds differently.
In her very first novel, Charlotte had set out with the aim of telling a story which would be free from the "ornamented and redundant composition" and would adopt "what was plain and homely". Yet unfortunately as Charlotte herself says in the Preface to *The Professor*, "publishers in general scarcely approved this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical – something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy with a taste of pathos, with sentiments more tender, unworldly. "Thus, *The Professor*, supposed to be couched in a style more plain and homely than extravagant, was not really steeped in the sensationalism of the gothic. Yet, as said earlier, the inexorable pull of the gothic made Charlotte introduce some episodes that could well rouse the sense of the unusual and unnatural. Thus, when Crimsworth, the hero, loses his beloved, Frances Henri, partly due to the jealous machinations of a cunning Mlle. Reuter, and partly due to the vicissitudes of a cruel Fate, he runs from pillar to post hunting for her. Yet after tasting bitter failure for a whole month, he discovered her sitting at the cemetery beside the grave of her departed aunt. Life floods back to Crimsworth's overjoyed mind. Yet, the gothic sense of the uncanny lingers in the reader's mind to find life coming to him in such close proximity to death. In fact, Charlotte had grown up in a parsonage that was almost paved with gravestones. She grew up seeing life lying so close to death. Thus, there is nothing surprising in the fact that her hero should regain a new lease of life and love in no other place but a graveyard.

*Shirley*, written after a spate of criticism by G. H. Lewes against "too much
melodrama" in Jane Eyre does not carry much of the traditional, spine-chilling layers of the gothic in it. Shirley was mostly about the Luddite riots. Excitement is there in the episodes of direct confrontation between the millowners and the labourers. More than the gothic, the spirit of adventure dominates in the chapters where Charlotte describes the attack on the mill of Robert Moore and the great retaliation on the part of the owners. This, like many other incidents in the Bronte novels, was inspired by the numerous reports she gathered in her otherwise quiet childhood. Mrs. Gaskell in her biography records the incident that happened on the night of the 11th of April 1812, a Saturday, when rioters assaulted the factory called Rawfolds, in Liversedge, belonging to one Mr. Cartwright. Very like Robert Moore in Shirley, Mr. Cartwright had geared up his factory and house like a fortress, thereby ensuring an almost single-handed victory over the hundreds of attacking cloth dressers. In Shirley, Charlotte provides enough of the thrill through a graphic description of the Luddite riots. But as far as the gothic is concerned, there are no such pronounced instances except one or two mild touches where one comes across incidents of the torment that Caroline had to suffer when she was just a mite of a girl. These little hints too, come veiled as the flashback memory of Caroline. The term 'gothic' itself comes forth when Caroline pays a visit to Shirley's house in Fieldhead with her uncle. Charlotte describes the house as a gothic old barrack and outlines it somewhat in the fashion of an
old gloomy foreboding mansion:

Very sombre it was—long, vast, and dark; one latticed window lit it but dimly. Carved stags’ heads, with real antlers looked down grotesquely from the walls. This was neither a grand nor a comfortable house; within as without it was antique, rambling and incommodious. (191)

Now, if we tend to sit up with anticipation at this description, we will be in for disappointment. Because the novel contains no explicit gothicism, no further account of child torment and such other sensationalism. The austere and grave interior of Fieldhead Mansion is brightened up by the iridescent presence of the titular heroine. Thus Shirley, looked inside out, cannot really come up with more than only a few Gothic touches here and there. In fact, on a closer look, one even tends to find a style of writing that was almost un-Charlotte like, if the style that surfaced in Jane Eyre is to be called Charlottean. The initial chapters of Shirley often pivot round descriptions of tea parties and dinners where curates and parishioners dine together with implicit match-making purposes. Music played in the background. All this actually made Charlotte's Shirley often sound dangerously Austenesque. I say dangerously, because Charlotte, in a letter to G.H. Lewes dated the 12th of January, 1848, had voiced quite an adverse view to Austen's pretty, docile and very domestic
I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate, daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face, a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.

Yet, in *Shirley*, the first few chapters sound very like Austen's novels. It is only later, with the introduction of the character of Shirley in Chapter XI, that things change. The narrative mode changes. The 'bonny becks', 'moors' come in, long walks are taken and nature is celebrated in its gloom and glory, replacing the indoor scenes of the rectory, and its parties and gatherings. In fact, the presence of Shirley changes Caroline too. Caroline changes from a girl whose world revolves round her marriage with the man she loves — a very un-Charlottean girl — into someone who had an independent will of her own, who can afford to let marriage take a backseat and who can look after her responsibilities on her own. As Charlotte, the narrator observes ex cathedra, "It was Shirley's presence which thus transformed her"(289). Discussion on Caroline and Shirley as Charlotte's heroines will be taken up after an analysis of
Villette, since there is not much of the gothic in Shirley. In Villette, one finds that Madame Beck’s pensionnat takes on the shape of a haunted place as the ‘vague tale’ of ‘a black and white nun....seen in some part of this vicinage’...who was “buried alive for some sin against her vow” gradually develops. In fact, Lucy Snowe, the pale-faced, sober and plain-looking protagonist, while stealing up over to the attic of the pensionnat to read a letter from John in peace, freezes with terror as she spots “in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black and white, the skirt straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.” In this context, the warm arm of Dr. John was there for Lucy to lean on. Again, once when she was just hanging around the garden near old Methuselah, she caught sight of a ‘shadow’ which increasingly became ‘distinct and marked’ until it turned out to be ‘a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman’, who had no face, no features: all below her brow was marked with a white cloth; but she had eyes....” Eerie indeed! Once more the storyline skims the gothic when Charlotte launches into a description of Madame Walravens in Villette. The old lady emerges out of the gaping ‘arched passage’ of the desolate mansion, signalling her withered appearance with ‘a tap, tap, like a stick.”Weird as she was, this lady was no more than three feet tall, with no shape... she seemed to have no neck;... there were a hundred years in her features, and more perhaps in her eyes — her malign, unfriendly eyes, with thick grey brows above, and livid lids all round.” When she spoke it was in a hoarse voice “rather of a male than of a female of old age; and indeed, a silver
beard bristled her chin." What with her short, hunchbacked form clad in its folds of bright blue brocade vying with the riot of colours in the jewels on her 'skeleton' form, this witch-like figure struck Lucy as "Cunegonde the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy." And sure enough, Mme Walraven's very presence was punctuated by a "peal of thunder" as "a flash of lightning blazed broad over salon and boudoir." It was the "spell-wakened tempest" wreaking vengeance on the "enchanted castle."(403) As Annette Schreiber says 'Her appearance to Lucy reverberates with all the associations of the witches of folklore and nightmare.' (64)

But, the height of gothic probably comes in *Jane Eyre*. A close reading of *Jane Eyre* shows how densely Charlotte had steeped her work in the gothic. The gothic theme of incarceration comes in as little Jane Eyre, forced under punishment behind the locked doors of the 'red room' of which she had a mortal dread. This chilly, fireless room was where Mr. Reed had breathed his last — the very association turned it into a haunted house:

Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker's men; and since that day a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion (8).
This, coupled with the fearful tales of ghosts and dead men, lent a gothic terror to Jane’s tender mind, set to a crescendo by the mysteriously flitting lights on the ceiling. The objective correlative of this chilling event never fails to strike the reader’s mind. Mrs. Reed invariably falls into the groove of the gothic tormentress.

Once more, when Jane tries her luck as governess at Thornfield Hall, the place, not at all as formidable and eerie as Emily’s Wuthering Heights at first, gradually, acquires the character of a great gothic mansion with its own mysteries echoing through the passages of this ‘plague house’. (Pg 140) Then, the whole ambience of suspense and anxious apprehension comes to a head on the night of the great fire in the house. It was two in the morning when a blood-curdling, demoniacal laughter, followed by a ‘gurgle’ and ‘moan’, shattered the quietude of the night.

Again, on the night when Bertha Mason attacked, flogged and bit her brother Richard Mason, savagely, the moon reigned over the landscape --- ‘full and bright’ in its mystic, ‘silver-white and crystal’ clarity. The sharp, shrill, devilish scream, followed by the sound of a scuffle, a frantic call for help and then finally an ominous silence, brings in the typically gothic ambience. The gothic once more rears up in all its grotesqueness on the eve of Jane’s wedding night when Jane went through the horrifying experience of visualising a woman, ‘tall and large’, with thick dark hair, with a white ghoulish gown on beneath the ‘fearful’, ‘ghastly’, ‘discolored face’, the ‘savage face’ with purple swollen lips, and furrowed brows over bloodshot eyes. The apparition rends Jane’s marriage veil to shreds, horrifying Jane to distraction.

Again, the night Thornfield Manor was set on fire by Bertha Mason, the huge
conflagration of the burning manor house instills the intrinsic feel of the Gothic. The witch-like dishevelled figure of Bertha waving her arms and ululating like a banshee with her unkempt hair streaming behind her, raises the gothic uncanniness as she is silhouetted against the infernal flames of the fire.

