CHAPTER – II

Childhood and the Evolution of the Family:

The Bronte Context

My home is humble and unattractive to strangers but to me it contains what I shall find nowhere else in the world – the profound and intense affection which brothers and sisters feel for each other when their minds are cast in the same mould, their ideas drawn from the same source...

Charlotte Bronte, Letter from Drewsbury 1832

Homes of great writers have often been the setting of legends about the people who lived in them, and Haworth was no exception. No family of writers can have attracted more attention than the Bronte’s. The story of the Bronte’s is the story of the Parsonage, where four children grew up to maturity amidst joy and unhappiness. The Georgian features of Haworth influenced each member in a distinctive and profound way. The effect was complex; it was dynamic, breeding unity and interdependence. Those years in Haworth witnessed momentous social changes that altered every sphere of life in the nineteenth century. The Bronte family too witnessed this change, to industrial society, leading to epidemics, starvation and unemployment. The influence of their father Patrick Bronte was profound, and it was his style of life, that moulded the personalities of these future writers of an exceptionally close-knit family. The Evangelical religion, the close embrace with the church, the Parsonage, and its graveyard all played a significant role in the Bronte family.
Patrick Bronte was formerly a schoolteacher in Drumballerony in Northern Ireland. He showed a fondness for teaching, and it was this love, that inspired him to publish a collection of verses in 1811 entitled *Cottage Poems*. This book was meant for the humblest, slowest and poorest of students, it was for a special market and in this respect Patrick Bronte was far ahead of his time, for he was pioneering popular adult education. His *Cottage Poems* was “an early attempt, albeit a modest one to offer the soothing benefits of literature to the poorest people” (Wilks 17). His wife Maria Branwell was a well educated, Methodist and devout Christian, from Penzance who regarded poverty as a positive advantage in the pursuit of perfection. She too shared the same respect for literature and made one attempt at literary composition. It was at Thornton where Patrick was posted as Curate, that Charlotte (1816), Branwell (1817), Emily (1818) and Anne (1820) the children who would bemuse the world were born. The two elder daughters Maria (1814) and Elizabeth (1815) were born in Hartshead. They lived in Thornton for five years, which saw the publication of two more books of Patrick Bronte—*The Cottage in the Woods* (1815) and *The Maid of Killarney or Albion and Flora* (1818), which have an undeniable influence in the family’s literary development. An understanding of the discipline of writing permeated their whole lives. They read these books, and the very fact that the books had their father’s name on them, was enough to engage and stimulate the imagination of these young children. At a remarkably young age the Bronte children set out to print their own books as miniatures and copies of their father’s books. As Brian Wilks tells us, “the idea of being authors was as natural to them as walking across the moors which they never forsook” (Wilks 26).

Haworth exercised a powerful spell on them, and whenever away from the parsonage a debilitating homesickness overcame them. “Haworth was the talisman that protected the Bronte’s from life declaring the world unreal” (Lansbury 140). At times it
was a haven where they could relax and luxuriate, at other times it seemed remote and isolated, keeping them apart from the world as a prison. The tiny town of Haworth, the Parsonage, and the endless miles of moors all combine to provide a unique setting that dominated and moulded their developing imaginations. Their responses to their environment, to its people, its landscapes, was a continuing dialogue, a continuous change of ideas that began at a tender age, and remained till death moulding their attitudes to life.

In a letter from Drewsbury, 1832 Charlotte confesses:

The wind pouring an impetus current through the air, sounding wildly from hour to hour deepening its tone as night advances —
the wind I know is heard far away in the moors of Haworth —
Branwell and Emily hear it, and as it sweeps our house ... they think perhaps of Anne and me. (C. Bronte 30)

