CHAPTER V

A Journey Though Family Relations: The Novels of

Charlotte Bronte

Charlotte Bronte, the eldest of the three Bronte sisters, brought to English fiction an intensely private expression. It is this unique expression that bridges the distance between the novelist, the protagonist and the reader, and also gives reasons for the ambivalent reception towards her works. Like her sisters Emily and Anne, Charlotte was concerned with contemporary issues, but it was the family and the social situation of the woman that was more important for her. In this, she confronts Victorian society and convention. “She is usually at odds with the Victorian mind and is thus variously seen as coarse or subversive.” (Edwards 209). Read as a sequence her four novels manifest Bronte’s development as a novelist, and the story of a woman’s relationship to the world. Her heroines find an identity outside the enclosed family, popularly supposed to encompass 19th century women. Like her two younger sisters she also emphasized the importance of family in the strife ridden Victorian society. For the Bronte’s, it is the family support that gave them strength and inspiration. Charlotte was the only daughter who survived, and lived with her father fulfilling religiously the duties of a Victorian daughter.

Retrospectively, all seeds of Charlotte’s future works can be seen in her first novel The Professor. Written before all the rest of her novels and rejected by successive publishers throughout her life, The Professor was posthumously published in 1857. It harks back to the juvenilia in the revival of enemy-brothers theme, and male first person narrator. In The Professor, Charlotte “emerges from her chrysalis and explores new vertices for observation and juxtaposition” (Harris 180). It was in Brussels that a change
took place, in her attitude to the process of writing and its function in her life. In her Preface, she tells us of her efforts to overcome a redundant composition and to achieve a plain and homely style. Her hero:

should work his way through life ... no sudden turns should lift
him in a moment to a high station... As Adam’s son he should
share Adam’s doom and drain throughout life a mixed and
moderate cup of enjoyment. (C.Bronte 3)

The novel is a narrative of self-help, very much similar to Dinah Mullock Craik’s John Halifax, Gentleman (1859). “Pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps, the practice of frugality and business probity, taking careful initiative in pursuit of financial independence and security were major themes in Charlotte’s life”. (Davies 72) The Professor explores the family in a patriarchal and industrial society, and attempts to resolve the anger and anxiety of the author both, by examining the situation through sympathetic male eyes and also by transforming her into a patriarchal male professor, an orphaned underling turned master. Gilbert and Gubar in their study “A Secret Inward Wound: The Professor’s Pupil”, try to make sense of the masculine voice, explaining that “by pretending to be a male, Bronte can better analyze what really concerns her: being female”(317). When the novel begins, William Crimsworth is neither a narrator nor a professor. Through his story, Charlotte Bronte probably found a way of confronting her own feminine problems. “The use of the male persona suggests an attempt by the female artist to objectify her vision of the story, to distangle personal fantasies from the plot”(315). The male narrator is more than an authorial disguise, as it affords Charlotte the means to gratify her frustrated emotional needs, by adopting the male role. This leap into the dark separates her from her younger sisters. The master-pupil relationship, which existed between M. Heger and Charlotte, is to be seen in the development of the Crimsworth-Frances story. “The question of women’s self-determination lies at the heart
of *The Professor*. It approaches the issue somewhat obliquely through employing a male narrator" (Davies 185). Through the Cinderella plot between William Crimsworth and Francis Henri, Charlotte solves her romantic dilemma and makes her dream come true in *The Professor*.

The principle theme revolves around the importance of choosing a good wife with a good character, and the importance of a man earning his living by his own emotions. *The Professor* reflects a direct association between industrial pollution and society polluted by materialism, competition and self-interest. Bronte presents before us these agents that threaten the virtues of benevolence co-operation and selflessness associated with the family. *The Professor* complements Anne Bronte’s critique in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildle Hall* while Anne charges individual families with prioritizing material values over the real good of its members, Charlotte extends this criticism to society at large. *The Professor* portrays corruption of family values and affections, by the spirit of Industrialism. Bronte is deeply concerned with the damage inflicted on private and public associations. In this industrial society, personal relations were measured by market values. This is beautifully exemplified in Hunsden Yorke of *The Professor* when he questions the future wife of William Crimsworth...“Mademoisella, what is an association? I never saw one; what is its length, breadth, weight and value -- aye value. -- What price will it bring in the market?” (TP 236). Family here is not safeguarded against the intrusion of market-place values. This often led to the disruption of domestic and social harmony. Men became materialistic, unfeeling and self-interested. The Victorian family was recurrently seen as an unsullied haven of morality. Harmony in family life depended on the spirit of trade, and relations in public sphere were to be modeled on the relations within the family. Only examining the structures of desire in the 19th century family can link concepts of the social and the
individual. According to Sarah Ellis in *The Women of England* (1838), the family was a virtuous refuge amidst social disorder and injustice. Ellis’s *The Women of England* (1838) draws on family/society analogies, employing the trope of sibling rivalry to describe social relations. Ellis blames society for its worship of Mammon, and addresses wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, insisting that women have the power to win men away from Industrial competition. Men need the help of women to pursue the evocations towards family and society. For Ellis, the family’s reformatory power was located in its difference and protected detachment from larger society. It is not known whether Charlotte has read *The Women of England*, but like Ellis she employs sibling rivalry, as a metaphor for industrial strife between men, who should serve one another as brothers but act as oppressor and victim. She however challenges Ellis’ vision of private sphere, as protected and isolated from marketplace strife by woman’s redeeming influence. Charlotte instead aligns women with working-class men, in order to probe the affinities that make both disadvantaged in a mercenary male world.

The industrial chapters of *The Professor* reflect sibling rivalry and point to the socially critical theme of brotherhood forsaken, which is explicitly formulated in her third novel *Shirley*. Bronte begins *The Professor* with William Crimsworth, the protagonist as a victim of male exploitation. His wealthy maternal uncles refuse to aid his dying mother, and his brother Edward Crimsworth treats him, as an inferior clerk. He therefore refuses further help, as he loathes being his brother’s ‘slave’, a word Bronte designates to his situation in the first five chapters. One is reminded here of Bronte’s heroines who suffer similar indigence’s, but the language used in the case of her hero is much more fierce—“I hate being condescended to”*(TP 19)*. The rivalry is between master and worker. *The Professor* is concerned with male dismissal of brotherhood brought about by competition and self-promotion. Charlotte Bronte proposes a homology between family conflict and
social conflict. Sibling rivalry is employed as a metaphor for industrial men who should serve one another as brothers, but act as oppressor and victim. Family here is represented not as a refuge, but as a reflection of human relations embroiled in conflict between self-defensive, self-seeking individuals. The opening portrait of sibling antagonism specifically links the novel's atmosphere of mutual hostility in a rising industrial society. According to Helene Moglen in *Charlotte Bronte: The Self Conceived* (1976), Edward Crimsworth is a representative of a developing class, a prophet of industrialization and stands for that Mammon worshipping society where cash payment is the sole relation between human beings. Edward looks upon his brother William strictly in terms of the hierarchical bond that joins employer and employee:

> hear once and for all what I have to say about our relationship and all that sort of humbug!.. I shall excuse you nothing on the plea of being my brother; if I find you stupid, negligent, dissipated, idle or possessed of any faults detrimental to the interest if the House—I shall dismiss you as I would any other clerk...I expect to have full value of my money out of you. (TP 19)

Edward measures familial bonds on utilitarian terms, and his speech establishes his power as 'master' of the house.” Inexplicably hostile and despotic, Edward Crimsworth is a bad tempered Captain of Industry, whose petty tyrannies prefigure the vicious oppressions of John in *Jane Eyre*, and whose business looks forward to the dark Satanic Mills of *Shirley*”(Gilbert& Gubar 319). Edward beats his horse, enslaves his subordinates and according to Yorke Hunsden “will one day be a tyrant to his wife”(TP 48). Mrs. Crimsworth is regarded as a prized commodity. She has no influence over her husband, and is a victim of Edward’s ruthless materialism, physical violence and emotional abuse when he is threatened with bankruptcy. Mrs. Crimsworth proves that
Edward is a tyrant not only at work, but also at home. Their relationship symbolizes the damaged link between private and public spheres. *The Professor* also seems to suggest a correlation between persecuted workers in public and women in private by the Mammon worshipping men in power. This semi-dependence irritates William, and he disowns his fraternity, using counting house language to terminate their private/public association: “Its time you and I wound up accounts” (TP 41). Family relations here become an economic transaction, where each brother struggles to exalt himself, with hands raised against one another. Bronte uses the attitude of Edward to criticize the atmosphere of public world of trade, where men exchange fraternity for competition. *The Professor* remarks Stevie Davies:

> has in common with *Wuthering Heights* themes of alter ego,  
> mother-loss and a dark violence in the heart of human affairs. It  
> shares Emily’s saturnine sense of fratricidal relations bonding  
> society her critique of so called civilized behaviour as collective  
> legitimized hypocrisy. (74)

Edward Crimsworth lords his possessions over his dependent sibling—a portrait of their mother, towards whom William has a feeling of sympathy. Although he breaks away from family connections his anxiety for his mother’s portrait proves that family ties do still have a meaning. “The face I remembered,” remarks William, “pleased me as a boy but then I did not understand it; now I know how rare that class of face is in the world” (TP 15). This portrait of Crimsworth’s mother stands for all the steadiness, wisdom and tenderness absent in his world. Like Emily and Anne, Charlotte records the primacy of the homing instinct. Love of family is not only the foundation, but also the deepest bond the characters of *The Professor* possess. The rivalry among the brother is representative of conflict between master and men/rising manufacturing class and fading aristocracy. This class conflict is translated into family conflict between manufacturing
Crimsworth and aristocratic Seacombs. Edward treats William like a clerk, for he represents the aristocratic Seacombs with whom he grows up. Edward’s goal in treating William as a clerk and not as a brother is to emphasize the latter’s position as a member of the working class despite his aristocratic demeanor and Eton education. During a party at Crimsworth’s hall, Edward is left isolated and unacknowledged—“weary, solitary, kept down like some desolate tutor or governess” (TP 24). This snub marks the triumph of trade over aristocracy. Associating William’s degradation with the feminized position of a governess, Charlotte was recalling her own bitter experiences as a governess. Her letters compiled a chorus of complaints. Charlotte writes to Ellen Nussey in 1841:

I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a governess. The chief requisite for that station seems to me to be the power of taking things easily as they come, and of making oneself comfortable and at home whenever we may chance to be ...(86)

The inevitable evils of being a governess never paled, as Charlotte described earning a living among strangers was always irksome. Her sympathies extended to her sisters, whom she saw trapped in some kind of slavery, and through her life she continued to feel for anyone unfortunate enough to need to become that social nonentity—‘a governess’. “There is a famous tale in which a small child evinced some affection for Charlotte whose I love’oo Miss Bronte” was met with a proper reply “love a governess? Really!” (Wilks 86). It is for this reason that Charlotte makes William rise above familial dependence to make his way in the world. He embarks for Brussels and utters a paean—“Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time” (TP 63). As in Bronte’s later novels, Crimsworth reacts to his perception of ‘female’ powerlessness, “first with claustrophobic feelings of enclosure, burial, imprisonment and then with rebellious decision to escape.” (Gilbert & Gubar 310). But this vision says Gilbert and Gubar is on the brink of
metamorphosis into a powerful creature, decidedly a male professor. His decision to become a tutor signifies his determination to establish himself outside the defining community of family. "The gratuitousness of his commitment idealizes the forced labour of the Bronte sisters; it displays the spirited self-reliance which will pull him through pitfalls" (Eagleton 34).