In Charlotte’s novels, the gothic touch had an autobiographical base, too. Bertha Mason, for instance, the most gruesome of Charlotte’s gothic-like creations, had her semblance right in The Juvenilia collection of Charlotte. The childhood story, "The Fairy Gift", written in 1830, when Charlotte was just fourteen, has a hero who is given four wishes. Yet he receives as his second wish a horrible wife, huge, brawny and villainously strong, who attempts to strangle him and haunts the corridors and stairways of a great mansion in the true Bertha Mason style. On second thoughts, the character of Bertha Mason might have been modelled on the very personal yet horrid experiences that Charlotte had with her brother Branwell. Charlotte had seen her brother waste away before her eyes starting from his dismissal from the Robinson family in 1845, ending with his death in 1848. In her letters to Ellen Nussey, Charlotte states that it had become impossible to have visitors in the house because of Branwell's condition. But she doesn't make any clear statements about his exact behavior. But John Lock in his biography of Rev. Patrick Bronte gives some details that might have had to do with the making of Bertha Mason. For instance, Branwell once, in a comatose state, had set fire to his bedclothes, which his sister Emily extinguished by pouring pitchers of water on it. This might have been there at the back of Charlotte’s mind when she framed out
the night of the fire in *Jane Eyre*.

Branwell, again, had once been found by his father, lying in the churchyard. The seventy-year-old father had to lug him bodily back on his shoulders. Charlotte, who was at that time in Haworth, writing *'Jane Eyre,'* must have been stirred by ideas of paranoia and distraction, which found their way into her writings. Even Anne Bronte’s novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* too, seems heavily autobiographical from that aspect. Apart from being inspired by the biography of Byron by Thomas Moore and the book titled *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester* — Rochester being one of the most erotic poets of the eighteenth century — Anne’s book draws heavily from her own experiences. The ill effects of an excess of drinking and profligacy that she had witnessed in Branwell surfaced in the novel through the atrocities of Huntingdon and his gang.

II

But the conventional gothic almost fades out at this stage. As Charlotte Bronte was not out to write a typical gothic thriller, devoid of much of the intellectual side, maybe this was all that she could allow into her novels. The gothic is not allowed to penetrate more than the surface. Beyond that rise serious issues that set her novels in a class of their own — a class quite appropriately termed by Robert Heilman as “The New Gothic” (180). The commonplace Victorian ideals and norms
set out for women by a patriarchal society irked Charlotte. Women were supposed to be quiet, shy and coquettish, with infinite dexterity in sprucing themselves up, producing reams of embroidery, tending to the household and bringing up children. They were to be led happily by the nose by a set of ideals and rules framed out by their elders, fathers, brothers or husbands. This is precisely what the Bronte sisters hated. Emily had registered her protest by sketching out the defiance against suppression of desires through a paranoid Cathy. Charlotte voices her opinion through her singularly calm, independent, and strong-willed heroines. A sharper and more pointed snipe at the clichéd Victorian regulations for girls couldn't have been voiced in any other novel than in Charlotte's Shirley. In chapter XXIII of the novel, the dignified and elderly Mrs. Yorke clearly states in all the glory of her priggishness, that, 'It becomes... girls to be silent in the presence of their elders.' And her daughter the little Jessy, voicing what Charlotte must have dearly loved to assert, whips back: 'Why have we tongues then?' Charlotte utilizes her 'new gothic' mode to carefully raise the issues of the emancipation of women's mind and soul by creating free-spirited heroines.

Almost every single gothic episode in Charlotte shrouds ulterior layers of meanings and connotations that tend to plumb the unfathomable depth of the human, especially the female, psyche. Each episode can be read between the lines to reveal a separate, subcutaneous undercurrent of connotation, which entrances the mind. A careful analysis of Charlotte's novels shows that whenever she uses the gothic, she does it with the aim of revealing some grave truth or exposing some
social malady. Ernest Baker believes that nothing was farther from the minds of Charlotte Bronte and her sisters when they began writing novels, than the idea that they were heading a revolt or voicing a protest, though they had courage for anything (25). But to believe that they had no inkling of the fact that they were writing something revolutionary would probably be denigrating their creative faculties and self-analytic powers. Moreover, some ex-cathedra remarks on the part of Anne, in her Preface to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall vouches for the fact that writing novels to hold up the loopholes of society consciously and thus stage a mild literary revolt, was a part of their narrative aims:

I would not be understood to suppose that the proceeding of the unhappy scapegrace with his few profligate companions I have here (Wildfell Hall) introduced, are a specimen of the common practices of society: the case is an extreme one, ... but I know that such characters do exist, and if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain. (4)

She asserts her reformatory objective of writing fiction even further instead of writing with purely aesthetic aims:
... be it understood, I shall not limit my ambitions to ... producing ‘a perfect work of art’: time and talents so spent, I should consider wasted and misapplied. (4)

After a perusal of such strong-voiced comments, it is difficult to take it for granted that any reformative or protesting step on the part of the Brontes was unconscious. One tends to feel that, whatever they said, whatever gothic they used, had a purpose other than fruitless romancing. Charlotte in her novel often interposes the conventional gothic horror through grisly situations as in Jane Eyre or through spine-chilling tales of spectres as in Villette. Yet, a deeper analysis and a little bit of reading between the lines would reveal more of the new gothic than meets the eye. In Villette, the gothic sensation of terror, mystery and eeriness reaches a climax, and then one night, the whole episode is humorously deflated by the revelation that the much-dreaded apparition was none other than De Hamal in disguise, secretly out on a rendezvous with his beloved Ginevra Fanshawe. By doing this, Charlotte has the last laugh on the cliché Radcliffean and Walpolian mode of gothic novel. Charlotte underplays and dissolves the normal feeling of the gothic through laughter. Robert A. Colby remarks on this and calls it a step towards modernity:

This, her last word on the Gothic novel, is a laugh at it — and a laugh that liberates. Lucy Snowe, destroying the empty
vestments of the nun, is the heroine of the ‘new’ realistic novel,
sloughing off the trappings of the shadowy heroine of the ‘old’
romantic novel. (419).

Hence, Lucy becomes the heroine of the ‘new’ romantic novel — the ‘new gothic’.
In *Jane Eyre*, the conventional gothic abounds, as shown earlier in this chapter.
The red-room episode, the lunatic in the attic, the night of the fire, the appearance
of Bertha’s lurid figure before Jane on the eve of her marriage — all provide the
shudder of the gothic novels. Yet, the motive behind setting up the gothic holds an
interplay of subcutaneous symbolic implications that cannot be overlooked. As
Valerie Grosvenor Myer says, ‘*Jane Eyre* is full of metonymies and synecdoches’
(138). Among the most gothic of incidents in *Jane Eyre*, the red-room incident has
intrigued critics for ages. David Cowan, who chooses to categorise *Jane Eyre* as a
Freudian Bildungsroman tracing the various stages of Jane’s ‘libido development’,
interprets Jane’s incarceration in the red room as her ‘engulfment’ into the ‘great
Maw’ (33) of the red room. David Smith in his article ‘Incest Patterns in Two
Victorian Novels’, conceptualises the red room as a bedroom where Jane, in her
terror, kept her mind riveted on the memories of Mr. Reed, and thus, ‘not only
feared, but committed, in fantasy, incest with Mr. Reed’ (137).
Again, Elaine Showalter makes out a ‘paradigm of female inner space’ in the red
room, which to her, is replete with ‘its Freudian wealth of secret compartments,
wardrobes, drawers, and jewel-chest’ — all associated with the ‘adult female body’
(114). But, all these interpretations seem a trifle too far-fetched in their efforts to wring out Freudian sexual connotations, where sexuality was probably the last thing in Charlotte's authorial mind while framing out the red room episode. But, a close reading of the chapter reveals a set of images that reek of the fear of death. Little Jane finds associations of death in almost every aspect of the red room. For one thing, the furnishings of the room, ranging right from the curtains to the carpets were a deep damask red in colour, rousing the association of a blood-soaked cavity. Over and above that, there stood out against the red backdrop, the phantasmagoric shape of the bed, the easy chair, done in deathly pale white drapery. The idea of death looms large in Jane's mind as she stares round with fascinated awe at the blinds which were 'drawn down', like in a room where the dead are laid out, and the windows which were 'shrouded' in festoons. The association of death is underlined even more when she realized that the room was as 'chill' as a corpse as it seldom had a fire, it was 'silent' as death, for it was housed in a remote wing of the building. The eeriness is brought to a peak with Jane's memories of the dead Mr. Reed acquiring vividness around this room. The whole episode, if seen from the psychological point of view, spells forth all connotations of Jane feeling buried inside a place which, with all its associations of death, resembled a grave. The trauma of this experience surfaces through a kind of death wish that forms itself in her hapless child-mind on that fateful day:

What thought had I but just conceiving of starving myself to
death? That certainly was a crime: and was I fit to die? Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead Church an inviting bourne? (10)

This death-wish is fortified by her vision of the cushioned easy-chair done in white which seemed to Jane like a ‘pale throne’, rousing associations perhaps of the biblical throne in Revelation (XX,II) before the judgment of the dead. This contributes a lot to her ideas of death inside the red room. Thus, the gothic of the episode is modified and modernized by the psychopathological associations it carries.

Yet another episode where the new gothic of Charlotte comes to the fore with deeper psychic connotations and issues, is where Bertha Mason (quite a few chapters later) is found locked inside the attic. Bertha, locked and chained animal-like, epitomizes the extreme plight of women in a society which is busy stashing away every evidence of its guilt and wrongs. Bertha — a significant objectification of the ruthlessness, unscrupulousness and unethicality of Rochester — stands as the ‘scapegoat and victim of capitalist society’ (Grosvenor Myer, 142). Terming Bertha’s situations as the typical ‘Mad woman in the Attic syndrome,’ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar analyse Bertha Mason as the archetypal figure of ‘hunger, rebellion and rage’ (339). In every age, every society, women have had to rebel for their rights, yet more often than not, all they met with was humiliation in incarceration — physical or spiritual. 