Here Charlotte enumerates those features of Haworth shared by the family that possessed their imagination and linked them profoundly. This sleepy village was the microcosm of greater England, and the Bronte children witnessed machine-breaking, Reform agitation and riots against the New Poor Law. As adults they lived through Plug strikes, struggle against the Corn Laws and for the Ten Hours Bill. The families were genuinely concerned with these grim conditions. Apart from these social conditions, the graveyard with its macabre setting played a vital role in their experiences. Gaskell writes in her biography that Charlotte "was afraid of death... she dreaded it as something horrible"(65). It is interesting that both Charlotte and Emily could write about it, with such melancholy — one with clarity and the other with nostalgia typifying the family ambivalence to their circumstances. Squalor and menace was common to the Bronte's. The poise and dignity they sought and found in their strivings to transcend the limitations of the environment were rewards received from life-long battles both physical and mental.
The move to Haworth was marked by tragedy in the form of death. Their mother, Maria Branwell became dangerously ill, and died on the 15th of September 1821, at a young age of thirty-nine. It was a testing time for this close-knit family, especially for the young curate, happy father and proud poet, who was oppressed with grief:

...there were seasons when an affectionate 'something' sickened my whole frame which is I think of such a nature as cannot be described, and must be felt in order to be understood.

(P. Bronte 38)

Patrick was unable to overcome this untimely shock. With the loss of a mother's care and affection, a constant dread of becoming orphans stalked the family for years, but with time it became an incentive, to educate themselves into competent individuals. After their mother’s death, a new member arrived to shoulder the responsibilities of the family. Aunt Branwell as she was called, became the presiding genius over domestic matters, and contributed immensely to the circumstances that nurtured Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell. She instilled in them a sense “of duty, of obligation and concern with moral choices, ebbs and floods as a continuing tide that found its way into every kind of private and public event”(Wilks 39). She polarized the domestic and public life of the Parsonage and made distinct, the feminine from the masculine, thereby adding to the hierarchy of Patrick, the children and the servants, which defined the small worlds that sprang in the compact house. The Parsonage became a microcosm where every individual had a rightful role and position. This order was beneficial for the education of the children. They learnt the importance of privacy, which nurtured the idea of individuality, and sovereignty of spirit as evident in their works. This change brought the children closer and made them interdependent, which remained characteristic of them in adult life, and in their careers as authors. Aunt Branwell was their first teacher, her bedroom their first classroom. They read lessons, sewed samplers, and learnt to turn collars and cuffs of
shirts and dresses. It was here that they discussed current affairs and read newspapers, journals, Blackwood’s, the Lady’s Magazine and all kinds of pamphlets. Aunt Branwell reinforced Patrick’s habit of discussing current affairs with his children, and it was through this effort that the Bronte children came in touch with weighty matters of the day.

By 1824, Patrick realized that formal education was necessary for making his children independent. Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily were enrolled in Cowan Bridge, a school meant for the Clergy Daughters founded by Rev. William Carus Wilson. The experience here was marked by a sharp contrast to the family unit at Haworth, as the Evangelical ideas inculcated by Rev. Wilson were diametrically opposed to Patrick Bronte’s. The confrontation between a stimulating and liberal life and the restricted pattern of routine of the charity school had physical and intellectual repercussions. Maria and Elizabeth both died at short intervals and the younger two were called back home. This tragedy brought the remaining siblings closer to one another. As a result they started weaving bonds of affection and companionship, they needed to sustain each other in loneliness and sorrow. They withdrew from the outside world, which had dealt a tragic blow on them. This retreat from Cowan Bridge made the family turn to itself for strength and this was to become a familiar pattern of the family character. Secure at home Charlotte, Emily and Anne began to weave the ‘web of childhood’ that was to envelope their imagination and determine their personalities. In 1835 Charlotte writes of her childhood:

We wove a web in childhood
A web of sunny air;
We dug a spring in infancy
of water pure and fair;
We sowed in youth a mustard
We cut an almond rod;
We are now grown up to riper age
Are they withered in the sod?
The mustard seed in distant land
Bends down a mighty tree;
The day unbending almond wand
Has touched eternity.