His journey of progress is marked by his rise from family dependent to patriarch, from victim to master, from dis-satisfaction in his original family, to supreme self-satisfaction in a family of his own. In joining the Pensionnate, Crimsworth the victim becomes Crimsworth the dominator. Charlotte too had been pupil and then pupil governess at the Pensionnat Heger, and like Crimsworth knew the power-relationship from both ends. The Pensionnate is microcosm of a society composed of self-interested individuals, whose idea of relationship was to trample another to raise oneself in society. M. Pelet treats all students with severity and contempt, and the Directress Mile Reuter maintains, Frances Henri needs keeping down:

I think Monsieur, it appears to me that ambition is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of a woman: would not Mdlle Henri be much safer and happier if taught to believe in the quiet discharge of social duties consists her real vacation...She may never marry...but even in celibacy it would be better for her to retain the character and habits of a respectable decorous female.

(TP 144)

Anti-feminist irrationalism had not wholly changed when Charlotte was writing the novel. Crimsworth's voyage to Belgium initiates a psychological quest. This section of The Professor, which is devoted to Crimsworth's career in Brussels, is unimportant, as Bronte will use him among other things, as a sort of lens through which to examine the narrow female world of the Pensionnat, in which she herself was immured for two painful years.
Before he joins the Pensionnat, Crimsworth is oddly obsessed with the girl’s school. This suggests a characteristically female desire to comprehend mysteries of femaleness. Crimsworth like many women novelists, fantasizes becoming a voyeur, a scientist of several secrets, comments Gilbert and Gubar.

The Professor also extends a portrait of life after marriage. Crimsworth’s wife Francis Henri is a complement of her husband. She does not violate male idealization of feminity. It is the desolation of Frances, which completes William’s metamorphosis from outcast to master. Frances is very much similar to Charlotte and like her occupies an analogous position in the Pensionnat. A lace-mender and part-time sewing teacher, she ranks near the base of the school’s hierarchy. She is “a Cinderella who prepares costumes for the other young ladies, but has no socially acceptable costume herself.”(Gilbert & Gubar 325). Like Bronte she suffers because she is older and less educated than her classmates. It is her forgiveness that appeals to William, as it detaches her from the English class-system so that:

marrying a Swiss lace-mender seems less ignominious than marrying an English one. As an amalgam of English and European, working girl and gentlewoman, pupil and teacher, child and adult, Frances represents the blend of docile and socially desirable Victorian wife. (Eagleton 41)

Half-English, protestant, small, plain and needy but proud, industrious and honorable, Frances re-enacts Charlotte’s outsider status in the Brussels Catholic world. Frances is an extraordinary spectacle in Victorian eyes. She is a young liberated woman, who finds nothing wrong in entertaining a man in her lodgings, and who insists after marriage to be a joint bread owner –“I wished merely to say, that I should like of course to retain my employment of teaching ... I must be no incumbrance to you – no burden in any way”(TP 215). On one hand she continues to address Crimsworth as Monsieur, but on the other
hand, has a certain proud impatience that makes her chafe against his tutorial help. She can be as sour as Crimsworth to her pupils. It is the first master/pupil relationship in which Charlotte’s heroines are seen to hover between challenge and capitulation. Charlotte was an advocate of woman’s rights, and agrees with Anne Bronte, on the rights of married woman. Frances could not think of marrying to remain unemployed and depressed at home as he, with typical masculine self-flattery expected.

In the later part of the Frances—Crimsworth story, Charlotte seems to be exploring obstacles and emotions symptomatic of ‘femaleness’ in a patriarchal society. This led to the creation of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. Frances is prepared to break society’s rules, and like Helen of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall she is ready to abandon a tyrannical or profligate marriage. She is explicit about the inevitability of revolt: “Monsieur if a wife’s nature loathes that of the man she is wedded to, marriage must be slavery. Against slavery all right thinkers revolt…”(TP 243). Crimsworth yields to his future bride’s dreams but remains a professor and patriarch:

I put no obstacle in her way; raised no objection… you have conceived a plan …; execute it; you have my free consent and whenever and wherever my assistance is wanted ask and you shall have.(TP 237)

This is the voice of the Master, kind and patronizing. It is in Frances that Charlotte realizes her dream fulfillment of becoming an idle directress—industrious, serious, worthy of high respect, kind and completely democratic in her indifference to rank and title. Through Frances she recalls her happiness on winning M.Heger’s approval of her ‘devoirs’ and her pleasure in writing to him. “As with the Heger’s, the presence of the husband-professor supports the school. Charlotte here sets up an ideal which owed something to Mme Heger moving effectively between daytime control and domestic compliance”(Gordon 130). The relationship within the Crimsworth family is charged with
ambiguity Mrs. Crimsworth develops a "sort of schizophrenic personality" (Gilbert & Gubar 331). During the day she was the Directress and in the evenings a lace-mender, "a good and dear wife" (TP 243) to her professor. Crimsworth remarks that she was so different under different circumstances that he "seemed to possess two wives" (TP 238).

Charlotte's exposition of his thoughts seems to portray her notion of "what is best in all possible worlds - a man's response to his existential partnership with a woman" (Prentis 125).

Bronte's attitude towards her sex, oscillated between two extremes. On one hand there was resentment and rebellion, and on the other hand a residual conservatism, a sense of duty which was in conflict with yearning for liberty. "The woman in her saw the justice of the female argument but the male in her was subconsciously resistant" (Prentis 124). These psychological disunities invade her work. Victor the son of Crimsworth and Frances is introduced as a strange child, attracted to the dangers and delights of Byronic rebellion. This mysterious problem together with his parent's differing attitude towards it, seems to epitomize all tensions that Bronte herself had been considering. The Professor echoes a theme that runs through the sister's novels - education, discipline and upbringing of boys. Like Charlotte herself, Victor represents a desire for rebellion and escape. Her first novel "corresponds to her own paradigmatic female wound (Gilbert & Gubar 335).

William returns from his journey, with his wife and son Victor, whose name symbolizes his personal victory from slave to master, and settles in the vicinity of his brother's mill. The novel thus ends in a full circle. Charlotte here circles back to the family, as a site of contention and violence. She once again suggests an analogy between social conflict and family conflict. The William Crimsworth family and the Edward Crimsworth family end up as social equals. Professor Crimsworth has made a good
fortune, given up work, and plans to seal an alliance between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, by sending his son to Eton, to be prepared for a world of conflict beyond the home. As master, Crimsworth now has power, control and authority as head of house, as employer, as owner and as tutor. This dialectic of master/slave threads its way through her novels, together with the dialectic of mastery and submission. The question of gender comes to fore in such oppositions. Master/slave, master/mistress, male/female, father/mother, all play the same cultural binaries in different realms. She seems to challenge such thinking.

The disturbing patriarch in William makes his son wretched, as Edward lorded over him. He resembles Edward, in his threat to whip out Victor’s unruly temper. It is indeed ironic, that William recognizes violence in his son’s conduct, but not in his actions as a father, when he shoots Victor’s mastiff, and resolves forcefully to send Victor to Eton. William seems to enjoy a kind of perverse pleasure in cataloging the future misery of his son — “to leave me, his mother and his home will give his heart an agonized wrench” (TP 253). William feels, his son’s violence should meet “blows instead of blandishments – kicks instead of kisses” (TP 254). He is an epitome of a Victorian father, and believes in the doctrine of self — discipline and “the need to break the child’s will” (Grylls 39). It thus becomes difficult to find the atmosphere of harmony in the domestic haven of William where his son Victor, wails over the grave of his dead dog — “Oh Papa; I’ll never forgive you... You shot Yorke ... I never believed you could be so cruel – I can love you no more” (TP 252). This gesture of shooting Yorke, symbolizes William’s attempt to pull down Yorke Hunsden, who intrudes upon his domestic environment and contaminates his walled garden, both as Victor’s mentor in mutiny, and as a figure of industry. Hunsden appears frequently in the narrative, but his function is hard to understand. He seems to incarnate, much of the dissatisfaction in The Professor. According to Gilbert and Gubar, he is like Charles Wellesley, Zamora or the Duke of Northangerland of the Angrian tales,
an involuntary image of the anger in Bronte's own mind. He performs a three-fold role as a voice of rebellion, a plot - manipulator and a narrator - in - disguise. His presentation of the portrait of Crimsworth's mother, assures Crimsworth with a refreshed sense of identity. His love for the enigmatic Lucia "who once wore chains and broke them ... not matrimonial chains... but social chains of some sort"(TP 249), offers Frances fantasies of an escape, from the choking binds of patriarchy. The end of the novel enables William now patriarch and professor, to kill the "diseased rabid element in his life"(Gilbert&Gubar 334), which comprises of Yorke Hunsden as well as the dog Yorke. The novel thus ends with the journey of Crimsworth and Frances, who have struggled to find a place where they could identify fully ...a true home "amid a sequestered and rather hilly region... a region whose verdure the smoke of mills has not yet sullied"(TP 245). This natural haven indicates William's personal success. The family here symbolizes personal success, as well as a pastoral contrast to the industrial environment.

*The Professor* restores the institution of marriage in a new form and offers a plan for rational living, instead of a fanciful vision of constant wedded bliss. But does this peaceful untainted atmosphere, correspond to a harmonious family environment? This question is ambiguous, as it is difficult to find an atmosphere of domestic peace in the vignettes William gives us—Victor's mutiny supported by Yorke Hunsden and Frances' anxiety about her child in this situation. The Crimsworth family represents not potential relations of social harmony, but actual relations of domination, denial and oppression. Thus this peaceful and untainted atmosphere does not correspond to a harmonious family atmosphere. *The Professor* rewards its hero with domestic happiness, but suspicion and vigilance are not forsaken. The novel continues to picture a world of intense interpersonal competition. Charlotte concludes her novel with an account of Edward Crimsworth's financial recovery, probably to suggest that, while the William
Crimsworth's of the world can rise through steady self-improvement, materialistic and ruthless self-interest has the capacity to reap rewards in an increasingly capitalistic and competitive society. It is this materialistic self-interest that divides the familial bond in her next novel *Jane Eyre*.