Jane Eyre too, was close to Bertha, as a
woman, from that aspect. The same hunger, rebellion and rage burned in her too. Yet, while Bertha chose to reduce everything, including herself to ashes in her rage, Jane, the more civilized, controlled and genteel of the species, chose to win over those primal instincts through level-headed dignity, self-esteem and control. Bertha’s incarceration was physical, whereas Jane’s was spiritual. The asphyxiating claustrophobia that Jane suffered when she felt exasperated with unfulfilled desires and unrealized ambitions, she sought relief in long walks, or the exertion of her potentialities through painting or reading. She chose the positive way of dealing with life, thereby asserting her individuality as a human being and emerging victorious in her own way.

Unfortunately, Bertha chose the nihilist way of dealing with life. Her insanity symbolically brought out the animal in her in all her fury, thus shoving her towards a defeatist self-annihilatory end. Thus, the Bertha Mason episode, replete with symbolic connotations, transcends the conventional gothic to create the ‘new’ gothic.

Again, when Bertha appears like a monstrous apparition in Jane’s bed chamber on the eve of her marriage and tears her bridal veil apart, the gothic reigns. Yet, this event could be read between lines, too. Bertha with her enormous size, masculine strength and muscular, unfeminine build, resembles the archetypal figure of the male. Thus, when she bounds into Jane’s room and rips apart her bridal veil, it all carries the implication of a rape. It could be the symbolic representation of Jane’s dread which culminates in her repeated visions of an abandoned woman with an
infant in her arms — actually a projection of her own subconscious fear about herself.

In the new gothic novels by Charlotte, all tables were turned. The heroines, instead of being paragons of beauty and feminine charm, were all plain-Janes (Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Mlle Henri et al) with fiercely individualistic minds that could screw up the courage to transcend all norms to live up to their aspirations. Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell in her memorable biography, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* quotes the writer of the beautiful obituary article on 'the death of Currer Bell' regarding Charlotte's own views about the heroine of a novel:

She once told her sisters that they were wrong— even morally wrong— in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.

Yet, risky it was for Charlotte to project as her heroine a woman so plain that her suitor himself states ever so bluntly: 'you are not pretty any more than I am handsome' (*Jane Eyre*) Fielding had suffered failure by highlighting a plain-Jane of an Amelia in his novel of the same name (1751) even after the stupendous success
of the more flamboyant *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). But, Jane, the highly educated but socially and economically underprivileged heroine made her way to the heart of the reading public through her strong will, her daring morale and her artlessness of articulation. Right at the outset, Jane stands up to her aunt in an almost savage voice:

I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again so long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up: and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.' (31)

Even as a child, Jane never beats about the bush with any sham of piety as she voices her insight into reality --- an insight that rather clashed with the beliefs she had grown with:

'...my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell; and for the first time it recoiled, baffled; and for the first time glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood -- the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth; and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos, (75).
That ten-year-old child makes no bones about her enjoyment of the bloom of youthful health even when forty-five out of her eighty schoolmates at Lowood were falling prey to illness and dying. Surprising as it seems, she even goes to the extent of stating in a very matter-of-fact voice that, now that the ‘sick could eat little’, the ‘breakfast-basins were better filled’ (73). ‘Coarse ‘—probably — it would sound in Victorian yardsticks of decorum, but it is inexorably realistic, all the same. Jane’s unassuming frankness that endears her to the readers and sets her apart from most other contemporary heroines, comes up once again when she rejects the proposal of St. John Rivers because it is — of all things — merely spiritual ! Creating a woman who, in spite of being physically little endowed, dares to say such things in an age when women were supposed to be chastely bodiless, did need some mettle on the part of the creator, Charlotte.

Her Lucy Snowe in Villette, was plain-looking and even almost unlikeable at times with her priggishness and certain morbidity of spirit, coupled with a lack of the emotional toughness that Jane Eyre had. But she grips us all with a graphic depiction of her journey through spiritual loneliness towards emotional triumph.

Charlotte's heroes too, for that matter, were not always the brave brawny princes of deliverance. Instead, we find big, hunky, rough-looking Byronic men like Rochester, who is found maimed and very submissive at the end. We find M. Paul, the ‘dark little man...pungent and austere’ (136),who seems be drawn in the shadow of M. Heger, with whom Charlotte fell in love in Brussels. He is as Lucy observes an ‘autocrat’ by nature, jealous and had a mercurial temper. Yet he had a
heart of gold. That was what made him look after Justine Marie’s mother, waspish grandmother and servants. That is what made him gift Lucy with the prize of her lifetime—a pensionnat of her own. Crimsworth in *The Professor* is not half as handsome as his brother Edward. But he had an intellectuality that outdid his brother’s good looks by far. His ideals are of ‘ideality, self-esteem, conscientiousness’ His sentinels are ‘Caution, Tact, Observation’.

Thus, this was a new sort of gothic trait that Charlotte intended to imbibe into her novels. As Penny Boumelha aptly sums it up, in Charlotte’s novels “...it was the function of the gothic to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions; in a word, to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being. It became then a great liberation of feeling.” Naturally, Charlotte was not using the gothic just for the sake of writing a sensational tale. Rather, the gothic often was made to play second fiddle to many other essential narrative techniques opening out “horizons beyond social patterns... and institutionally approved emotions.” The gothic was there only to mellow down the sharp edges and crudities of the old conventions. Bertha Mason, for instance, in *Jane Eyre*, is a serious indictment, in person, against a society that torments and twists normal women into Bertha Masons and then quarantines them in ‘attics’. The gothic ambience only softens the harshness of this accusative attitude.
Writing in an age that meant women to be more seen-than-heard, Charlotte stood up for a fierce individualism in women through portrayal of heroines in a totally offbeat manner. Charlotte’s heroines were meant to fight it out in life. "I resisted all the way" — that is how the second chapter of *Jane Eyre* begins. And that is exactly what Jane or any other Charlottean heroine for that matter, was fated to do. Unprotected by any social position, family or independent wealth, the seemingly powerless, “small, plain and Quakerlike" Jane would carve her way through the whole novel — against her destiny, against norms and psychological inhibitions and dilemmas.

All of Charlotte’s women were invested with an outlook that could well be dubbed feministic. Jane Eyre yearns for the untravelled route, she burns with the desire to mount the distant hills and to break out of the shackles of a routine existence: “I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer.” (82) Lucy Showe in *Villette*, too was raring to fight her way out in life:

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single handed. I pondered how to break up my winter quarters — to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to encounter: too
In *Professor*, Frances Henri, with her clear thoughts and ideas, is just what Charlotte wanted to see herself as. She was as individualistic as Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe—she had the fieriness of Jane, the scruples of both Jane and Lucy Snowe but was less a slave to her passions and emotions than them.

This passion for romantic nympholepsy grips all of Charlotte’s heroines. Jane’s hunger to be the ‘lady’ that she really was had driven her on in the course of life. In *The Professor*, Frances will ‘hold’ her job ‘fast’, for she abhors the thought of being ‘kept’ by Crimsworth. Far from being complacent about her position, she frets because she earns only a “miserable twelve hundred francs” while her husband gets a considerable eight thousand francs a year. She knows that she can do better and she resolves to show what she can do. She proposes to start a school—an idea that reminds one straightway of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, who ends up running her own pensionnat.

Set against the very marriageable heroines of the conventional gothic tales, Charlotte or Anne’s heroines nursed unconventional ideas about marriage. A heroine of the Victorian era though she was, Frances in *The Professor* states in no ambiguous terms that “if a wife’s nature loathes that of the man she is wedded to, marriage must be slavery. Against slavery all right thinkers revolt....”

In *Jane Eyre*, too, marriage is not the definition of shelter for the woman; on the contrary, one has this feeling that the end of the novel witnesses Rochester finding the solace of his life through his marriage to Jane. Indeed, Jane stands out as the
mistress of the house. Her inheritance places her on monetary independence, while Rochester's blindness renders him rather dependent on Jane. Jane partly acts the Delilah to the Samson-like Rochester with his shaggy thatch of over-grown hair as she sets about cutting his 'thick and long uncut locks' (441). The only difference is that unlike the former, Jane doesn't weaken Rochester; on the contrary, she 'rehumanises' him through a sort of metamorphosis from a beastly, unkempt creature. Rochester, punished providentially through blindness, for his guilt of adultery, is the one who now depends on Jane. One has a hunch that Charlotte opted for an end that would show Rochester, the dashing hero, maimed, so as to strengthen Jane's position all the more. Jane, through her financial independence denies Mr. Rochester even the superiority of wealth. She won't have to depend on his money and be "dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester", or sit "like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily around" her. (268). Jane sounds totally in control as she announces, not without a dash of pride, to Rochester:

I told you I am independent, Sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress (440)

The sort of aversion at being prettified in glittering jewels and rich clothes shows up in Anne Bronte's Helen Huntingdon too in Chapter XXIV of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where she has the unpleasant experience of hearing her husband’s wish that she should "sparkle in costly jewels" and do herself up "like a painted butterfly" before being displayed to society. Anyway, coming back to Charlotte, the ultimate materialization of Jane's marriage to Rochester re-asserts the note of equality
between man and woman. Right when Rochester finally proposes marriage to her, she says, "...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" (253) Later on, after she marries Rochester, now hamstrung by blindness, she asserts—"I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine." (456) In the last chapter, she declares blandly, 'Reader, I married him'. The implication which comes out as clear as daylight is 'I married him ---- not that he married me'. What greater triumph could there be for the orphan, the governess, the small plain and 'Quaker like' virgin?