(C. Bronte 50)

Charlotte never forgot the experience at Cowan Bridge School, and twenty years later when she needed to invent a school for her novel *Jane Eyre*, she drew heavily on her experiences, and had to bear the humiliation of Wilson’s family and friends. “In *Jane Eyre*, two worlds met, one an oppressive world weighed down by a sense of sin... the other a world of honest commonsense and simplicity”(Wilks 46). Charlotte is her father’s daughter when she depicts a solemn catechism for Broklehurst, and a tender assertion of loving nature in Jane. Jane’s love for her shabby miniature scarecrow of a doll, speaks volumes about the kind of life the Bronte family lived. The children, the pets, their toys all derived a security from the affection and bonds of understanding that Patrick and Aunt Branwell sustained. The four children remained in close company, and tried to help each other overcome the painful memories of death and Cowan Bridge.

A direct result of keeping the children at home was the phenomenon, which Branwell describes as “scribble mania” (48). In the months that followed the grim events of 1825, the children acquired the habit of writing. They started indulging in a spontaneous scribbling of prose and verse; derived from the games they played which led to the production of hand made books. It is really a mystery how these young minds came to write torrents of words. Through a continuous sharing of ideas they generated a unique energy that drove their imaginations and developed their insight. The earliest of their juvenile writing, is a tiny booklet that nine year old Charlotte wrote as a present for Anne,
and eight year old Branwell wrote *The Battell of Wch- not - on* which was a process, that would take them through an extraordinary process of composition. These writings had a direct affect on these children. They were encouraged by their father to the delight and hard work involved in composition, and found happiness in a game they could share. The webs that the Bronte children spun were words that would make Haworth famous for its literature, just like its wool. The present of twelve wooden solders by their father played a significant role in shaping and moulding their minds into writers. The game shifted to writing, fixed by the imaginative exercise of the worlds of fantasy (Angria and Gondal) that they had created. Aware of their potential they went to the extent of keeping themselves abreast of information reading newspapers, magazines, annual children’s books and their father’s library, stocked with the poetry of Milton, Shakespeare, Thompson Goldsmith, Pope, Scott, Byron, Campbell Wordsworth and Southey, the history of Bewick, biography of Johnson, Sheridan and Burns apart from *Blackwoods* and *The Lady’s Magazine*. Mr. Bronte tells Mrs. Gaskell in *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* “As soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own . . .” (P. Bronte 29). Patrick knew what his children were about; and he purposely took them to the brink of such an enterprise. Initiating them into the habit of writing, he grilled into them the importance of writing, involving them in topical discussions.

The years from 1832 to 1842 were fruitful and happy years that augmented talents and brought the Bronte sisters closer to one another. In between their father fell dangerously ill. Shortly after this, Charlotte was sent to Roehead, a school near Drewsbury. Uprooted from the secure companionship of her siblings the school proved to be an ordeal for 14-year-old Charlotte. Her schoolmates came from different backgrounds and made fun of her dull and drab clothes. Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor were her pillars
of strength in Roehead. Ellen Nussey describes Charlotte as an “odd looking girl sick for
home and always in tears”(Nussey 52). Roehead however instilled in her a sense of
independence and she picked up information concerning painting, sculpture, poetry and
music. It was here that she got the source for her novel Shirley that is based on the
Luddite riots of 1812. The years following her return from Roehead were the busiest and
happiest. The Bronte siblings were busy developing other talents that would compliment
their writing and add to their artistic insights. For them art was important – love for
literature and poetry as natural as conversation, the necessity of drawing and painting
were never questioned. Branwell and Charlotte, both sought advice about their literary
ambitions. Charlotte wrote to Southey about her lifelong desire to become a writer only to
be admonished and warned in his reply in March 1837:

   Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life and it ought
   not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less
   leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a
   recreation...(Southey 81)

Charlotte was mildly incensed by his reply and wrote back with a fighting spirit on the
16th of March, 1847:

   You do not forbid me to write; you do not say that what I write is
   utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of
   neglecting real duties for the sake of imaginative pleasures...