*The Professor* looks forward to *Jane Eyre*. Like William Crimsworth, Jane begins her life from a position of familial dependence and subservience. Edward's callous treatment is similar to John Reed's treatment towards Jane. Edward owns the treasured portrait of their mother, just as John possesses the books that Jane treasures. Family serves as a protector of class status in both novels. Published in 1847, after the failure of *The Professor*, Charlotte Bronte found ways of dramatizing desires and principles through the narrative of a young woman confronting the world. A novel of development, it is structured as a quest through five stations-Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor-House and Ferndean. Through the figure of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte explores prominent subject positions of Victorian women, ranging from the female child, female adolescent, and working class woman to the lady of the Manor. Gilbert and Gubar remark:

> The novel is a story of enclosure and escape, a distinctively female bildungsroman in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from imprisonment of her childhood, toward an unthinkable goal of mature freedom, are symptomatic of difficulties. Every woman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead) starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield) and coldness (at Marsh End).

(66)

Elaine Showalter commends Bronte for her attempt to describe "a complete female identity". The title page itself is a comment on the problematic status of women in the Victorian age. *Jane Eyre* is "a soul speaking to soul, it is an utterance from the depths
of a struggling much enduring spirit; suspira de profundis!” (Gordon 154). In the novel Jane moves out of an original family, which she is in but does not belong to, and finds a secure place in a family of her own. Her quest is not just a family limited to marriage, but a relationship characterized by kinship.

The progress of Jane Eyre can be charted through a sequential arrangement of the family/counter-family dyad. In the novel we encounter first the Reeds as the legal family, and Jane (late Mr. Reed’s sister’s daughter) as the representative of a near incestuous counter-family; second the Broklehurst’s who run the school Jane is sent to as the legal family and Jane, Miss Temple and Helen Burns as a counter family that falls short because it is only a community of women; third Rochester and the mad Mrs. Rochester as legal family and Jane and Rochester as illicit counter-family. Jane moves from counter family to family-in-law. In the next sequence Jane restores full family status to the incomplete family of Rivers. Final sequence is a community of families with Jane, Rochester and their children.

(Spivak, 98-99)

Family in Jane Eyre indicates a sense of ‘belongingness’ which is absent in the Reed family, comprising of a patriarchal stepbrother, wicked step mother and two selfish stepsisters who tyrannize Jane, and make her feel unwanted. The beginning is powerful, and readers are thrust into a family situation fraught with conflict and controversy. When the story opens at Gateshead, we are introduced to an ideal Victorian family, a perfect tableau of domesticity, conveying warmth and insularity of the family unit, safe from the forces beyond home. Mrs. Reed and her three children John, Eliza and Georgina appear happy and contended, but there is no place for Jane in this secure family picture. Mrs.
Reed considers her "unchild like, a stormy presence that threatens to corrupt her brood of contended children (JE 7). Her position is ambiguous as she cannot fit into the slot of the working class nor can she be considered part of her aunt’s class. Jane is presented as a figure that is peripheral in social terms, marginalized in terms of economic status and victimized as an outsider. Her silence is a result of “circumstance, of being born into the wrong class, race or sex, being denied education, becoming numbered by economic struggle, by censorship or distracted or imbedded by the demands of nurturing”(Fiskin & Hedges 197). She distances herself from her blood relations, seeking different nooks and corners where she can be secure. But her escape to the window seat behind the crimson curtain only reinforces her marginalization and inferiority. It is a scene of marginalization and privatizing of the protagonist. John Reed taunts Jane:

you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money, your father left you none; you ought to beg and not live here with gentleman’s children like us, and eat the same meals, we do and wear clothes at our mama’s expense.(JE 115)

The bully cuffs and strikes Jane, because she refuses to show due deference. John symbolizes patriarchy, common in Victorian families. He understands the socio-economic power that determines one’s place in the world. Membership in family, empowered children to certain rights that established their social status as adults. The political and social circumstances in Jane’s life are established. In the Victorian society a girl’s prospects depended on the wealth and status of her father. As John makes clear, Jane’s father left her nothing, so she has to make her journey without a family. John feels it is his right to punish Jane – “I’ll teach you to rummage my bookshelves; for they are mine, all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years”(JE 11). This scene portrays the social and political contradictions of the Victorian era. Subordination arises here, out of rights of property, which determines the master/mistress/servant relation. As a female
Jane is exposed to male physical brutality and whim, and as an economically helpless person, she is vulnerable in a class-conscious society. As Jina Politi comments:

It is also the physical, psychological and legal subordination of female to male. (83)

He hurls the Bewick book at Jane, to assert his patriarchal inheritance, which reminds Jane of being a usurper in the Reed household.

Here Jane can be compared to Heathcliff, the Byronic hero of *Wuthering Heights*. Both are orphans brought home by the father, against the mother’s wishes and persecuted by the family siblings. Mrs. Reed resembles Mrs. Earnshaw in her hatred for the outcaste Jane, and John Reed like Hindley, repeatedly asserts his patriarchal power over the orphan Jane. Heathcliff remains an outcaste throughout the novel. Barring Catherine, no one accepts him as a family member. At a later stage in the novel her aunt accepts Jane though she is an outcaste in the beginning. Before she dies Mrs. Reed repents for being callous and unkind to Jane “I have twice done you a wrong which I regret now”(JE 250). This is the only difference between Jane and Heathcliff. Jane like Heathcliff, rebels and frantically tries to assert the ‘self’. It is from John Reed that she learns what it is like to be powerless female in a patriarchal society. Her struggle against John, leads to her imprisonment in the red – room, a kind patriarchal death chamber where Mr. Reed breathed his last. “No jail was ever more secure,”(JE 14) she tells us, and this emphasizes her isolation and vulnerability. Frustrated and angry, she fantasizes some way of escape from this oppression. Jane’s struggle appears to us as a child’s instinctive desire for freedom, for self – determination against restriction and oppression. Her initial weapon and revenge against persecution comes in the form of Uncle Reed. She strikes her aunt dumb when she retorts “what would Uncle Reed say to you if he were alive?”(JE 28). Bronte here asserts the power of the family and of the father within it. Patriarchal
authority rebukes Mrs. Reed the archetypal ‘bad mother’. This struggle between Jane and her family is solved when she encounters the merciless and hypocritical patriarch Broklehurst. He has come with news to remove her to Lowood, a school for orphan girls. With all indigence’s, Lowood offers Jane a refuge which prompts her final act of defiance — “I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt as long as I live” (JE 39). She is released from the bonds of a family and moves to the next step of her journey in search of an identity.

At Lowood, Jane is schooled to be submissive. Lowood represents the author’s shocking experiences in Cowan Bridge School. Charlotte Bronte expresses “the pent-up emotion fermenting in her soul through Jane” (Matus 110). The status of women in society was a major concern of Bronte. She wrote to Ellen Nussey in 1848:

I often wish to say something about the condition of women. One can see where the evil lies, but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear ... her vocation is evident; when her destiny isolates her, I suppose she must do what she can, live as she can, complain as little, bear as much, work as well as possible ... At the same time, I conceive that when patience has done its utmost and industry its best, whether in case of women or operatives, and when both are baffled and pain and want triumph, the sufferer is free, is entitled, to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief.

(C. Bronte, 196)

It is in Lowood that Jane gets a chance to determine her position in an all female community. Jane is treated with equality and for the first time tastes independence away from the Reed family. But Mr. Broklehurst denouncing her as a liar cuts this spell of happiness short, and once again she is a “castaway, not a member of the flock” (JE 69).
Her journey from Gateshead to Lowood is one from passion to self-control. Helen Burns, her only friend in Lowood, represents an impossible ideal to Jane. She advises Jane to re-evaluate her relationship with the Reed family because one’s duty, Helen declares, is to submit to the injustices of this life, in expectation of the ultimate justice of the next—

“Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you” (JE 60).

But Jane finds it impossible to love her enemies and determines to maintain her hostility. She is once again pitted against a “more substantial representative of the patriarchal system in the Rev Mr. Broklehurst” (Moglen, 112). His mission is to “mortify in these girls the lusts of flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety” (JE 67). Broklehurst’s aim is however based on inequality and injustice. He demands cutting off the topknots of all girls who had them and removal of a natural evil—curls of Julia Stevens. He condemns aberrant hair and latest fashion, and it is indeed ironical that his family appears that moment, dressed in frills, laces and French curls. But he sees nothing evil in the curls of his family. Economically they belong to a higher level from the poor girls he is castigating. It is therefore, reasonable for them to behave differently. Broklehurst thinks it right to exercise ambition and discontent among the inmates, to prepare them for the confines of future life. This is a pointer to the different treatment of the rich and the poor, which was one of the less attractive features of Evangelicalism. Bronte was not a pioneer in social reform, but she protests against demarcation between the rich and the poor. Jane passes eight years of submissiveness in Lowood, but always yearns for true liberty. When Helen dies due to typhus and Miss Temple marries, Jane prays for freedom and exclaims, “I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped... grant me at least a new servitude” (JE 89). Her stay in Lowood helps her to conciliate the intense impression of her childhood sufferings. But her quest remains the same—“what do I want? A new place, in a new home, amongst, new faces, under new
circumstances.” (JE 90). This marks her desire to secure a place within a temporal domestic community which is continued in her next home Thornfield.