The only exception to the typically Charlottean women seems to be Caroline Helstone in Shirley. Though not the heroine ,Caroline provides an extreme foil image to the free-willed titular heroine ,Shirley. Caroline more like the conventional Victorian girl, basks in her first love for Robert Moore.

Unlike most of Charlottean women, this girl is quite beautiful:

To her had not been denied the gift of beauty......she was fair enough to please even at the first view... Her mouth was very pretty; she had a delicate skin and a fine flow of brown hair, which she knew how to arrange with taste ; curls became her, and she possessed them in picturesque profusion. (71)

What a far cry from the staid, pallid ,straight-haired, plain Jane or Lucy is Caroline .
This girl seems at first a total oxymoron to the likes of Jane Eyre. This girl seems to be made for marriage. While Jane Eyre in the novel of the same name declares with self-satisfaction: 'Reader, I married him', Caroline dreams away about how good a wife she would prove to be... if he did marry me '(95). Yet, when her reverie breaks she suffers in the unrequital of love, and pines away in the dumps of dejection:

"I shall not be married, it appears;" She continued."I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of ...What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?" (171)

For Caroline, then, being married is the be-all and end-all of life. Having a husband and rearing children seems to be the sole worthy occupation for women. That is what they are created for. The home and hearth are the only places they belong to. When Caroline seems to have failed in love she turns to "governessing". But, she yearns for a job not because she desires independence and wants to be her own mistress, but because a job elsewhere would be an escape route from pressing despair. A direct contrast to Caroline's character is that of Shirley. Shirley, a moneyed estate-owner has a status, a will and freedom of her own. To her, as well as to the other Charlottean girls, marriage is not the most important aim in life.
Shirley, as Mrs. Gaskell points out in her biography of Charlotte, was very much like Emily. Emily was supposed to be generous, passionate and withdrawn in temperament, with a propensity towards unpredictable mood-swings. And so was Shirley. One marks how in chapter XX of Shirley, the heroine sees red one moment because the carelessness of her servants in showing hospitality to the injured mill workers irked her, but the next moment, when things were set right, her face beamed with smiles.

... Shirley moved away from her friend and stood at the hall window, silent, unapproachable....The purple flush which painful excitement kindles on a pale cheek glowed on hers; the spark which displeasure lights in a dark eye fired her glance. (348)

Yet all the temper simmers down when Caroline and the others worked hard to mend the damage:

A chance glance and smile from Caroline moved Shirley to an answering smile directly. The former was carrying a heavy basket up the cellar stairs. "This is a shame!" cried Shirley running to her "It will strain your arm". She took it from her and herself bore it out into the yard. The cloud of temper was dispelled when she came back; the flash in her eye was melted; the shade on her forehead vanished. (349)
These moody flickerings of temper were what made her character so closely similar to Emily's. Shirley was totally in control of her own life. Unlike Caroline, her life did not revolve round home, hearth and marriage. In fact, so little of the conventional femininity is there in Shirley, that Charlotte even jocularly portrays her as a man at times. In chapter XIV, when Shirley presents a plan for the expenditure of 300 pounds that she had donated for the welfare of the poor, she commands the gathering, that includes the Rector, with humorous vivacity:

You must regard me as Captain Keeldar, today. This is quite a gentleman's affair...(264)

And as the meeting breaks up satisfactorily after a toast of good wine, Charlotte in her tongue-in-cheek omniscient narrative observes:

Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste; the compliment charmed him. It had been his aim to gratify and satisfy his priestly guests. He had succeeded and was radiant with glee. (266) (emphasis mine).

This downright and carefree demeanour of Shirley had its own effect on Caroline. The hitherto marriage-prone, feminine Caroline with her sole aspiration trained towards becoming the good wife of a loving husband, started thinking in feministic
lines. She outgrew her sterile ideas of life revolving round sewing, kitchening, housekeeping, marrying and child bearing, so much so that she screwed up the courage to dart challenging questions at the male part of society, which she realized was responsible for the suppression and degradation of women through the ages:

Men of Yorkshire! Do your Daughter reach the royal standard? ......Can you help them reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! Look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids--envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them;....Fathers! Cannot you alter these things? ...then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuvre, the mischief-making tale-bearer...

Cultivate them--give them scope and work; they will be your greatest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age”(382-383)

Deep down in the mind, the readers do not fail to understand that this was
Charlotte speaking out through Caroline. The indignant accusation that Caroline makes, was Charlotte's. The caustic indictment and the suggested solution too were Charlotte's, vented through Caroline as the mouthpiece. This was Charlotte surfacing with her 'new gothic' in her gutsy novels. This was her way of championing the cause of women, their rights of independence, their rights of vocation. The 'new gothic' in this context turns into a new mode of feminine characterisation, projecting a band of females with sharp-edged personality, disobedient, defiant and self-assertive.

IV

Wherever marriage is concerned, the Charlottean heroine holds a tepid interest in the institution. Their trepidity about marriage could have been inherited from their creator herself. Charlotte herself had very ambivalent ideas about marriage as is evident from numerous biographical and epistolary sources. In a letter to George Smith, (dated the 26th of March, 1853), she, while talking about the ambiguous ending of Villette, makes a remark that throws ample light on her own ideas about marriage:

Drowning and Matrimony are fearful alternatives. The merciful...

...will choose the former and milder doom – drown him to put
him out of pain. The cruel-hearted will, on the contrary, pitilessly
impale him on the second horn of the dilemma, marrying him
without ruth or compunction to that — person — that — that —
individual — Lucy Snowe.

The gothic gloom that invades the end of Villette with all probabilities pointing at a
dreary death of Emmanuel by drowning in the sea, conceals Charlotte’s ideas
about matrimony. Elizabeth Gaskell in The Life of Charlotte Bronte says that
Charlotte had decided upon the death of Emmanuel right from the time she
mapped out the story in her mind. But when she told her father Patrick Bronte of
that ending, ‘Mr. Bronte was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he
disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind’. But the novel
landed up with an ambiguous ending. As Mrs. Gaskell says:

…the idea of M. Paul Emmanuel’s death at sea was
stamped on her imagination till it assumed the distinct force
of reality, and she could no more alter her fictitious ending
than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she
could do in compliance with her father’s wish was to veil the
fate in oracular words, as to leave it to the character and
discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning. (336).
Whatever it was, she refused to let her heroine Lucy end up as someone's wife at the end of her novel. Lucy had to remain single to uphold her individuality as a woman all the more. Yet, it was very difficult for the Victorian heroine to make a place in the hearts of the reading public even after exemplifying an exhortation not to marry. So the novel had to end in ambivalence. Kate Millett sums it up beautifully:

As there is no remedy to sexual politics in marriage, Lucy very logically does not marry. But it is also impossible for a Victorian novel to recommend a woman not to marry. So Paul suffers a quiet sea burial (147).

Autobiographical records give out the clear indication that a kind of ideological dilemma had invaded Charlotte's own life after her marriage to Arthur Nicholls. Charlotte probably found her individuality, her authorial self, her own space slipping out of her hands after the entry of Arthur Nicholls into her life. In a letter to Margaret Wooler (dated 22nd August 1854) Charlotte says:

... my time is not my own now, somebody else wants a good portion of it, and says, 'we must do so and so'. We do so and so accordingly, and it generally seems the right thing.
This clearly shows that her individual space of living was being a bit squashed by the will of the other person. Again, in another letter to Wooler, (dated 19th September, 1854) Charlotte says:

I have not so much time for thinking: I am obliged to be more practical, for my dear Arthur is a very practical, as well as a very punctual and methodical man ... I believe it is not bad for me that his bent should be so wholly towards matters of life and active usefulness so little inclined to the literary and contemplative.

These letters hint at some amount of dubiety in Charlotte's mind — not stated clearly, though — about the compromises that had to be made by her artistic self to accommodate the wifely self in her. Nicholls once recorded in a letter to Smith (dated 11th October, 1859), what Charlotte had once blurted out probably in a moment of creative anguish:

If you had not been with me I must have been writing now.

This shows how Charlotte must sometimes have felt marriage to be a hindrance to her creative potentiality. True enough, she never did really write anything complete
and full-fledged after *Villette* was completed on 20\textsuperscript{th} November, 1852. True enough, she did start *Willie Ellin* and *Emma* in 1853, but both were left unfinished by her.

Marriage came in, and after that, death drew the last curtain in 1855 putting an end to a life of tremendous creative potentiality. *Villette* was her swan song. Thus, it is with a pang that the reader mulls over the last word in *Villette* — 'Farewell'. ‘Farewell’ it was for Charlotte too, who almost pronounced her ultimate valediction in this novel. Anyway, the fact that needs to be emphasised is that she was indeed going through a phase of ideological dilemma in her life — vacillating between the two horns of marriage and vocation.