(82)

Branwell on the other hand did not fare as well as his sister. His letters were never
answered, but were treated as curiosities. Even Wordsworth remained silent and this only
aggravated Branwell’s sense of inadequacy and defeat. From writing, he moved on to
painting portraits. Branwell was the painter of the family and he alone received formal
training in oils. Emily on the other hand, was pursuing her own education, and was
discovering an artistic vision, that was to become the most distinct and powerful talent nurtured in the Parsonage. It is rather baffling, that no one till date could guess the inner life, which produced *Wuthering Heights*. Emily’s closeness to her family indicates the ambiguity of her personality. While totally absorbed in the family, drawing her inner strength and inspiration from the same sources, she retained complete privacy, keeping her own counsel and proving enigmatic even to her sisters. “Liberty was the breath of Emily’s nostrils,” without it she perished (Gaskell 71). A home-bird, she could never adjust to a life away from Haworth. Haworth and its moors were an Eden for Emily, a paradise she loved with her heart. She writes:

There is a spot mid barren hills
Where winter howls and drives the rain ...
... the house is old, the tress are bare,
Moonless above bends twilight’s dome...
... the mute bird sitting on the stone.
The dark moss dripping from the wall,
The thorn trees gaunt, the walks o’er grown
I love them, how I love them all.

(E. Bronte 35)

Her love for Haworth was inclusive; it embraced the harsh physical conditions, which appall others, for she saw with a realist’s eye. She was deeply influenced with her father’s view of life, and the philosophy of Wordsworth’s poetry, as is evident in *Wuthering Heights*. She also had an intricate knowledge of the folklore and dialect of Haworth, an attribute derived from the lifelong familiarity she shared with Tabitha Ackroyd their domestic help. Tabby balanced the austere gentility of Aunt Branwell, and was the authentic link with the history of Haworth. The story of the youngest sibling Anne is different from the other Bronte children. Motherless at the age of eight and
brought up entirely by Aunt Branwell, she slept in her Aunt’s room, and came into close contact with Methodism that gave her a religious bent of mind, as she matured. She was quiet hard working and understood that education was important to support oneself. “She had a core of steel, a sense of duty and obligation” (Barker 237). The tragic deaths that had a deep impact on the other siblings had less effect on Anne who was too young to remember her mother and two elder sisters. Emily and Anne shared a special bond and Ellen Nussey found that they were “inseparable as twins” (Nussey 73).

Branwell or Brany as he was affectionately called, is an enigma of the Bronte family. He was closer to Charlotte. Not much is known about him but the story of his life is one of great promise, yet profound disillusion. “Excessively melancholic, possessed by a religious mania, haunted by the memory of sister Maria and a genius manqué that broke his father’s heart” Brain Wilks describes him in a nutshell (Wilks 65). He was not without talents – his witty poetry, musical talents and his ability to draw and paint set him apart from others and it is strange why the talents of this Bronte sibling was wasted and remained unraveled. Much was expected from the only boy of this family. However all experiences that gave the sisters strength, a single minded determination to concentrate their energy, and drove them to undertake and complete large scale of works of art, had an opposite effect upon the solitary boy of the family. Everything that toughened the girls, and made them resilient and resourceful, seemed ultimately to weaken their brother. Ill-equipped by nature, he was unable to cope with the world. Although he was the first to publish his work, the themes were morbid and biographical, revealing his inability to cope with life and its pressures. He writes in 1841:

My prayer is earnest, for my breast
No more can buffet with there storms;
I must have one short space of rest
Ere I go home to dust and worms;
I must a single gleam of light
Amid increasing darkness see,
Ere I, resigned to churchyard night
Bid day farewell eternally!
(B. Bronte, Brearly Hill 85)