The Thornfield section portrays Charlotte Bronte’s concern with the controlling power of the family over the individual. Here it is the Rochester family that controls. Jane learns that there are others who have suffered in the hands of money-conscious family. The main function of the Thornfield section is to hide family history and secrets. Family connections are stifled and denied. Rochester denies any connection with Adele, Mrs. Fairfax refuses to divulge her connection with the Rochester family, and Jane continues to dissociate herself from the Reed family. Rochester’s attempt of suppressing secrets of his family portrays his desire to control the family as it had once controlled him. The family here plays a vital role and primogeniture steps in to move the action. Primogeniture was the custom of family property descending to the eldest son, which governed the family structure in the nineteenth century. Rochester being the younger son was left out of the family inheritance. His protest against this injustice can be compared to Jane’s complaint against the subordination of women. Lack of economic status left woman and younger sons a prey to family abuse, as both their families portray. He however has achieved worldly success and so “blends social desirability with a thwarted underdog past, and his attempt to violate marriage conventions, suggests a cavalier stance towards the code which governs Jane” (Eagleton 20). Jane learns from Mrs. Fairfax about the history of the Rochester family – “he broke his family, and now for many years leads an unsettled kind of life” (JE 134). She realizes that they both shared a history of family troubles, and a bond of kinship arises between them:

I felt at times, as if he were my relation, rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. So happy, so gratified did I became with this new interest added to like, that I ceased to pine after kindred; (JE 153)
According to Merryn Williams, all heroines of Charlotte Bronte “want not just a husband but a master” (Williams 92). First found in the Angrian stories, this is the key word is all her novels. Her women “normally call their husbands my master, sir, monsieur” (92). Mr. Rochester’s attention and application of her wit and spirit changed her self – conception. Felicity Rose in her critical study “Angel and Demon: Female Selfhood and the Male Gaze in Byatt and Bronte” comments, that the night Rochester’s mad wife Bertha sets fire to Rochester’s bed, serves as a warning that Jane’s selfhood is in danger. Conflict now characterizes their relationship, as Jane is determined to hold on to her self. Different families intrude the growing affinity between this master and governess. The Ingram family is another Reed family, giving much importance to wealth and social status. They marginalize Jane’s position of a governess to that of “an anathemized race” (JE 221). As M. Jeanne Peterson points out every Victorian governess received strikingly conflicting messages “she was and was not a member of the family, was and was not a servant” (Gilbert & Gubar 75). She was:

- trapped within rigid social functions which demands subservience and self sacrifice. But being an upper class – servant she has an imaginative awareness and cultivated sensibility, and lives at that ambiguous point in the social structure at which two worlds – an interior one of emotional hungering and an external one of harshly mechanical necessity meet and collide. (Eagleton 16).

Mary Poovey’s article “The Anathemised Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre”, observes the overlapping of its thematic concerns and date of publication with the historical context of 1850’s. The profession of a governess was based on contradiction. When Jane takes up this job she remains an outcast. She experiences this most acutely
when she comes into contact with Rochester's aristocratic friends. Jane realizes that her relationship with Rochester was based on inequality:

You of importance to him in any way? Go, your folly sickens me. You have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference—equivocal tokens shown by a gentleman of family and a man of the world, to a dependent and a novice. (JE 169).

She accepts that Rochester would marry Blanche Ingram for family and social reasons. But she refuses to be in any way another Blanche. Like Becky Sharp of *Vanity Fair* (1847), Jane sets a fashion by marrying into the employer's family. They were earning their living but never ready to knuckle under circumstances, or allow their personalities to be submerged. Charlotte takes an emphatically feminist viewpoint in denying that a women's duty is to be beautiful. Jane pronounces Blanche inferior, due to lack of kinship with Rochester. Charlotte once told her sisters that, they were wrong in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting in other terms, to which she replied, "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"(C.Bronte 176). Charlotte Bronte satirizes the upper class in her portrayal of the party scene, absurd charades and the bogus fortuneteller. The Ingram family along with Colonel Dent and Sir George Lynn portray the frivolities that Bronte wants to criticize. With the visit of these high society friends of Rochester, Jane is once again marginalized.

It is at this point that the Reed family once again enters into Jane's life and she returns to Gateshead, where her dying aunt, informs her about her uncle Mr. Eyre, and Jane offers Mrs. Reed her full forgiveness. This portrays Jane's spiritual growth and superiority, but her narrative burns with a sense of injustice that is both religious as well as familial. Jane remarks—"women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women
feel just as men do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer" (JE 115). Jane never tires in her quest to find someone worthy of her determined self hood. Poetic justice is fulfilled with the Reed family meeting a tragic end. John Reed dies a dissipated man, Mrs. Reed dies in agony and shame, Eliza is left with no alternative but to join the religious order and Georgina makes an advantageous match with a wealthy worn-out man of fashion. This time Jane leaves Gateshead not humiliated, but an heiress. But home for her was Thornfield, which upholds and cherishes the full integrity of her person. “I love Thornfield ... I love it for a full and delightful life.” (JE 265). But destiny has other things in store for her. On her return she finds that Thornfield has no place for her, no place as a(nother) Mrs. Rochester. After their betrothal, tensions develop in their relationship. Having secured her love, Rochester starts treating Jane as a plaything for she is now his girl-bride. He showers her with jewels and silks and declares that he would attach her to “a diamond chain” (JE 271). This rekindles the entrapment of Gateshead and once again she asserts “I am not an angel and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself” (JE 272). Jane cannot accept the idea of turning into a doll or an angel for her master, and rejects the idea of this union. According Patricia Thompson:

Jane considers herself a woman first and a dependent second.
She was a woman earning as a governess, but not knuckling under to circumstance or allowing her personality to be submerged... *Jane Eyre* was a revolutionary document, the *Magna Carta* of governesses. (46)

Unable to endure the sense of being ‘kept’ by him, she enquires about her uncle in Madeira, which emanuates in the frustration of their marriage. Rochester now becomes an abyss of fear and self-hood. Her desire to write and inform her uncle about her marriage, unconsciously signals her wish to forestall a self-sacrificing union. Once again family is
seen as the all-controlling power. Richard Mason reaches in time to defend the honour of
his sister, by preventing Rochester marrying a lowly governess, a familial interloper, who
has overstepped the boundaries of caste and place. The existence of an “impediment” (JE
203) marks the family’s power over the protagonist, and action is brought to a halt. The
impediment is Bertha Mason and it is the family here, which saves Jane from a bigamous
marriage, and the fate of being a kept woman. Like The Tenant of Wildfell Hall;

*Jane Eyre* focuses on marriage as a tie that binds rather than
sustains. Like Helen, Rochester is bound to a marriage, which
has failed. Both novels raise questions about the state of the
family in 1840’s when the Brontës’ were writing. (Matus 116)

Rochester’s secret is revealed with the existence of Bertha. Jane learns that Rochester had
married Bertha for status, for money, for everything else but love—“I never loved, I
never esteemed, I did not even know her”(JE 322) confesses Rochester. The secrets of
patriarchy affect Jane and doubts about Rochester start breeding. She realizes that even
where minds are equal; marriage may be wrought with inequality. The past is always
present as a barrier and this leads to frustration in their marriage. The impediment, Bertha
Mason Rochester, is a warning of mindless passion and is in many ways similar to the
child Jane- a passionate dependent, who must be restrained and a bad animal who must be
locked away. Gilbert and Gubar have interpreted Bertha as “Jane’s truest and darkest
double”(83). Their similarity arises from their analogous position in the family. They are
both family secrets, sources of family shame, but both rebel against family containment.
Jane gains freedom but Bertha remains a slave. Every one of Bertha’s appearances or
more accurately, her manifestations has been associated with an experience (or
repression) of anger on Jane’s part. Jane’s feelings of hunger, rebellion and rage were
accompanied by Bertha’s “low slow ha!ha” and “eccentric murmurs”. Gilbert and Gubar
remark that:
Jane’s apparently secure responses to Rochester’s egalitarian sexual confidences was followed by Bertha’s attempt to incinerate the master in his bed... Jane’s anxieties about her marriage and her fears of her own alien robed and veiled bridal image were objectified by the image of Bertha in a white and straight dress...(85)

Jane’s interrupted marriage marks the end of her quest for kinship and the beginning of a new search.

Volume III opens with Jane’s question—“What am I to do”(JE 313). This signals Jane’s embarking on a new journey—a journey of spiritual progress. In deciding to leave Rochester, Jane’s takes the first crucial step towards independence. Mother nature is her guide and the moon advises—“my daughter flee temptation”(JE 337) and Jane fleeing temptations becomes absolutely destitute, without family or possessions. Jane’s days on the heath symbolizes “the homelessness—the nameless, placeless and contingent status of woman in patriarchal society”(Gilbert& Gubar 84). Jane is without an anchor in this patriarchal society, and appeals to the universal Mother Nature to sustain her. Like Bunyan’s pilgrim, she is bereft of family and friends: homeless and penniless, observes Helen Moglen in her essay “The End of Jane Eyre and the Creation of a Feminist Myth”. But the maternal love of nature cannot fulfil the needs of Jane as a social being. Her experience in the heath also helps her to refocus on the need to adapt, or adjust, to any situation. The heath becomes a place where she can redefine her position as a woman in a space that knows no boundaries. This helps her to proceed to Moor- House, which in a sense is her true home- a symbol of security and family unity the home of her kin the Rivers family. St. John, Diana and Mary are idealized portraits of the Bronte siblings— “There was nothing like them in these parts, they liked learning all three, almost from the time they could speak... they were agreeable with each other”(JE 361). Jane is drawn to
the two sisters who were very much alike and extremely close like Emily and Anne. St John however is an alien, in this domestic set up, just as Branwell was distanced from his sisters. Moor-House gives domestic fulfilment to Jane where she is treated with inequality in the company of women. Jane’s longing for a family of her own is reflected in her joy on learning that the River siblings are her real cousins. Her inheritance is of no significance, as money cannot fulfil Jane’s isolated self. It ensures domestic comfort, but family and a home are more important for Jane—“I never had a home, I never had brothers and sisters; I must and will have them now” (JE 405).

Moor-House is a picture of the family harmony and solidarity and the family injustice she had suffered in Gateshead, is corrected when she proceeds from dependent at Gateshead to provider at Moor-House. The Rivers family fulfils her desire for earthly home and human kin. But this contented life is marred, when St. John resolves to become Jane’s husband. St John offers her a life of principles, where Jane would be his soul mate. Jane realizes that as his wife, she would be always restrained. Felicity Rose remarks that this male possession of body and mind leads to the collapse of female self. Domestic endearments and household joys have no attraction for St John—“He would hardly make a good husband; and it would be tiring to be his wife” (JE 413). This would be a union based not on love but labour, and according to Jane, appears to be another form of dependence. Life with St John in India would be a life of “homelessness, lovelessness and subjugation” (Eagleton 21), involving sacrifice of personal fulfilment, and Jane is not ready to violate her identity. “God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish,” (JE 436) replies Jane, when St John proposes to her. Part of her experience is to know the extremes of a chaotic life, and one of disciplined order. It is here that Charlotte Bronte gave form and meaning, to the private extravagance of her own life, torn between claims of the self and the claims of society. Unable to solve the crisis Jane once
again seeks the help of her paternal Father, through whom she hears the cry of Rochester—“Jane! Jane! Jane” (JE 442). She breaks away immediately from the Rivers family and returns to Thornfield.