And this ideological dilemma was there, glaringly evident in most of her heroines. ‘Love without work, or work without love’ — that is the question for the Charlottean heroines. Charlotte gradually resolves the dubiety in merging the two plots — that of romance and that of vocation together. Thus, be it Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe — the girls are tied up in wedlock only when the vocation is secure. A vocation connotes self-esteem and self-respect for these women. And at no cost are they willing to part with their self-respect, their independence. Thus, self-esteem refuses to give way to the passionate impulses, thereby making vocation win over love and romance. A closer look suffices to show that man is even made to assist and help woman in her work, thereby exuding a tacit acclaim on his part, for feminine independence. Thus, it is M. Paul, in *Villette* who eggs Lucy on — sometimes through exhortation, sometimes through persuasion and sometimes through intimidation — to carry on with her education, topping it all off by helping Lucy to
achieve her own dream, her own pensionnat. Critics opine that it was a singular way that Charlotte had devised to get her own back on the people who thwarted or insulted her at some stages of her life, considering her to be a powerless middle-class white woman of the austere Nineteenth Century. Hence came the likes of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe — the ‘New Woman’. Lucy is educated enough, she travels about all alone. She is her own mistress. Jane Eyre nearly travels to the south of France, Madeira and India. She learns French, German and Hindostani. She lives alone, has no qualms about receiving male visitors in her bedroom in the middle of the night and stands confessor to financial treachery and sexual profligacy. She suffers, fights back, vanquishes her enemies, sticks to her principles and emerges ‘supremely blest’. (456) These girls are radical foils to the conventional heroine who often used to feature as the helpless, incarcerated princess in the traditional gothic novels, waiting to be delivered by the gallant knight. The Charlottean heroines are not such. If at all they feel imprisoned by circumstances, stagnation and ennui, they await no deliverer, for they can free themselves and their self-esteem with aplomb.

Charlotte's heroines may be said to be the predecessors of the strong, self-earning women featured in the later literature of the Anglo-American Feminist critical tradition. The Bronte heroines seemed to be afflicted with the angst of living that the later
existentialists more concretely defined or diagnosed. Most of Charlotte's heroines are questers after their own identity, their independent place and recognition in life. As Caroline in *Shirley* muses, 'I often wonder what I came into the world for' (221). She could as well have acted as the voice of all the Bronte heroines.

Interestingly enough, most of Charlotte's heroines are orphans. Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, Shirley and Caroline Helstone in *Shirley*, Frances Henri in *The Professor* are all orphans. None of them has parents to lean upon. The missing mother figure haunts them. In *Villette*, Lucy tries to snuggle up to the warmth of love in the motherly Mrs. Bretton. Right in the beginning of the book, Lucy reminisces how life was pleasant when she was in the fold of her "Godmother", Mrs. Bretton:

> Time always flowed smoothly for me at my Godmother's side; not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain. (10).

Yet, the peace, the quiet was torn apart by the psychic rift that occurred when Lucy realised that her love for Graham, Mrs. Bretton's son, was fated to go unrequited. The mother-figure faded out and the yearning for maternal shelter deepened. In *Jane Eyre*, too an orphan is in constant search for the soothing shelter of motherhood. The real mother being dead, Mrs. Reed takes on the semblance of a foster-mother for Jane. Yet her role proved to be far from satisfying. Later, Miss Temple who had, 'stood me in the stead of mother' (P 85) marries and leaves the
community in Lowood. Jane regrets: "she was lost to me".... and "with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me".(84 - 85) Later on, Jane sought the warmth of motherly affection from Mrs. Fairfax, with her 'widows' cap, black silk gown and snowy muslin apron....occupied in knitting'. But, she soon proves to be 'no great dame, but a dependent like myself' (101), thereby becoming disqualified as a mother. Later still, the moon replaces Mrs. Fairfax as the mother figure for Jane, warning her against evil: 'My daughter, flee temptation' almost in Biblical undertones. Throughout the whole of Jane Eyre, the moon seems to take on the archetypal image of a guardian angel — a mother. Thus, a careful scrutiny of the texture of the novel reveals the fact that every single move in Jane's life, every step she takes, every new happening is punctuated by the direct guidance of a mother-figure (like Mrs. Fairfax) or by the indirect promptings of a mother-figure in absence (like the moon). Right at the beginning of Jane Eyre, when the tortured, traumatised little girl tries to find hope in her transportation from Gateshead Hall to Lowood School, the rays of the moon seemed to come "streaming through the narrow window" (35) near her crib. The moon mother seems to be happy along with her helpless little ward at the prospect of a life of better living. Much later, when Jane goes to Thornfield Hall and falls in love with Rochester, every move she takes is looked over by the moon. On the evening when Jane first sees Rochester, the moon smiles at her, casting a spell of joy:

On the hilltop above me sat the rising moon; pale yet as a
cloud, brightening momentarily, she looked over Hay, which half lost in trees, sent up a blue smoke from its chimneys ...

(109).

The brightening moon seems to wax even brighter because of Jane's prospect of happiness in life. Jane, too basks in its comforting glow when she takes a late stroll outdoors. Thus, she tells Mr. Rochester, while helping him back onto his horse, how secure she feels under the moon: '... I am not at all afraid of being out late when it is moonlight.' (111).

The same night, Jane watches 'the moon ascending it (The sky) in solemn march; her orb seeming to look up as she left the hill-tops ... and aspired to the zenith ... '(114). The course of the moon gliding radiantly to a crescendo seems, at that point, to prefigure Jane's own rise to happiness, while the falling-off of her prospective happiness with Rochester finds a parallel in the waning of the moon. The repeated mention of a glorious moon watching over the proceedings amply bolsters the image of the moon as a guardian angel. This very moon is found to be conspicuous by its absence, thereby forewarning premonitorily against some mishap in the offing, when Rochester proposes to Jane and she accepts. This Jane notices, as she had probably fallen into a habit of looking up to the moon as her foster mother — for an approval of every step in her life. As she set out on her stroll through the garden, that fateful evening, the moon 'was yet beneath the horizon.' (247). She did rise after a while, and yet, the queer absence of her usual bright glow made Jane uneasy:
But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: (256).

The charged atmosphere of unease and uncanny ascends to a climactic head when, instead of the benevolent glow of the moon, 'a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash and a close rattling peal' (256). As the sky broke asunder to let down a deluge of rain, one has the gut-feeling that the macrocosm was in deep unrest at the apprehension of some evil to befall the one tiny being of the microcosm called Jane Eyre. The writhing, groaning chestnut tree is split apart by a temble flash of lightning in the night, foreboding the ultimate maiming of Mr. Rochester. Even later on in the novel, when Rochester proposes to Jane to stay on close to him as his mistress, she is half tempted to cling on to this last straw of love, of staying close to her loved one, but, the mother moon comes in again this time in the form of her dream to guide her out of degradation, indignity and temptation:

I lifted up my head to look: ... the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever ... She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the
tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart — 'My daughter, flee temptation.' 'Mother. I will'. (321)

Jane does flee temptation and Thornfield at the behest of the moon-mother. But that only makes her a total destitute, without family, fortune or possessions. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find this moment emblematic of "the essential homelessness — the nameless, placeless and contingent status of women in a patriarchal society" (364). At this juncture Jane has severed herself from family, marriage, class, work — everything that is associated with the patriarchal culture and escapes into Nature: "the universal mother, nature; I will suck her breast and ask repose" (327). But here again the 'Universal Mother' proves to be without nourishment for Jane. Jane has to go back to culture. Nourishment awaits her there — once again — within the threshold of Rev. John Rivers — yet another world of women ruled by a 'man' — Master Rivers. It is Jane's instinctual hunger—her desire for position, her longing to be a lady, her yearning for a sense of belonging that drove her at last back to culture and society. In Shirley, too, Shirley, the parentless heiress, comforts herself by looking upon Nature as her mother. Like the distraught Jane Eyre, she loves proximity with Nature, the beauty of Nature. Maybe that explains her long, engrossed walks through Nature. She pours her heart out to Caroline:

I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature. I love her — undying, mighty being!... All that is
glorious on earth shines there still. She is taking me to her bosom, and showing me her heart. (313).