After Charlotte returned from Roehead she seriously decided to help her father in the running of the house and took up the job of a governess. Anne also followed suit. The years spent in other people’s houses, caring for their children, was a time for observation and accumulation of experience. Brought up motherless, knowing nothing about the gaiety and sportiveness of childhood, never experienced fond attentions, they were ignorant of infancy or how to call out its engaging qualities. Children were to them troublesome necessities of humanity. In a letter to Ellen on the 3rd of March, 1841, Charlotte writes “my pupils are wild and unbroken...no one but myself can tell how hard a governess’s work is to me -- for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment” (93). Together with the life led amidst the moors of Haworth, the trials of the Bronte’s as governesses provided a profound source of ideas and stimulus for their writings. Becoming a governess meant moving into a higher social circle as well as getting an opportunity to exercise one’s intellectual talents. But it also meant entering that society as a servant, as socially subservient to the very men and women they were culturally superior to, only to suffer acute sense of rejection and inferiority. But this traumatic transition, from the sheltered enclave of the parsonage to the hard exigencies of a working world, has a representative significance. Without the anguish experienced in Roehead and embarrassment felt in accepting the role of a non-entity, Charlotte could never have realized the portrait of Jane Eyre, nor Anne her counterpart in Agnes Grey. While Emily’s imagination fed upon the moors, and their
mysteries, her sisters drew strength from the enforced silence of their situations. Isolated from each other they lived through their imaginations, developing and refining their creative genius.

On Charlotte's return from Roehead, Aunt Branwell, Papa and the three girls, hit upon a plan of opening a school of their own. Aunt Branwell agreed to finance the plan, which was spurred by Charlotte's enthusiasm. But a letter from her friend Mary Taylor, changed her mind, and she realized that there was a lot more to learn. It was then decided that both Charlotte and Emily would go to Rue d'Isabelle in Brussels, to brush up their French and German. It was in this finishing school, that their horizons broadened, and knowledge of literature increased. "The impact that Brussels made upon Charlotte was lasting and deep" (Wilks 91). The history of Pensionnat Heger, its pupils, its gardens, its director and his wife are beautifully recreated in the novels *The Professor* and *Villette*, just as Cowan Bridge was recreated in *Jane Eyre*. Her observant nature employed minute details of place, and character in her own creations. During their stay in Brussels, Aunt Branwell became ill and passed away in 1842, and it was decided that only Charlotte would return to Rue d'Isabelle. It was during her second stint in Brussels, that Charlotte came close to Monsieur Heger, the director of the Pensionnat. But the feelings were one sided and slowly she was overwhelmed with a desire to go back to the security of Haworth. "I do wish to go home" (94), confessed Charlotte in a letter to Emily. Her anguish, conflict and misery left her with no alternative, but to leave Brussels. The love she nourished for her teacher became an informing experience behind her greatest creations. Jane Eyre's secret love, owes much to the bitterness that gripped her after she left Brussels. She wrote to Ellen in Nov 1845:
When day by day I await a letter and when day by day
disappointment comes to fling me back into overwhelming
sorrow ... I lose appetite and sleep — I pine away. (C. Bronte 95)

Returning from Brussels in 1844, she realized how much her father needed her. Ambition
took a back seat, and Charlotte together with Emily remained in Haworth and accepted a
life dominated by the church calendar and parish meetings.

Meanwhile Branwell ran into problems with the family he was working for. His
dismissal not only wrought misery but also stifled the peace of Haworth. His whole
history was of hopes dashed, ambitions thwarted and trust betrayed. His deep need for
affection, a need shared by the whole family beguiled him. He convinced himself, that his
family despised him — "the quietude of my home and the inability to make my family
aware of the nature of most of my sufferings makes me write:

Home thoughts are not, with me
Bright as of yore
Joys are forgot by me
Taught to deplore

(B. Bronte 103)