On her return, she finds Thornfield in ruins. Poetic justice is fulfilled with Bertha’s death, and Thornfield set ablaze by a fire. Jane now moves to Ferndean, where she finds Rochester a reformed man. Bertha’s act of burning down Thornfield has left him blind and maimed. Rochester has come to acknowledge his miserable state as an apportionment of Divine Justice—“Of late, Jane—only of late—I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom” (JE 470). It is in Ferndean, that Jane’s desire of an identity and kinship, are both fulfilled. She realizes that she will not be subsumed in marriage or be economically dependent in her union with Rochester. Her role as well as her new found economic independence, places her in a position of power observes Sally Shuttleworth in her book on Victorian psychology- *Charlotte Bronte and Nineteenth Century Psychology* (1996). As Jane and Rochester move towards an union, she declares explicitly—“I love you better now, when I can be really useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence when you disdained every part but that of given and protector” (JE 469). Marriage for Jane is “in no sense, merely a solution or a goal. It is not patriarchal marriage in the sense of marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman but a continuation of this woman’s creation of herself” (Rich 483). It is Rochester who now becomes dependent and this deprivation of physical power, helps Jane to equalize the situation, expressing the feminine need to be needed, revealing again “the intimate connection between helping and controlling” (Spacks 67). Charlotte Bronte here manufactures an ideal realization of a female fantasy. All her novels deal with a woman in search of an identity, a search for independence. Jane the poor orphan now becomes an independent woman, who chooses her companion in marriage. *Jane Eyre* records a
woman's journey to a faith and family of her own making, which are sites of Jane’s self-fulfilment.

The entry into a family is a progress from loneliness. Jane Eyre thus “insists on independence as forcefully as it recognizes the importance of marital interdependence” (Sanders 421). Marriage resolves the emotional and sexual conflicts and supplies a satisfactory woman’s fantasy of independence coupled with love. Jane Eyre challenges contemporary attitudes and believes in the conviction that the institution of family provides the only means of true emotional fulfilment for women. Charlotte Bronte sets out to liberate women from representations in which patriarchal Victorian ideology held her. She set out to vindicate the socially underprivileged woman. Jina Politi in her thought provoking article “Jane Eyre Classified”, suggests that once Jane enters the center discarding her marginal position, she grows, “from revolted marginality to quiescent socialization, reblending contradictions which it [the narrative] initially exposed, thus securing its survival through the convention of a happy ending” (78). Jane Eyre moves reluctantly, defiantly towards a conventional ending in marriage whose harmony and statis suggest, to an individual defined by conflict, as Jane has been throughout the novel. Felicity Rose suggests that the ending can be read as Jane’s triumphant culmination of her search for acceptance and understanding, or a loss of independence forced on characters by Victorian convention.

Unlike The Professor which ends with a traditional view of the family, in Jane Eyre, Bronte seems to have chosen to resolve her doubts in a vision of harmony, whose ideality depends on an untraditional view of the family. Jill Matus in her study “Strong Family Likeness: Jane Eyre and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall” suggests that “despite the sense of Jane’s ascendancy and power and the fact that an unloved orphan finds kin, inheritance, personal refuge and marital joy, the novel still encodes a sense of the
precariousness and fragility of human happiness”(119). Though we move ahead of the discord that was Jane at Gateshead to her perfect concord with Rochester, the novel’s romantic apotheosis is still riven with tensions and contradictions. The balance of passion and reason remains in tension. There seems to be a sense of continual struggle instead of a conventional tying up of loose ends.

Her next novel Shirley offers a parallel to the Jane – Rochester relationship and also takes up the issue of materialistic self-interest, that divided familial bonds in The Professor. Charlotte Bronte started writing Shirley in 1847 shortly after the publication of Jane Eyre. Set in Yorkshire during the period of the Luddite riots (1811-12), the novel illuminates two themes, class-relationships and corrupted family values. The inevitable rise of capitalism, as a result of industrialization had impeded and tampered the cooperative relations, associated with the family. Like her first novel The Professor, Shirley also deals with the values of contemporary society that intimidated the virtues of cooperation and selflessness in the family. A novel of social criticism, it emphasizes the corruption of family values, by the spirit of industrialization. Charlotte Bronte represents the “family jarring”(Sh 99) reflecting the social strife, as the family was not safeguarded from the infringement of market-place values. She criticizes the disruption of social and domestic harmony, effectuated by materialistic self-interest in the family. This materialistic self-interest that corrupts William Crimsworth’s fraternal relationship in The Professor, divides the entire society of Shirley. It portrays an industrial society that has created gulfs in family, and public relationships. The novel is used as a reformist agenda to bridge this gap. Penny Boumelha in her essay “Shirley” does not read it as a flawlessly feminist text, but as one, which, having raised the class issue, compromises it by its paternalistic ending. Shirley “is itself caught in its representations of both class and gender oppressions”(Boumelha 93). Domestic relations in the novel are reduced to a
question of personal economic gain. Members of the working-class and women, are portrayed as victims of relationships based on cash payment. The disregard of common brotherhood lies at the heart of Charlotte Bronte’s social criticism. Thematic unity is achieved through the parallels between suffering of dispossessed women in the private sphere, and dispossessed workers in the public sphere. Relations in a workplace should be modelled by relations at a home, ideally governed and protected by a benevolent father who by his position earns respect from his children. Charlotte Bronte’s aim is not to overturn the working of society, but to re-assert domestic and social paternalism. Shirley is structured around polarized masculine and feminine world. “The mill versus the home, industry versus nature, head versus heart: all these are familiar enough ideological oppositions” (Boumelha 94).

The novel begins with Robert Moore, the hero discussing marriage with Malone. Moore is guided by self-interest and materialism:

If there is one notion, I hate more than another, it is that of marriage; I mean marriage in the vulgar and weak sense, as a matter of mere sentiment, two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling... humbug! But an advantageous connection such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad—eh? (Sh 23-24)  

Robert inherits his father’s position as a mill owner but according to Yorke, is a poor substitute due to his lack of paternalistic inclinations towards his ‘family’ of workers. He rationalizes his drive for money, claiming that he had been “brought up only to make money”(Sh 138). Bronte here criticizes the mistaken conflation of family in Roberts’ upbringing. In his concern for the concepts of family honour (dependent on his economic status) he neglects the workingmen who constitute a broader family, for whom he should
Shirley questions men's power over women and workers. Lyndall Gordon in *Charlotte Bronte: A Passionate Life* observes:

Robert is out of touch with his worker not willfully but because he himself struggles for survival against the laws of the land, specifically the controversial Orders in Council, which put war before the needs of trade and populace (180-81).

Bronte takes utmost pain to show that Robert does not value family relationships. He is more at home; in his counting house where he spends more time than the house he shares with his sister. Robert sees himself divided between two natures: “one for home and one for leisure”(Sh, 287). In practice he applies a single standard of behaviour - callous, profit seeking, the self- interest of the market place, which he shows, in casting off Caroline, and proposing a loveless but advantageous marriage to Shirley. He hides his feelings, in order to gain economically by marrying the wealthy heiress, Shirley Keelder. Marriage to Robert is like the purchase of new machinery. Women are seen as physical capital, and marriage as means to a profitable end. Caroline’s inability to convince Robert of his injustices, shows the limits of women’s reformatory power, and underscores the power of the original family environment in shaping personal values.

Charlotte’s aim was to illicit sympathy for the group by reminding Robert and her readers, that they were family men, whose distress arises from their inability to support their dependant families. Charlotte Bronte uses Hiriam Yorke to as an example of active paternalism that conciliates class differences, and preserves social harmony. He is a good father to his ‘family’ of workers and to his own family at Briarmains. The Yorke’s are described as the only intact family in the novel “the first and the oldest”(Sh 50). Helene Moglen argues that the Yorke’s are a good and successful family. Mr. Yorke “an advocate of family unity” is proud of and attentive to his children (Sh 147). Mrs. Yorke is a good wife, a very careful mother who looked after her children and was sincerely
attached to her husband. She fulfills the role of the ideal Victorian wife, but was a strong–minded woman who took strong democratic views of the society. But relations within the family were not an exemplary vision of harmonious relationship. The Yorke’s are a family divided by “Cain and Abel strife” (Sh 655). Brother is seen turning against brother, younger siblings rebel against the tyranny of the patriarchal eldest son Matthew. This conflict epitomizes the interactions of the world beyond the home and family, where men in general lack fraternal feeling. This family is fermenting with female discontent, and oppressed rebellion embodied in the eldest daughter Rose, whose mind is full “with the germs of ideas her mother never knew” (S 148). Mrs. Yorke refuses to attend to the protest of twelve-year-old Rose who prefigures a woman of vigour—an exact portrait of Mary Taylor, a close friend of Charlotte Bronte. Rose claims a life of exploration and travel, contrasted to Caroline’s life which is similar to a slow and painful death. The child Rose defies the mother:

I will not commit it to your worktable to be smothered in piles of woolen hose. I will not prison it in the linnen-press to final shrouds among the sheets: and least of all, mother will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoe to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry and ham on the shelves of the larder. (Sh 400)

To Mrs. Yorke this is ranting and spouting, but Rose answers “I utter it and leave it; it is for you to listen or not” (Sh 401). Rose’s demand to do more than society allows, reinforces the link between workers and daughters. It also serves the purpose of Charlotte Bronte’s domestic and social commentary, supporting her presentation of family relations in the private sphere adversely affected by the public hostility and competition. The Yorke family represents the microcosm of Shirley’s special concern with male conflict and female containment, which is the focus of the Caroline story.
Caroline represents a conventional woman whose energies are used, by a society that relegated them by law and custom to ineffectual positions. Her unspoken love for Robert Moore festers in a stagnant existence. Just like the unemployed worker's of Robert's mill who are victims in public sphere, Caroline is a corollary victim in the private sphere. The workers suffer for a short period, but Caroline is affected, both physically and mentally. Through her, Charlotte Bronte is highlighting the female struggle for livelihood and self-development, endured by those women who had lost their marriageable worth, and are prevented by the opinion of society and their own limited education from aspiring anything else. "Caroline is the type of Bronte heroine who because of her social position, middle-class, female single, economically independent can best express the consequence of repression" (Eagleton & Pierce 51). She is the only Bronte heroine who lives with her family, the head of which is an uncle who despises women. Caroline is faced with the agony of securing a valued sense of self, not dependent on the roles of mother and wife. What seems important to Caroline is a chance to simply move "I should be well if I went from home" (Sh 189). Caroline seems to be the most "cramped of Bronte heroines ...restricted physically, limited socially and attenuated emotionally" (Boumelha 92). Despite her uncle's contrasting views regarding marriage, her only aim is to become the wife of Robert Moore. But her domestic ambitions are no match for Robert's industrial ones.