Caroline, too pines for the mother she had never seen:

The longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, and which fear of its fallacy had of late years almost extinguished, relit suddenly, and glowed warm in her heart, that her mother might come some happy day and send for her to her presence, look upon her fondly with loving eyes and say to her tenderly in a sweet voice, “Caroline, my child, I have a home for you; you shall live with me. All the love you have needed and not tasted, from infancy, I have saved for you carefully. Come; it shall cherish you now.” (314)

Was that Caroline or Charlotte speaking? One wonders. The craving for motherly love must have been gnawing away at the motherless Charotte's own heart too. Perhaps it was a vicarious wish-fulfilment on her part, when she decided to end Caroline's search for the mother in the unexpectedly sudden reunion between mother and daughter in Shirley. The search that had been on in The Professor and Jane Eyre and Villette, comes to an end at last in Shirley. Like the newcomer in Kafka's The Castle (1926),
Charlotte's heroine hunts for the security of the ultimate social-spiritual home amidst a nebulous sense of alienation. Such a portrayal of desolation and bewildered identity by Charlotte is very modern conceptually as well as technically, and well ahead of the age of the Brontes. A similar projection of pain and loneliness was to be found in modernist writings like Carson McCuller's books *The Member of The Wedding* (1946) and *The Ballad of The Sad Cafe* (1951) or Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. But unlike Came Meeber in Dreiser, Charlotte or Anne's heroines never violate the moral code. This touch of modernism definitely adds a new dimension to the gothic in the Bronte novels. The gloom of alienation, the angst of a cocooned existence, a pang of longing for a sense of belonging constitute the 'New Gothic'. It is this sense of desolation, loneliness and insecurity deep down in the hearts of Charlotte's orphan heroines, that often leads them to seek company, love and shelter in the arms of men, much older than them, in whom they subconsciously find parental images. Being an orphan generates a deepset longing for a parent to love and be loved by – a parent to rely on and find comfort in. Thus, when the Charlottean heroines choose partners for life, they often fall for pronouncedly masculine males who, with their certainty, dependability and experience fill up the parental space, thereby unconsciously slipping into father figures. The plot of Charlotte's novels on this score seems to be inching towards the incest motif. Annette Schreiber sums up this fact neatly enough:

These desired lovers all stand in a parental relationship to the heroines by virtue of their age or occupation. Rochester
reminds Jane that he is old enough to be her father, Louis Moore is Shirley’s former tutor and M. Paul is both forty and eventual mentor to Lucy. (49)

Naturally enough, the Charlottean girls often have to engage in fierce strife against women much older than them, for the love of their desired men. Jane for instance, has to put down pangs of jealousy a number of times for Miss Ingram who is older than her. There is Bertha Mason too, almost a mother figure to Jane — as far as age is concerned — who almost spoiled Jane’s dreams of happiness with Rochester. Thus, the hint of incest gets compounded with what could easily be termed an Electra complex in Jane. A modern reader would applaud Charlotte’s daring to overstep the Victorian bounds of female propriety, to feature a very frank portrayal of female desire in her novels. Not that she did not stoke up the wrath of the contemporary critics for her candidness in representing the inner life of women. William Makepeace Thackeray, a novelist then in his prime and much admired by Charlotte, finds only a frivolous hankering for petty love in her novels. Thackeray even traces the happenings in Charlotte’s heroines’ lives back to the supposed desires and frustrations of Charlotte’s own life. After going through Villette, he wrote to Lucy Baxter, on 11th March 1853:

…it amuses me to read the author’s naive confession of being in love with two men at the same time... I can read a great deal of her life as I fancy in her book, and see that rather than have
fame, rather than any other earthy good or mayhap heavenly one she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with.

Sadly enough, the famous Matthew Arnold, too, finds nothing commendable in what we would call Charlotte’s gothic of passion, besides a cheap display of frenzy on the part of a frustrated authoress:

Why is *Villette* disagreeable? Because the writer's mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore, that is all she can, in fact, put into her book. No fine writing can hide this thoroughly, and it will be fatal to her in the long run.

It is unfortunate that men of literary stature like Thackeray and Arnold should be blinkered by narrow Victorian prejudices against the talent of women. They failed to appreciate the strong will, the courage and the straight-forward truthfulness in Charlotte that egged her on to champion the cause of women and their ambitions through her creations. Their Charlotte-baiting almost bordered on misogyny. Contemporary women literatrices, on the other hand, did appreciate Charlotte. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a celebrated poetess herself, commended *Villette* in a letter to Miss Mitford, written in September 1853, as a strong book. Earlier, while writing to Miss Mitford on the
2nd of April 1850, Mrs. Browning had applauded the 'spontaneousness and earnestness' of *Jane Eyre*.

Anyway, coming back to Charlotte's heroines, one finds that the fear of destitution and orphanhood, that lends the peculiar gothic gloom to Charlotte's novels, gets portrayed through the representation of the subconscious states of the protagonists. In *Villette* Lucy Snowe's desolation, insecurity and loneliness surface through the horrid, terrifying dreams that haunt her disturbed delirious sleep. A nightmare of barely fifteen minutes suffices to lacerate her with 'unknown anguish'. She trembles with the panic that all her loved ones would one day desert her, leaving her all alone:

Sleep never came! I err. She came once, but in anger. Impatient of my importunity, she brought with her an avenging dream. By the clock of St. Jean Baptiste, that dream remains scarce fifteen minutes - a brief space but sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity ... Amidst the horrors of that dream, I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved me well in life... (168).

In *Jane Eyre*, the disturbed psyche of the titular heroine lights up in flares through her
bouts of dreaming sometimes in broad daylight and sometimes in lonely nights. Imaginative as she was, Jane oftentimes let her id slip through her reveries or nightmares. And, more often than not, her dreams and reveries spring from her innermost thoughts. She often daydreams about the castle of Heidelberg, which was almost symbolical of Thornfield with its asphyxiating ambience. Yet her reveries stop when she finds security in her relationship with Rochester. But she dreams on at night – gloomy, stifling dreams that leave her terrified and anxious. A child-figure, which is an antithesis to the freedom of an individual, haunts her restless dreams. Jane herself explains that dreaming about a child was supposedly inauspicious. Yet time and again she dreams about it. Now, it is significant to note that in any sort of gothic fiction, be it the somewhat melodramatic ones of later years (eg. Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King et al), the feeling of apprehension, fear, panic and uncomfortable gloom have always predominated. Edgar Allan Poe's memorable tale *The Fall of the House of Usher* exemplifies the nuances of psychic tremors as the persona in the story grapples with the inexplicable but unshakable feeling of premonition:

'...when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity— an
atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the grey wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (150)

That is, the mind --- the seat of all such feelings --- has always had a place in the books. While it was lesser in older gothic novels, the new gothic novels let the psychic realm acquire prominence. It was a positively commendable step on the part of the Brontes to advance a lot on their age and portray heroines with complex psychological workings. And nowhere do the psychic ramblings come out better than in times of extreme mental stress. Emily had done it with her Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*. Charlotte does it too with Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, Caroline Helstone in *Shirley* and Jane Eyre in the novel of the same name. Anne Bronte, not by any account the least, brings out the psychic trauma of a wife locked in unsatisfactory nuptial relationship through Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. But the finest study of a disturbed psychic state comes probably in *Jane Eyre* where the fear of destitution that gnaws at Jane's heart surfaces through revealing but intriguing dreams. The first dream sequence comes up in chapter XXI, when she helps Rochester in looking after Richard Mason after Bertha's savage attack. For a whole week, Jane dreamt feverishly of some infant:

"... during the past week scarcely a night had gone over my couch that had not brought with it a dream of an infant;
which I sometimes hushed in my arms, sometimes dangled on my knee, sometimes watched playing with daisies on a lawn; or again, dabbling its hands in running water. It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next; now it nestled close to me, now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore, it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber". (172)

Ironically enough, the infant here does not stand for any positive correlative for creativity. On the other hand, the infant here stands for a burden, a state of wretched helplessness and anxiety: '.... to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin". (171) Jane next dreams and then hears the news of the death of John Reed and the fatal state of Mrs. Reed. Then, in Chapter XXII, after her return from the visit to the Reeds, when uncertainty as to the length of her sojourn in Thornfield grips her, she dreams again:

"I dream of Miss Ingram all the night: in a vivid morning dream I saw her closing the gates of Thornfield against me and pointing me out another road; and Mr. Rochester looked on with his arms folded--smiling sardonically, as it seemed, at both her and me."
Next, dreams invade her sleep once more on the night before her proposed wedding to Rochester:

I continued also the wish to be with you and experienced a strange, regretful consciousness, the windings of an unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my ear.... while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment. (220)

Yet again, she dreams as she sleeps fitfully. She fancies Thornfield as a ruin. She still dreams of the figure of the child in her arms. She hears the gallop of a horse and thinks it must be Rochester tearing farther and farther away from her. She describes her desperation and despair through her dream reactions:

I climbed the thin wall with frantic perilous haste, eager to catch one glimpse of you from the top: the stones rolled from under my feet... I lost my balance, fell, and woke.”

(221)

Jane wakes up with a start at her nightmare only to find the grisly-looking Bertha Mason
rending her wedding veil to shreds. As said earlier, these dream sequences do express the fear, the insecurity that gnawed at Jane's heart all the while. These dreams fulfill another purpose too. These dreams, like the ones that harrowed Lucy Snowe in Villette, are prophetic. When Jane dreams of The Thomfield Manor as a blackened ruin, it helps to prepare the minds of the readers for what is to come at the end of the novel, when one finds Thomfield, stripped of all its sedate glory by a ravaging fire and reduced to only a skeletal replica of itself. Again, when Miss Ingram intrudes upon Jane's dreams, it signifies Jane's subconscious awareness of a certain barrier between herself and Rochester, besides mirroring her unconscious jealousy of Miss Ingram. Every time, Jane finds herself, helpless, desperate and sickly in need of security in real life, she dreams of being burdened and rendered immobile with a child — the possible outcome of her relationship with Rochester as his mistress. Every dream shows Rochester in the horizon riding or walking away from her, or worse still, eyeing her distress with a sardonic jeer on his face. This reflects her lack of faith in their relationship, and more significantly, her lack of faith in the mystifying, overbearing, yet unfathomable character of Rochester.