He was ill equipped by nature and his upbringing, to cope with the world as he
found it. Charlotte defines this problem of a young man in her novel *The Professor*, when
Mr. Hunsden assesses the difficulties that beset an impoverished individual in 1830’s.
Branwell was the impoverished intellectual, his wit, his love for poetry, his lack of money
left him a total misfit in the practical, bustling world of Bradford. His dismissal was a
disgrace, but they tried to overcome this impending distress by writing. It was in the
summer of 1845, that Charlotte came upon a book of poems written by Emily. Emily an
extremely private person was furious at this discovery but later relented to publish them.
Assuming male pseudonyms they published a book of poems, which was not received
favorably. But “ill success failed to crush us, the mere effect to succeed had given a wonderful zest to existence...”(C. Bronte, *The Brontes* 111). Each now decided to write a prose tale. The dream of authorship was a powerful dominating presence that drew them away from distress. *The Professor, Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were the three tales being written by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Charlotte decided to campaign for their works. Smith Elder & Company rejected *The Professor* but Charlotte was not one to be crushed. She set out to write another prose tale *Jane Eyre* that was accepted by the publishers. It is unbelievable that these novels were written when the family was passing through a crucial phase of Branwell’s illness. They excluded him from their company, and tried to cope as best as they could. *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were published in 1846 and *Jane Eyre* took the world by storm in 1847. The three novels made a striking collection, Emily’s vigorous and robust story, Anne’s portrayal of trials endured by a governess, and Charlotte’s account of a young women’s battle to find love. Even Thackeray, the eminent Victorian writer praised her for her classical background and wrote to W.S.Williams on October 28th 1847,

I wish you had not sent me *Jane Eyre*. It interested me so much that I have lost (won if you like) a day in reading it at the busiest period, who can the author be I can’t guess – if a woman she knows her language better than most ladies do or has had a classical education... I have been exceedingly moved and pleased by Jane Eyre ... (118).

*Wuthering Heights* attracted much attention, baffling and alarming its readers. The Douglas Jerrold’s weekly Newspaper wrote an interesting review in January 1848:

... We strongly recommend all over readers who love novelty to get this story for we can promise them that they never read
anything like it before. It is very puzzling and interesting ...(Jerrold 302)

Anne’s *Agnes Grey* was of all works the most gently received –

- It fills the mind with a lasting picture of love and happiness
- succeeding to scorn and affliction and teaches us to put every
- trust in a supreme wisdom and goodness. (Wilks 118)

Readers now became curious to know more about the Bells. This great achievement was never brought to the notice of their brother, but the father was proud of his talented daughters. When rumours of Currer Bell started to spread, their real identity was revealed. After the success of *Agnes Grey*, Anne started a second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that was published in 1948. It was critically acclaimed as

- ... one of the few English novels that is completely adult in its portrayal of human passions. It has no peer in English fiction.
  
  (Bell 77)

Against this world of literary debate the grim reality of Branwell’s decline was a pain to the sisters. Within a year of *Jane Eyre* being published Branwell became addicted to drugs and heavy drinking. He went on abusing his body and ultimately died of ‘Marasmus’ in 1848. His death stunned Charlotte, and she fell ill with fever and jaundice.

She wrote to Ellen on the 9th of October 1848:

- The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave more acute, bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive pity, regret a near relation. (123)

His death brought an end to an era of the Bronte family. September 1848 saw their foundations shaken as a relentless pattern of sickness and death dominated the parsonage. Anne suffered from asthma and Emily from cough and cold. Emily suffered the most and
died of a broken heart. She never stepped out of doors after the Sunday succeeding Branwell's death. Her cough persisted and she refused to let a doctor be called. All Charlotte, Anne and their father could do was to watch in horror as Emily declined. Gaskell writes that she seemed to be a burden that Charlotte had to carry, a burden made heavier by her refusal to see the doctor. Gaskell records Charlotte's torment of baffled love, and anger at being excluded from Emily's rituals of pain. Charlotte's anguish is beautifully reflected in a letter to Ellen Nussey on November 23rd 1848:

In this state she refuses to see a doctor: She will give no explanation of her feelings; she will scarcely allow her feelings to be alluded to. Our position is, and has been for some weeks, exquisitely painful. (208)

Finally on 18th December Emily died before the doctor could treat her. The trial seemed to go on, as Anne showed no sign of recovery. Charlotte's literary endeavours were suspended as Anne started sinking. It was she who consoled Charlotte—"Take courage Charlotte, take courage" (A. Bronte 221). Anne accepted all advice and medicine available, being patient and long-suffering. She began to pine to visit Scarborough and it was here that Anne passed away on 28th May 1849. In less than ten months death had snatched a brother, and two sisters, and Charlotte was numb with grief. Back home, life was now different and lonely, but Charlotte rallied her spirits to endure anguish and write to Ellen Nussey in June 1849:

Labour must be the cure, not sympathy. Labour is the only radical cure for rooted sorrow. (128)

Both father and daughter faced a stunning situation as solitude, longing and remembrance were their only companions, but Charlotte still had "some strength to fight the battle of life" (Gaskell 223). Thus began her battle between memories and determination, to concentrate on her career as a writer. The tale of Shirley had been begun.
after publication of *Jane Eyre*. The character was based on her sister Emily on what she would have been had she been blessed with health and prosperity. She took extreme pains with *Shirley* and it was published on 26th October 1849. It evoked mixed reactions. In 1850 Charlotte republished *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* with her own editorial. “Writing” she writes to Ellen in 1850 “has been a boon to me. It look me out of the dark desolate reality into the unreal but happier region”(C. Bronte 130). The man most impressed with *Shirley* was Arthur Nichols, her father’s curate on whom she had modelled the curates of her novel. She was amazed when he proposed to her in December 1852 prior to the publication of her next novel *Villette* that re-accounts her stay in Brussels as a governess. Gaskell writes that though Charlotte was unconscious of the fact but Arthur “had already begun his service to her in the same tender and faithful spirit as that in which Jacob served for Rachel”(Gaskell 146). This love is a testimony of her character as a woman. This proposal hit her father and he outright rejected it. It was one thing to call herself an old maid but to be told by her father was another thing. Patrick’s assumption “that no one should have the offrontery to think of her as a wife, touched a nerve”(C. Bronte 130). She was confused as her feelings were also negative, and here is a love story where no presiding artist was able to dictate the outcome and response. She went to London to publish *Villette* and Nichols went to Australia as a missionary. However meetings between them continued, and finally they married on 29th June 1854. With Nichols, her commitment to her home, her father and her siblings could be preserved within the folds of companionship. She found a new happiness in married life, and *Villette* was repeating the success of *Jane Eyre*. But this spell of happiness was brief. She contacted a chill and her condition declined and once again death struck the parsonage. Charlotte Bronte passed away in the early hours of 31st March 1855.
Patrick Bronte stood alone carrying the greatest burden of grief. Nichols and Patrick were a solace to each other. In 1857 Elizabeth Gaskell a friend of Charlotte published *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, which remains till date the most extensively written biography of this famous writer. Nichols took the initiative of publishing *The Professor* her first novel in 1857. After the death of his beloved daughter Patrick's health deteriorated and he too passed away on the 7th of June 1861. Nichols then sold off the Parsonage and returned to Ireland. His departure marked the end of the Bronte saga, but the spirits of the three sisters are ever present in the universe of fiction. Charlotte, Emily and Anne, resonate through their brilliant novels. “Bronte children left hostages of fortunes in the form of books that would endure beyond generations of descendents.” (Chitham 272)

They were able to conquer physical extinction, through the medium of art. Their lives were beset with tensions, complexities, and over-shadowed by death. It was the security of the family bond that enabled them to face all these obstacles. Intense family relationship was vital to writing of Bronte fiction; as family underpinned the social, emotional imaginative lives of the Bronte’s. Family was the medium that provided supportive network; it was a pivotal influence in the course of their personal development. The Bronte sisters were writing in a historical moment, when family defined and positioned female identity. Anne Bronte is basically concerned with the educative value of the family, and highlights the benefits derived from family lessons. Emily on the other hand reveals errors inherent in the patriarchal family, and puts forward the modern concept of nuclear family. Charlotte embarks on a journey, and uses the family as a site where identity can be found amidst the restrictions and prejudices imposed on women by society. The Bronte’s here, seem to be challenging the ideological promotion of family, as an exclusive site for female development or fulfillment, without
explicitly denying the possibility of domestic contentment or the notion that domestic setting could be locus of female desire. The next three chapters discuss the novels of the three sisters, emphasizing the role of the family in relation to the issues mentioned above.
Works Cited


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