Family and Marriage are superfluities for Robert, compared to money, but for Caroline these are only the options. Being his cousin she occupies a position that is half way between sister and wife. She refuses to play the role of a sister: As for being his sister and all that stuff, I despise it. I will either be all over or nothing to a man like Robert" (Sh 262). Charlotte Bronte places Caroline's dilemma in the larger social context. Like all girls her aim is to marry. She has no alternative to marriage, and is totally
dependent on her uncle, who has never given any thought to her education, which would have offered her alternatives to wifehood and motherhood. Caroline is a victim of Victorian upbringing. In voicing this protest against narrow middle-class female existence, Charlotte Bronte holds the father-figures responsible for this present situation:

Men of England! Look at your poor girls...Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter well when it is brought before you... You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not blush for them - then seek for them an interest and an occupation. (Sh 393)

*Shirley* fuses the call of social paternalism with domestic paternalism. Daughters and workers are both dependent on the patriarchal structure of the family and society. Caroline and Farren's plea is for fathers' to help themselves. Interest and occupation are necessary for economic independence and emotional well-being. Caroline's dilemma when the marriage fizzles out, proves the differences in man/woman status. She suffers a crisis of identity -"What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world? (Sh 174). She turns for these answers to Miss Ainley and Mrs. Mann who are old maids. Patricia Beer observes, that "in Charlotte Bronte's world if matrimony has some pain, celibacy has no pressure."(Beer 123). Bronte here rewards their loneliness, their ugly faces and the self-denying aspects of spinsterhood. Caroline tries to overcome her disappointment and transfers her idea of self from wife to daughter, seeking to replace a husband with a mother "a deep, secret anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily"(Sh 186). But the mother being physically absent cannot sustain her, and she makes a last attempt to become a governess. "For Caroline as for Jane becoming a governess is ambition escape and imprisonment, free choice and fatality"(Eagleton 57). But she receives no support from her guardian, who "cannot in the least understand her longings to do something worthwhile"(Beer 120).
He absolutely overpowers her, and the patriarchal streak is evident when he declares that women should “stick to the needle...learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie crust making, and you will be a clever woman some day (Sh 98-99). And three meals a day and a roof over their heads ought to be all they need:

She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear, as usual: a while since that sufficed to keep her handsome and cheery, and there she sits now, a poor little, pale, pulling chit enough. Provoking! (Sh 189)

Her uncle’s tastes are consistent with these views. He felt “woman were not only inferior in ability but also in morals”(Beer 120). Caroline’s eagerness to become a governess, however does not match that of Agnes Grey. This seemed to be the only option open for the educated middle class Victorian women. But employment was a poor substitute for marriage. Charlotte Bronte does not condemn Caroline, for having domestic ambitions. She signals the need for socially accepted alternatives to marriage, which is portrayed in the illness of Caroline. Receiving no support from her guardian and having observed the desolate state of spinsters, Caroline sinks into serious illness related to emotional turmoil. She suffers a psychosomatic illness ...“a familiar decline, brain fever this time”,that brings her close to death (Spacks 93). Bronte projects her memories of Emily and Anne’s illness in Caroline’s illness, and questions God’s justice and mercy. Her description of Caroline’s doubts for faith emanate from her own for she believed that “God turned his face from her”(Sh 396). Caroline’s emotional and physical condition portrays Charlotte’s inability to face death. Death is averted and family restored.

Charlotte cures Caroline of her mental crisis of identity not by employment, but by giving her a new identity as a daughter of Mrs. Pryor. Family once again plays the role of the saviour. Its importance is highlighted by Bronte, when it makes its entry at a critical moment in Caroline’s life. This restoration gives her vitality an self-worth – “My
own Mama, who belongs to me and to whom I belong... I have something I can love well, and not be afraid of loving” (Sh 448). The chief relationship that Shirley considers is that of mother and daughter. This relationship is a search that bestows identity and worth, and brings Caroline back from the brink of death. Mrs. Pryor, her mother is a runaway wife, disillusioned with family life supporting herself under an assumed name. Her family life left her “galled, crushed paralyzed and dying” (Sh 437). Young and ignorant, she had been forced by circumstances to toil as a governess. No one was witness to her suffering “no sympathy – no redemption – no redress” (Sh 435). But she is ready to forgive her husband for the injustice he inflicted on her. All debts are cleared as the daughter had accepted her. Once again Charlotte Bronte emphasizes the importance of family both socially and psychologically. Family has that power which rejuvenates the life of Caroline and Mrs. Pryor.

Apart from Mrs. Pryor’s love, it is also the friendship with Shirley that restores Caroline and saves her from her dilemma. Shirley Keeler is a figure of female freedom, unburdened by any need to become a mother or wife. She offers Caroline an outlet for her views on unmarried women and a healthy friendship develops. Shirley was the fruit of Charlotte Bronte’s struggle “partly a posthumous struggle with a sister (Emily) who refused her lead, refused intimacy and often refused to speak” (Gordon 190). Shirley is a strong willed girl who has a man’s name and holds a man’s position – a landowner with no immediate family. She is independent, courageous and unconventional, in asserting self-expression and an ability to manage her own affairs. Her assertiveness is derived from her status and wealth and also because her parents expecting her to be a son gave her “a man’s name; I hold a man’s position: it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood” (Sh 213). It is suggested by Showalter that this masculine role-playing, is an expression of female powerlessness and a
challenge to claims of male superiority. Her economic and social condition makes it possible for her to exercise control over her destiny. She is clever and shrewd enough to manipulate men to her own purposes. She expels Mr. Donne from her house, controls the meeting with the senior clergy and stands up to Mr. Sympson. Yet her views regarding marriage are ambiguous. She favours a "traditional womanly role" (Williams 92), and wants not an eligible suitor but a master:

Any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me... One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward-whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear. (Sh 552).

There is a distinction between a master and a tyrant. Shirley shows no respect when she does not feel it. Shirley offers Caroline an outlet for her views on unmarried women but Caroline is discontented with this friendship as it does not make her strong and happy nor does it provide her with answers to her life questions. This bond of friendship does not remain undisturbed like the Jane-Rivers friendship, as Shirley too starts developing feelings for Robert. Rivalry issues, although Caroline claims sisterly affection, and like Jane starts comparing herself to the heiress: "a graceful pencil sketch compared with a vivid painting" (Sh 280). Knowing Robert's ardent desire to be rich, she resigns herself to the fact that this union would be fruitful both emotionally and financially." Caroline is poverty and incapacity, Shirley is wealth and power" (Sh 260). Shirley's journey to family turns Malone's view upside down. She privileges mutual sentiment over personal interest. She realizes Robert's aim in marrying her, being backed by economic necessity, and refuses him: "You spoke like a brigand who demanded my
purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart" (Sh 534). Robert’s queen is his mill and Shirley scorns him “You would immolate me to that mill – your Moloch” (Sh 535). Her own uncle Mr. Symson, tries to force her into a marriage of convenience. She defends her personal freedom, by defying her uncle and refusing to marry either Sam Wynne or Sir Philip Numely. She criticizes her uncle’s participation in making marriages for economic and social gain:

Sir, your god, your great bell, your fish tailed Dagon rises before me as a demon... Behold how hideously governs! ... In his realm there is treachery, there is vice – deep, deadly, domestic vice. In his dominion children grow unloving between parents who have never loved (Sh 557).

According to Shirley, families formed on the basis of worldly interest without love, respect and trust are the sources of domestic strife that corrupt family life. Her tirade is a nationalistic one, a warning of threat to England’s families. Family bonds were shattered due to lack of emotional rapport among the members of such families. For Shirley, it is her heart that will decide the choice of her husband. When her uncle questions her, “will you marry a man below you” she answers “never a man below me” (Sh 555). In agreeing to marry Louis Moore her French tutor, who is below her station, Shirley redefines the value of human relationship in contrast to monetary standard. Family here is saved from market and industry. Though the character of Shirley, Charlotte Bronte depicts the right for women to determine her own life both in the public as well as in the private sphere. Only the highest kind of bond should exist between man and woman – the bond of love.

Towards the end, Christian family values replace market values that governed human interactions. Domestic relations come to be viewed away from cash payments by Robert. This is a result of Shirley’s refusal to marry him. He fully understands the
suffering of his workers and Caroline, during his journey to Birmingham and London. As atonement, he starts looking upon Hollows Cottage as his home. “I am pleased to come home” (Sh 611), he tells Hortense. He now values family ties more than as a vehicle of ‘Credit and Commerce’ (Sh 611). When he finally proposes to Caroline, he acknowledges his need of a helpmate not a business asset and promises to reform. Shirley winds up with reforms in both family and community. The end however is ambiguous, as Charlotte leaves a doubt regarding the domesticating influence of Caroline and reformation of Robert. Bronte also leaves the woman question unanswered. She proposes occupation for the middle class female, outside the domestic sphere, but the heroines in Shirley never achieve it. This issue is taken up by Charlotte Bronte in her next novel Villette. There is no solution apart from marriage and family in Shirley. This ambivalence presents difficulties, as there is a strong sense of tension that remains unsolved. Whereas in Jane Eyre the union of Jane and Rochester represents a harmonized polarity of male/female relationship, the final position of the heroines in Shirley is artistically inappropriate. Shirley and Caroline are mastered, and bound tightly in matrimonial chains, a fate which strikes us as incommensurate as it contrasts their protest against restrictive ideology. This seems to be some kind of compromise. “In each case marriage represents a response to certain aspects of individual personality and an acknowledgement that the specific circumstances permit no other desirable alternative” (Showalter 99). The four cornered relationship between Shirley, Caroline, Robert and Louis is significantly complicated. Shirley is more successful than Caroline and Robert more successful than Louis. But it is a union between successful and less successful. Shirley represents a surrogate of Caroline, introduced when the latter is in the throes of frustrated passion. She “is a Romantic idealization of Caroline and attractively ‘other’” (Eagleton 59). The complex relationship is solved when Shirley marries Louis, a spiritually cultivated, apparently docile
subordinate, a male type of Caroline. Caroline rises to Shirley’s role while Shirley descends to marry someone in Caroline’s social level. The Louis-Shirley union offers a parallel to the Jane-Rochestor relationship. Shirley deliberately seeks to become subservient to him and to encourage him to be more assertive to her. The novel is far from revolutionary in its view of woman. Charlotte Bronte is not attempting to alter society but is hoping make society more fair and understanding towards woman.