Jane's dream-sequences are renewed as once more she dreams on the night of the disastrous and uncompleted marriage, which was to trigger off Jane's reluctant yet well thought-of departure from Thomfield and Rochester:

"I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gates-head; the light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled this vision,
seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremulously to pause in the center of the obscured ceiling. I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours, she is about to sever....Then not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: "..." My daughter, flee temptation." (250)

Even after that, dreams haunt Jane’s sleep. But the nature of her dreams changes a bit to reflect the change in her innate attitude. The erstwhile insecurity in the fidelity of Rochester seems to have gone. Rochester emerges as the harrowed, desperate man, trying hard to salvage the broken bits of his relationship with Jane, after the revelation of the fact that he already had a wife. This somewhat explained his mysterious behaviour with Jane, thereby strengthening her reliance on this liaison. Thus, in the later dreams there is no Rochester who rides farther and farther away, or stands smiling ironically. On the contrary, Rochester this time was met again and again. In chapter XXXII, she says, "I used to rush into strange dreams...dreams where ... I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis. XXXII (288) These obviously reveal the feelings of confidence and trust that Jane had by now developed for Rochester — negating any possibility of transitoriness in her emotions to the man. The last time that Jane has one of these surrealistic experiences is when she, in Chapter XXXV, almost distinctly hears a voice — Rochester’s voice calling out
"All the house was still...the one candle was dying out: the room was full of moonlight My heart beat fast and thick...suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as startling:.... I heard a voice somewhere cry 'Jane! Jane!'...It was the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice — that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe wildly, eerily, urgently. 'I am coming!' I cried. 'Wait for me! Oh, I will come! (330)

Curiously enough, Rochester, too, as he confirms in chapter XXXVII, had heard her answering call on the same evening about the same time. Sceptic minds may frown on this unique touch of clairvoyant telepathy as a mere figment of a feverish brain, yet one has to say that the voices symbolize the power of love to transcend the barrier of time and space. Delving into Mrs. Gaskell's biography of Charlotte, one finds that such paranormal communions were not strange to Charlotte herself. After the morbid death of Branwell and Emily, followed fast by Anne's decease and Patrick Bronte's isolation in sickness, all Charlotte was left with was a haunting loneliness. She used to yearn for her dead sisters when she would stay up in her insomniac nights in a house steeped in the silence and quietude of sleep. Mrs. Gaskell records those nights in beautiful detail:
"All the grim superstitions of the North had been implanted in her during her childhood by the servants, who believed in them. They recurred to her now—with no shrinking from the spirits of the Dead, but with such an intense longing once more to stand face to face with the souls of her sisters, as no one could have felt. It seemed as if the very strength of her yearning should have compelled them to appear. On windy nights, cries and sobs, and wailings seemed to go round the house, as of the dearly-beloved striving to force their way to her. Some one conversing with her once objected in my presence, to that part of Jane Eyre in which she hears Rochester's voice crying out to her in a great crisis of her life, he being many, many miles distant at the time. I do not know what incident was in Miss Bronte's recollection when she replied in a low voice, drawing in her breath, "But it is a true thing, it really happened (Ch. X,296)".

Sure enough, both Jane and Rochester were, at that juncture of time, going through stressful mental trauma. But that is exactly what the new gothic concentrates on and highlights. The stressed mind, the unnatural emotions and repressed desires turning into
violent dementation of the mind — paranoia — all these are the aspects that have gained the New Gothic its appellation. This is the Gothic of Passion. As quoted earlier from Freud, the gothic was just another genre that engaged itself in the unheimlich or the uncommon. In earlier instances of the gothic, the authors like Walpole or Radcliffe played with fear psychosis — an unnatural, rather abnormal state of a disturbed mind. The Brontes too, dealt with such states of disturbed minds, but in their works it was passion unleashed after much repression under social inhibitions. Theirs was a study in mental states that were at times bordering on paranoia. The overwhelming sense of fear and unrest seeped into their novels through harsh realism rather than spooks and spirits. Thus one's hair stands on end in Jane Eyre at the terrible scenes of child-torment. One shudders at how the little Jane used to feel psychologically stressed and tortured in the terrifying asphyxia of the Red-Room. One cannot help being overwhelmed with horror at the grating portrayal of the more crude side of real life. That is where the gothic, in the new sense of the term, lies. The cathartic inlay of terror is there, but it rises more from realistically portrayed features of a mind, strangled in the vice-like grip of paranoiac experiences, rather than from clanking ghosts.

One can only say that the Brontes, in taking up the curious probing of the labyrinthine depths of a mind, disturbed by passion, fear, social taboos and repression, were quite
ahead of their times in their psychoanalytic abilities. Their characters often suffered from the 'Mad woman in the attic' syndrome, as Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert put it -- a constant state of choking claustrophobia under the shackles of contemporary social norms, thrown into relief by a fervent wish to break away, to transcend borders and soar on the wings of experiences. Robert Heilman, too, corroborates this view when he comments on the unique experiences of Lucy Snowe inside the empty pensionnat on a deserted lonely evening when the whole dormitory seemed to turn ghostly to her stressed mind. Heilman says, "The surrealism of Lucy's evening is possible only to a special sensitively, and it is really the creation of this sensitivity, in part pathological, that is the apex of Charlotte's gothic". This 'sensitivity' in Charlotte's novel is often seen to surface through the variegated artistic abilities of her quietly talented heroines. The girls, cloistered amidst compromising circumstances, often sought relief in brief snatches through a venting forth of their manifold potentialities. Thus in Jane Eyre, Jane seeks refuge from the monotonous drudgery of everyday humdrum existence in the colourful imaginative world of painting. Her paintings often reflect her mind and its longings, thereby delving into the depths of a mind lacerated by unvoiced wishes and unrealized desires. Jane, on coming to Thornfield, has an occasion to show Mr. Rochester three of her considerable œuvre of paintings. One of them shows a dismal scene with darkened foreground and background with a ray of light illuminating a drowning ship and a corpse floating in the billowing sea. The second one is a vision of the Evening Star, done in dark, vapoury tints, while the third one is a portrait of a head with its eye reflecting in nebulous haziness 'the glassiness of despair', against the backdrop of an iceberg. The
The sea in the first picture could well epitomise the sea of life for Jane, who at times of intense despair, finds no ray of light freshening her horizon, and feels drawn down into the vortex of the restless sea of life. The evening star is an outward expression of Jane’s longing for a guide and direction in life. The third painting reflects, retrospectively, the dark depths of gloom that often haunted Jane’s oppressed childhood mind. Later, when Jane, in a conscious effort to put down her growing affections for Rochester, feels prompted to draw comparative portraits of herself in drab lineaments and of Blanche Ingram in all splendour, she might sound a wee bit masochistic but the portraits help bring out the hint of jealousy in Jane’s mind towards Miss Ingram. Yet, the clear acknowledgement of Miss Ingram’s superiority (in looks, of course) and her own comparative inferiority (‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain’ 124), helps calm her mind down to a resolved quietude. Thus these paintings are cathartic for her. They purge her mind of oppressive claustrophobia by affording her a way to vent her feelings. Thus, when Mr. Rochester asks her whether she likes painting such dismal sketches which smack of the typical feeling of gloom and the uncanny derived from the gothic, she answers with conviction:

I was absorbed, sir: yes, and I was happy. To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have known (97)

In Villette too, Lucy’s intensely feminist mind cannot approve of the voluptuousness
with which Cleopatra had been portrayed in one of the art galleries she visits. It demeans
women, in her opinion, to be featured as sensuality epitomised, without giving any
importance to their intellect and sensitivity. In contrast, she empathises with Vashti, who
in the play she watches, refuses her husband, king Ahasuerus, the satisfaction of
showing her off in all her sensual splendour and beauty. Charlotte applauds the powerful
depiction of the character by the actress:

...she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor
enduring, nor, in finite measure, resenting it: she stood
locked in struggle, rigid in resistance. (234).

Lucy, elated with this image of resilient toughness, challenges the irksome painter of
Cleopatra in indignant triumph:

Where was the artist of Cleopatra? Let him come and sit
down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the
mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed
flesh he worshipped: let all materialists draw nigh and look
on. (234).

In fact, a biographical probe into the life of the Brontes vouches for the fact that the
artistic sensibility in almost all Chariottean heroines comes from their creator, herself. It is
evident from their biography, that all of the Bronte sisters were keen on painting. Inspired by the artwork of Robert Martin in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the sisters even had a teacher engaged to teach them the nitty-gritties of painting. Their interest in this artform had been exploited deftly by Charlotte, and to some extent, Anne, too, to bring out the feelings at the depth of their characters' minds surrealistically. (Anne Bronte shows the heroines in both of her novels to have avid interest in painting. In fact, Helen Huntingdon, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* turned out to be a professional in painting, too.)

This display of deep interesting psychoanalysis, made unique by touches of the gothic, (Jane's paintings) becomes even more modernized by some socio-political touches added to it. Thus, Karl Kroeber sees the nun-figure as symbolically rooted in Lucy's own embedded Puritanism which, however, she finally overcomes when she tears the nun's robes: "Although the nun motif in *Villette* is not faultlessly handled, it is an advance on the ironic manipulation of gothic motifs in *Jane Eyre*. The theatrical fake Gothicism of the nun represents a true impulse in Lucy, whose temptation is to become cloistered (Chapter XV) but whose destiny is self-dramatisation, creation of self" (92) Shirley talks about the Luddite riots, issues like the necessity for a good education for women, ideas about Christianity, Napoleonic Wars and the conflicts between the manufacturers and labour-hands. All this lends a modern touch to the gothic infrastructure of her novels, and in the process, lifts it from bland horror to a meaningful composition of interest.

Yet another issue that adds to the modernism of the Bronte novels is a distinct leaning towards imagery and symbolism. Inanimate objects and natural phenomena act as objective correlatives of the various psychic states of her characters. The fatalistic belief
in predestination comes through the very archetypal symbols of the sea and the ship. The sea is destiny while the ship is the soul of man. Paulina and Dr. John's vessel has encountered a calm sea in the voyage of life. But all souls are not so fortunate:

Other lives run from the first another course. Other travellers encounter weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable—breast adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the closing winter night. (391-2)

The image of the voyage on sea takes up larger-than-life proportions in Villette as the end of the novel winds up on an ambiguous note with all suggestions to the effect that Emmanuel's journey has proved to be one doomed for a tragic yet inexorable end. It is on this voyage on sea that Lucy loses the love of her life a second time to the mystifying powers of Destiny that render her helpless in the hands of Providence. Again, at the beginning of the novel, when Lucy sails down the sable flood of the Thames, ferried across like a soul gliding down the Styx to the new realm, one finds her voyage symbolising a crossover from the drudgery of inane existence and ennui to prospects of independence, fulfillment and self-recovery. In fact, on looking at the novels of Charlotte, one finds most of them replete with this image of a journey. If not a voyage, then Charlotte's land-bound heroines are often found on lonely, ponderous walks which parallel the 'voyage' of Knightly ballads as a physical epitomisation of the quest motif. The heroines, always eagerly in search of identity, fulfillment and self discovery, are
prone to taking long walks like the Bronte sisters themselves did at Haworth. Annette Schreiber observes:

... if the central theme in Bronte's work is essentially a quest for self and psychic integrity, be it in the name of love or death, then journeys appropriately abound in her novels...

For those heroines who are land-bound, walking, the pedestrian equivalent of knightly quests replace the boat trips. In fact, all Bronte protagonists are addicts of walking

(56.)

And significantly enough, it is often during their long walks that they come across important milestones of their life. For instance, Jane happens to meet Rochester during one of her walks. The walks image the lonely but steady journey that each Charlottean heroine undertakes in life.

Again inanimate objects, as simple as beds in a dormitory, assume the forms of 'spectres', 'death's heads huge and sun bleached...' with 'wide gaping eyeholes', in Charlotte's Villette. It reminds one of the stunningly defamiliarised vision of a mirror that Catherine sees in her dying days. A mirror with her own pale image on it appears to her delirious mind to be the 'press' of her childhood home, with a ghostly, fearful figure on it. (437-38) This could be likened to the psychic colour-combinations in which Edgar Allan Poe often paints his inanimate objects. For instance, in the famous The Fall of The
*House of Usher,* one finds that Poe describes the windows of the gloomy mansion as 'eyelike', the armorial trophies look 'phantasmagoric', while the furniture too, reflects 'phantasmagoria'. Even trees and arbours carry symbolic connotations in Charlotte's novels. As it is, trees and undergrowth are interlaced intricately with the lives of the Bronte protagonists. But in novels like *Villette* or *Jane Eyre,* the garden acquires almost a personified role of a participant in the happenings in life. In *Villette,* the gothic is evoked by the weird tales shrouding the garden with its monastic past. The stone slab at the foot of the pear tree was supposed to have been the remnant of the portal of a vault which concealed "the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive, for some sin against her vow" (93). The mystery deepens, thereby heightening the gothic, when tales of the nun still haunting the place, comes afoot. Yet to Lucy, the garden affords a place of peace, quietude and respite from company. Hence, she dismissed the tales of gothic horror as 'romantic rubbish'. The garden is dubbed a 'berceau', which in French signifies both an arbour as well as a cradle. Thus, the garden becomes a symbolic transcription of a place of rest and comfort. No wonder, Lucy, in moments of anguish at her failed love for Dr. Bretton, finds solace and peace on burying the letters from Dr. John at the foot of Methuseleh, the ancient tree. The garden, protects her and shelters her like a mother in moments of pain. In *Jane Eyre* the gothic touch is livened when Charlotte describes the old Chestnut tree, cleft and gnaried by lightning on the eve of her marriage to Dr. Rochester. Here too, the gothic is underplayed by the symbolic insinuations that the tree spells out. The tree, which symbolically parallels the masculine vigour of Mr. Rochester, gets damaged, foretelling almost futuristically the
maiming and debilitating of Mr. Rochester. The deliberate use of such symbols is one of
the traits that go a long way in making Charlotte's work modernistic and thereby, ahead
of her age. This was one more aspect that justifies the christening of her style the 'New
Gothic'. Robert Heilman, while vindicating the use of the term the 'New Gothic' points out
some factors operating in the conventional Gothic mode through humour, rationality and
a turn toward 'the lesser known realities of human life'. But one tends to think that this
extensive, thoughtful and carefully devised use of symbolism to intellectualise the gothic
is something that invariably makes it worth calling Charlotte's style the 'new' gothic.

VII

Inducing a fastidious Victorian reading public to delve deep into her novels must have
been the chief idea behind using gothic techniques and features in Charlotte's novels
that proposed to deal with themes far removed from Gothicism. Yet, at times, one
wonders whether the paraphernalia of the gothic are not rather extrinsic to the essential
character of the novels. In fact, at times, like Jane and Rochester having this telepathic
communication between themselves, the novel teeters on the brink of implausibility. But
then Charlotte Bronte never forces the authenticity of this spiritual communion between
two distant souls, on her readers' credulousness. She rather leaves it as a peculiar
aspect of Jane's sensibility which the reader could or could not have faith in. Apart from
that bit, the other surrealistic experiences like the repetitive nightmares that she recounts in *Jane Eyre* or *Villette* are absolutely plausible. Again, whenever one finds some supernatural presences in the books, Charlotte takes infinite care to explain the pseudo-supernaturalism through scientific or rather, natural reasons. Thus, the eerie laughter that rings out in Thornfield, turns out to be the horrid proof of the existence of the weird Bertha Mason. The nun in *Villette*, swathed seemingly in shrouds of white, turns out to be -- funnily enough --M. Le Comte Hamal in disguise, off on a secret rendezvous with Ginevra Fanshawe. In *Villette*, though, the episodes of a spectral nun sailing across the corridors of the pensionnat does sometimes seem rather exaggerated and almost ridiculous when the spook turns out to be a man in disguise. Moreover, it is hard to figure out why Charlotte had to introduce that episode at all, since it had no visible contribution to the plot or theme. In these cases, arresting the reading public through 'sensationalism' must have been the concern. This makes the use of the gothic rather extrinsic in *Villette*. But in *Jane Eyre*, the extranatural episodes do contribute to the feeling of unease in the novel. The spooky laughter of Bertha Mason helps bring out the horror of insanity and the tragic consequences of conjugal mismatch. The final telepathic communion too, helps in highlighting the mental proximity of Jane and Rochester. Thus, the gothic is, thematically and structurally not at all extrinsic in *Jane Eyre*, but rather adds to its narrative dimension and potential.

In *Emma*, too, an unfinished fragment of some twenty pages, Charlotte creates the aura of mystery and the gothic sense of heightened expectancy and gloom. Set in what could be termed her favourite locale, — the school premises — the narrative in *Emma* trails off
just when it had gained momentum. Would Matilda, the little unhappy girl, become the heroine of the novel? Who was Emma? Was Emma the real name of this very Matilda?

Who was the man called Conway Fitzgibbon in reality? These are some of the umpteen questions that crop up in the mind of the reader, giving off a distinct whiff of the gothic sense of mystery and suspense.

Considering all this in a neutral light, one does not find the use of the gothic very extrinsic.

Rather one could not deny the fact that Charlotte did manage to weave the gothic into her novels with astounding effectiveness.

Very relevantly does Ernest Baker point out that the Brontes were the ones who quietly and unobtrusively spearheaded the initiation of a new genre in the history of fiction. He also marks that their very narrative mode was basically different from that of their predecessors who were more taken up by the multifaceted exterior of life, its numerous aspects and variety, but were 'as yet unawake to the call of the deeper imagination, unaccustomed to look within.' (11). That was exactly where the 'New Gothic' lies in the Bronte novels. The Brontes with their observant, analytical and profoundly imaginative minds, could not turn away from the various anomalies and complexities of the human soul. They could not turn away from the torments of an oppressed mind or the numerous vicissitudes of emotions, passions, desires and desperations that the human psyche continually passes through. Theirs was a style that was more psyche-oriented than anything else. They were the ones who broke fresh ground by making a gingerly exploration of the realm of the unconscious mind. No Freud had penned his theory of dreams at that point of time. Yet, the Brontes dared to let the unconscious mind surface
through often surrealistic dream-sequences. They plumbed the confusing depths of a mind gone deranged after harrowing traumas. They explored relations that bordered on Oedipal instincts or Electra complexes. No wonder George Saintsbury applauds Charlotte's elan in his *A Short History of English Literature* in no uncertain terms:

She followed no one, and many have followed her. Her work stands in the middle of the century, obviously transitional, distinguished as much from Thackeray and Dickens by a curious spirit of irregular and studied romanticism, as from the romantics proper by a realist touch no less unmistakable. (748).
Chapter – III: Works Cited

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