Her next novel *Villette* grew out of Charlotte Bronte’s renewed but frustrated attempts to publish her first written novel *The Professor*. *Villette* relives the mental / moral ordeal, the actual thoughts and feelings of a strong struggling soul. In the aftermath of continuous death of her siblings, Charlotte Bronte was pushed into a process of self-regeneration both as an author and a woman. She wrote to Ellen Nussey on the 18th of July 1849- “I do not know how life will pass... Solitude may be cheered and made endurable” (222). In fact *Villette* can be labeled Charlotte’s literary response to death. Lucy Snowe her protagonist highlights the displacement in her family due to the harsh impact of death. Lucy uses a metaphorical family shipwreck to achieve consolation over bitter memories associated with death. Charlotte like Lucy reflects on the devastation her family suffered and writes to Ellen Nussey in 1849 “It is all over- Branwell, Emily, Anne are all gone like dreams-gone as Maria and Elizabeth went twenty years ago” (223). This loneliness compelled her to reaffirm faith in afterlife. A very common Victorian characteristic was the idea of heaven as a final home, where family and friends would ultimately be reunited in happiness. With *Villette* Bronte finally achieved artistic control over her memories with death. Her letters and diaries document her inner struggle passing through a phase of loneliness. This is the very theme she takes up in *Villette*—an isolated young Victorian woman’s struggle for self-mastery in the face of death. Without the presence of her siblings, Charlotte was unable to venture on to a new novel. She suffered
from a loss of identity, a destabilization of selfhood which proves the interrelation of identity that characterized the Bronte's' creative partnership. She was very much dependent on family discussions and wrote *Villette* amidst tension. She wrote to Ellen Nussey in July 18th, 1849 "At that hour, we used to assemble in the dinning room- we used to talk- Now I sit by myself- necessarily I am silent"(C.Bronte, 222). Without a healthy sibling relationship Charlotte Bronte's abilities failed her. It was in total seclusion of Gaskell's home that Bronte wrote *Villette*, her last novel, the richest and most completely integrated of all her work, a masterpiece of sustained imagination and style. She gathers together themes touched upon earlier but not fully realized. Personal incidents lend deeper significance to the themes of *Villette*, which was published in 1853.

Diane. F. Sadoff in her critical study *Monster's of Affection: Dickens, Eliot and Bronte on Fatherhood* remarks that "*Villette* revises Crimsworth's as Crimsworth revises Bronte's experience in Belgium"(129). *Villette* returns to the master- pupil relationship and the Brussels setting of *The Professor*, but employs the female autobiographical perspective of *Jane Eyre*. Unlike Jane who recalls her life after marrying Rochester, Lucy narrates her history with a distance of decades reconstructing her past life. Gilbert and Gubar in their study "The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe" describe *Villette* as Charlotte Bronte's last fictional attempt to come to terms with her own loveless existence. "Bronte charts a course of imprisonment, escape and exclusion until the heroine fortuitously discovers a family of her own"(Gilbert & Gubar, 45). Resigning to her solitary existence she brings in a connection between the loss of Heger and the recent loss of her family. Lucy Snowe tells us her story through a double perspective: the loss of her family and loss of M. Paul. Helene Moglen describes *Villette* as "the confrontation of self by the self "(222). Both Lucy and Charlotte Bronte recreate the self in a solitary existence. The overwhelming question in the novel "Who are you Lucy Snowe? (V 440) is answered
pointedly "I am a rising character" (V 442). Lucy’s journey proposes to create an identity out of destruction and death. Family deaths deprive Lucy of all future protection. The novel is thus a story of destruction and death. Paulina and Graham love and lose parents, Miss Marchmont is deprived of her beloved Frank, M. Paul and the “family junta” (V 507) that envelops him mourns the death of Justine Maria. Unlike Bronte’s earlier heroines who are orphans, Lucy attempts to narrate the loss of her family. She employs a shipwreck as the tragedy that snatched away her family. *Villette* opens with family history but not Lucy’s family. “The novel is full of incomplete families and fake pairings. The ending brings two unions but they are both anomalous” (Hallett XXI).

Chapter I deals with the family of Louisa Bretton the godmother of Lucy Snowe. Mrs Bretton stands for a stale and selfless maternity living through her adored boy’s success. She is a conventional mother and a pleasant matron who would sacrifice any daughter in the world for her son’s breakfast. She bears the name “Bretton of Bretton” (V 1). This double emphasis symbolizes family rootedness, durability and its strength as an institution. However this family prosperity is disrupted due to financial strains. The Bretton family is thus uprooted. Their struggle to re-establish themselves in Villette underlies the precarious state of the family in the Victorian society. All had not gone on smoothly with the Bretton family, a paragon of domestic comfort and affection. The family of Lucy is also not successful in recovering from adversities. Much before the shipwreck, the Snowe family appears a wreck of a family. Lucy is more secure in the “large peaceful rooms at Bretton” (V 1), than in company of her family who impart an “unsettled sadness, a perpetual sense of impending doom” (V 1). Bretton serves as a transitory lull in the tumultuous storm of Lucy’s family life, and later a haven from her lonely life sans her family. In the beginning of the novel Lucy is saved by Mrs. Bretton from some unspecified kinsmen, for unknown reasons. Lucy reflects, “I believe she then
plainly saw events coming whose shadow I had scarcely guessed” (V 2). The letter that arrives at Bretton affirms the unsettled and dangerous family life of Lucy. Lucy is anxious that it may be a “disastrous communication” (V 2) from her home. This letter introduces us to Polly the daughter of Mr. Home who becomes the focus of the Bretton family, prompting Lucy’s self-marginalization. The even tenor of this household is disrupted by Polly Home who is left behind by her father with the Bretton family. Before his departure, Lucy experiences the loss of her family when she sees the close bond between her father and daughter. Polly becomes distraught when Mr. Home leaves “Why hast thou forsaken me? (V 18). She finds compensation in the presence of John Bretton and Mrs. Bretton. Polly is not a very solid character, but the novel focuses on her as a child, lonely, dependent and also mirrors Lucy’s position in the Bretton family. Her attitude towards Polly is stoical and her distaste towards emotion portrays her self-control. Both these qualities prepare her for the future. It is here that she moves to narrate the history of her family.

Lucy rejoins her family- “It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred” (V 31). But these conventional expectations are subjected to the harsh realities of her familial experience. Mid-Victorian culture projected the family as a refuge of fulfilment and serenity, but her family threatens Lucy’s personal well-being. Through the images of placid seas and smooth sailing, Lucy takes her readers on a pleasant journey of life, and suddenly throws them unawares into a violent storm. She states that for eight years she is “a bark slumbering through halcyon weather in a habour still as glass... As great women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?” (V 32). Employing this strategy, she invokes the domestic ideal of the child and the woman within the family, like a boat anchored on a placid habour enjoying the blessings of heaven. Women and children are protected and
guided in the family in a similar manner. “Picture me then idle, basking, plump and happy
stretched on a cushioned deck warmed by constant sunshine...“(V 32). Lucy then shifts
the metaphor and now becomes a passenger on a vessel, enjoying tranquil waters. In the
next section clouds darken and family situation is revealed veiled with images of a
shipwreck. Her family suffers disgrace financial/ marital as well as death. Her aunt
shielded her from any impending distress, which would have embarrassed her. Lucy
describes her the family atmosphere as “cold, of danger, of contention”(V 32) suggesting
an internal struggle of family burdened with financial/ marital distress. The image of the
sinking ship in which all hands are out, reinforces the idea of Lucy’s family trying to save
themselves. Her family like Jane Eyre’s leaves her without money and home.

Absence of family is thus a determining factor in Lucy’s attempts at self-
discovery and self-mastery. The significance of this absence for Lucy is emphasized by
the lack of any defined family history or background, which heightens our sense of
Lucy’s social and psychological isolation. Publishers criticized this lack of Lucy’s
personal history, but Charlotte Bronte staunchly defends her creation’ and lets it remain
elusive. Lucy is now without financial and emotional support and is as Ginerva avows
“nobody’s daughter”(V 147). Whereas Ginerva by contrast the daughter of “a
gentlewoman of family” swears “I would not be you for a kingdom”(V 146-147). Ginerva
is selfish and self-centered and her “engaging feature is her candour with Lucy Snowe
and her unresenting acceptance of the latter’s criticisms and snubs”(Pinion 141). Ginerva
like Blanche Ingram is a relic of Bronte juvenilia. She conforms to the Victorian
convention. Though flattered by her conquest of Dr. John she casts him aside for his
middle-class connections, and showers her attention on the dandy Count de Hamal. The
place of status, wealth and title is emphasized which is a constituent feature of Victorian
society. She gets married to de Hamal envisioning a better future, but her memoirs finally
end in bitter expiation of her youthful levities. Ginerva remains exploitive and mean and suffers very little inspite of her relationship being a farcical one. This was better than “earning a living”(V 52). Lucy admits that she is the “anesthetized survivor of her family, desolate, anomalous almost blank of hope”(V 43). Tony Tanner in his critical study “Substance and Shadow: Reading Reality in Villette” terms Lucy, “an unlocated individual”(64). Her journey is a search to constitute herself without her family, which conventionally identified a young woman both socially and economically. “Self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances”(V 32).

Her only family connections, Uncle Charles and Uncle Wilmont do little for her. Donning her mourning dress, Lucy accepts the offer of Miss Marchmont and becomes her companion. Miss Marchmont is elderly, sick and irritable suffering the loss of her fiancé who died thirty years ago. She stands as an “irascible mother”(V 34) to Lucy with whose help Lucy hopes to “escape occasional agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains” but “fate would not be so pacified”(V 35). Miss Marchmont dies after a few days and leaves Lucy once again isolated and friendless. “Lucy is a victim of servitude”(Edwards 154), which is often the lot of women in education. She is too poor and lonely to be anything else. This weak, helpless facade of Lucy reveals a challenge similar to Emily Bronte. Villette undercuts female constructs with ruthless acumen. Charlotte Bronte treats the “disabling condition which blocked women’s rise, but primarily she believes that a woman must create herself.”(Gordon 257). But the crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion a desolate feeling testifies Charlotte Bronte. It is this feeling which inspires Lucy to travel from London to Villette, where she pursues her search for independence internally, until M. Paul brings her all tastes of freedom. She joins Madame Beck’s Pensionate ‘Rue Fossette’ as a teacher of English. Madame Beck was of a most consistent character, forbearing and stoically calm.
As quoted by Kate Millet in her essay ‘Sexual Politics in Villette’ she was a “tower of convention, a perpetual policewoman, a virtual forewoman of patriarchal society” (34-35). She was concerned about her family interests and physical well-being, bereft of any kind of emotional bond with her family. She maintains a distance from her children, and treats them in an informal manner. She does not fully conform to the Victorian ideal of a mother. In Belgium (Rue Fossette), Lucy is plunged into the company of girl students who repel her by their stupid and selfish behaviour. She waits for the vacation, which however does not bring peace of mind but replays her suffering after the death of her family. She is once again isolated, confined and dislocated, as she remains in the company of a deformed cretin student. But she too goes home to an aunt and destiny mocks Lucy's miserable plight. Even the deformed and senseless have a familial bond. She loses her sense of belonging without employer, friends, students and family. This leads to the intervention of memory and the dead are brought back to life in Lucy’s mind. The turbulence of her homelessness, anchorless, unsupported mind projects itself to the outside world. These equinoctical storms in her mind results in idleness and she takes to bed. In moments of crises the Victorian heroine is often seized by illness, madness or violence—"I lay in a strange fever of nerves and the blood" (V 162). Charlotte Bronte admitted to Gaskell that the autumnal equinox affected her strangely as it coincided with her brother's death anniversary. Her physical and mental maladies emanated from the memories of the 'well loved ones' and her departed family haunts Lucy in her fever. The desperate feeling of alienation that envelops her during the vacation tears her away from her family unity. Like Catherine Earnshaw, Lucy Snowe yearns for a home, a place of self-fulfilment within a family." To be homesick one must have a home which I have not" (V 372). But this home is far removed from reality and attainment of home is deferred. Her allusions to family life obliterate the idea of home as a place of personal
security and death is a welcome escape from the complexities of family life. Volume 1 ends with Lucy fainting struggling against loneliness.

Like Jane Eyre, it is once providence that rescues her from the well-loved dead to the well-loved living. It is at the height of crisis that domestic shelter and family are provided. Jane is saved from physical starvation but Lucy is saved from emotional hunger, "want of companionship" (V 161). From the turmoil of utter loneliness and rootlessness, Lucy is reborn into a family when she regains consciousness in "auld lang syne" (V 167). Memory now becomes a consoling agent transforming an unknown room to a "familiar heaven" (V 168). La Terresa, the perfect replica of her childhood family abode Bretton, recalls the tranquility of her godmother’s company. Re-acquaintance with Louisa Bretton and Graham Bretton puts an end to her search for an identity, "and reaffirms a connection to a pleasant childhood memory" (V 5). Graham Bretton is the Victorian embodiment of manliness, benevolent, considerate and full of goodness. But his idea of women did not match with Lucy’s—"He always wanted to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him" (V 172). Money and status pull him towards Paulina Mary Home de Bassonpierre, whose arrival draws the curtain on Lucy’s short spell of familial happiness. Paulina intrudes into the family circle and usurps Lucy’s place in Graham’s regard. Paullina’s arrival puts an end to the correspondence that she shared with him. She now suffers "weeks of inward winter" (V 273). Lucy’s sentiments beautifully portray Charlotte Bronte’s longings for the "post hour" (V 274) to come as she waited for letters. She wrote to Ellen in 1850:

I have no letters from London for a long time – and am very much ashamed of myself to find – now when the stimulus is withdrawn – how dependent on it I had become – I cannot help feeling something of the excitement of expectation till post-hour
comes and when day after day it brings nothing – I get low.

(C.Bronte 172)

Charlotte cherished letters from her publisher George Smith who was her model for Graham Bretton. Both writer and protagonist resist dependence for letters but both hunger for a sense of connection. Lucy once again must face deprivation, and she buries the letters under a pear tree in order to bury any familial connection with the Brettons. But well love dead (her family, her feelings) still haunts her dreams and threatens to overthrow her control.

Pauline Mary Home Bassonpierre is the golden girl of Victorian age, the perfect women, the apple of her daddy’s eye and John Graham’s pretty Polly. She is a Victorian wife in the making agreeably modest and observant. In her book *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot and Bronte* (1982) Diane F. Sadoff remarks “Charlotte Bronte represents here, the literal father-daughter relationship”(130). Polly Home serves tea to her father and like many Victorian literary daughters sits at her papa’s feet “Be near me, as if we were at home papa”(V 11). She then sits by her father’s elbow and hems a handkerchief for him to take on his travels. This metaphorically defines the relationship between them. She beautifully fits into the role of a Victorian daughter. It is this role that disturbs Lucy, as there is no such bond in her life. Her ironic comments regarding Polly only reveal her desire for such a bond of kinship, a desire for an identity.

Throughout the novel Lucy is forced to play different roles. Graham too forces “a role not her own”(V 338). When Mr. Home offers her the job of a companion for his daughter Lucy objects “I was no bright lady’s shadow – not Miss de Bassocpiere’s” (V 306). Till date unrelated to anyone she preferred solitude. Unlike Jane Eyre who embraced kinship and Rochester, Lucy Snowe has to be convinced. It is Monsieur Paul who proposes friendship and asks Lucy to be his “sister” (V 417) as he was “conscious of
a rapport" (V 376) between Lucy and himself. The issue of the role of women in society is central to the relationship of Lucy and Monsieur Paul. Her progress towards independence continues to be acted out on the battleground of her relationship with Monsieur Paul. But this rapport is cut short due to religious differences brought up by Paul’s family, who try their best to keep them apart. Paul, however is not misled 

"Donnez-moi la main! I see we worship the same God, in the same spirit, through by different rites" (V 392). Lucy also believes in their affinity to one another, but this bond is once again sealed by death. Paul is committed to the memory of the departed. He remembers Justine Marie, who due to family pressure and pride renounces the world and finally dies. Paul sacrifices himself and pledges to serve her family during a crisis. Thus both Paul and Lucy are perpetual mourners – survivors of death, who are unable to release themselves for this bond with the departed. Both try to bury the past and seek happiness and Lucy is placed in competition with the Justine. “Was the picture of a pale dead nun to rise, an eternal barrier?” (V 408) The understanding he and Lucy reach is a rational one. They accept their differences, which though superficial are real. This loss inspires Lucy to confront deprivation, by writing her own tale. This will eliminate Lucy from leading a passive life in a Carmelite convent counting beads or hanging in a museum flat, dead, pale like vapid ghosts.

Charlotte Bronte has flouted convention by leaving the end open. She leaves the reader to decide Paul’s fate. Like Rochester, Paul is forced to go to West Indies to secure his family’s interest. Before leaving he gives Lucy the charge of the house in Faubourg Clotilde. This symbolizes his acceptance of her right to independence. As a directress of her own Pensionnat, she achieves full control over her life, a measure of fulfillment. Marriage and family is not essential to her sense of fulfilment. What is crucial to her does not match the pattern that men or society might impose on her. The relationship with Paul
thus helps Lucy to fulfil her ambition. Before his departure Paul tells Lucy “you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away…”(V 499). The house in Faubourg Clotilde becomes at last, the emblem of identity towards which Lucy has been groping throughout her life, it is her true home and in it she finds definition. The little house, which is neither English nor totally French, finally resolves the polarity of La Terrasse and the dark house of the Rue des Mages. “The meaning of identity has become a kind of pun: individual identity can be found only in identity with another”(Martin 224-225). The time of return is left blank. When Lucy starts writing three years have passed. She is now a successful teacher, “her own mistress and unlikely to become a victim of depression again”(Williams 96).

The conclusion of Villette though more focused is no more definitive. Bronte here brings her love of inconclusiveness to a new level in the final paragraphs of Villette. The ending anticipates the coming of Emmanuel with whom Lucy and the Christian pilgrims will make an everlasting life. Mike Edwards comments that the ambiguous ending can be divided into two sections. The first describes an independent and happy Lucy anticipating the return of Monsieur Paul and the second, an imaginary alternative with Monsieur Paul perishing in the sea. The tragic ending suggests the dashing of Lucy’s hopes with the wreck of Monsieur Paul’s ship due to a storm. “Unhappiness, frustration, confinement and denial are the basic ideas that issue forth”(Edwards 187). Lyndal Gorden in his biographical study Charlotte Bronte: A Passionate Life suggests that Lucy’s love for Paul Emmanuel transcends absence and death. This love exists in family affection that Bronte enjoyed with her siblings. Villette testifies this love that spurs one to art. Lucy Snowe spends her life in self-sufficient employment, anticipating M. Paul’s return, which will culminate in their marital union. The autonomy is not what Lucy desires but what she endures. Lucy sustains herself through writing with a promise of earthly and spiritual
communion with 'Emmanuel'. *Villette* is one of the few 19th century novels where the heroine ends as a career women rather than a bride. The novel tests three kinds of women. It exposes false femininity of high-society in Ginerva Fanshawe. Paulina as a domestic dependent accommodates Victorian expectations but her distortion leads her to remain unknown. Lucy Snowe is the woman to be. Rising from shadows she looks into the future. The ambiguous ending leaves a solution, which allows Bronte to appease the dictates of Victorian convention while granting her heroine the prospect of escape from the prison of patriarchal strictures.

*Villette* treats the social position of women from an exclusively personal point of view. *Villette* unites social injustice and personal relationships. Bronte here stresses the importance of work for women. She sees it as an opportunity for women to fulfill their potential as a source of self-respect and as a means of enhancing their worth both as wives and as members of society at large. Despite Bronte’s concern for the equality of women, *Villette* upholds traditional ideas of the conduct of women in society, and of the relationship of man and women within the institution of family. Fulfillment is found in service. It is a greater success that Lucy Snowe could have expected in the social climate and personal circumstances from which she comes.

Charlotte Bronte’s novels illustrate the growing frustration that women were experiencing and the contradictions that they repeatedly confronted. The anger of Jane Eyre, the energy of Shirley, the boldness of Francis Henri and the optimism of Lucy Snowe are powerful examples of dissent of the prevailing ideology of womanhood. Bronte reveals through the family, social as well as personal problems, which generated much debate in the society. This challenged the deeply held religious and cultural beliefs. It is the ‘Woman Question’ as the Victorians themselves called it that became a pressing concern for Bronte and other contemporary women writers. Her novels are protests
against restrictions and prejudices that thwarted female endeavor, and explore the internal labyrinth of female identity in the family and society. Charlotte Bronte perhaps therefore explores and confronts the concept of family from the particular way it is shaped by and identified, and perhaps finally enlarged by the women heroines. She envisions women trapped and yet redeemed by their energy to explore new and challenging ways to problematize boundaries considered sacred to the Victorians – the family, the male dominated society, the idea of duty and desires that the heroines both transform and frame. Finally it is to the liberated and humane sensibility that her heroines finally strive for- peace, stability and contention as against individual desires and passions.

The theme of the family was not a distinctive trait of the Bronte sisters. It was an integral part of the Victorian society and a common concern of women writers. The next chapter is an analysis of three contemporary women writers, who share a common family environment with the Bronte sisters. Like the Bronte’s, these writers are concerned with the same issues that affected family life in the Victorian period.
Works Cited


Gilbert, Sandra. & Susan Gubar. "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress."


