CHAPTER THREE

Charlotte Bronte and Masculinity in Jane Eyre and Villette

3-1 Charlotte Bronte’s Masculinity:

Charlotte Bronte occupies a position of great importance in the history of women’s literature in particular and in the history of the Victorian literature in general. She gave a female voice to fiction creating a new female as well as male consciousness in the novel genre. In doing so, she laid claim to unchartered territory, breaking silences, asserting truth previously unspoken and offering new perception of reality for both men and women in her novels. Charlotte Bronte is a landmark in the history of the English novel. Though resident in a remote district where education had made little progress, Charlotte Bronte pays a considerable amount in the novelty of the literary genre, novel. Though she wrote only four novels, Charlotte Bronte occupies a very vital place amongst the English novelists. This is because of her violent passion and unconventional approach to life and love. Such approach makes her quite different from Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Thackeray. Her works are mainly delineations of her actual experiences and the experiences of the Victorian women. She wrote in an age shaken by religious, scientific and social upheaval. Her novels offer not just a thematic exploration of the necessary union of thought and feeling, but an experience of that union as her poetic prose ensures that the reader is both intellectually and emotionally engaged at the same time. This poetic form marked a significant development in the literature of women.

Charlotte Bronte claimed a sexual identity for women. Contrary to the effacement and denial of woman’s sexual identity in the fiction and society of the Victorian England, Charlotte Bronte asserted that women not only sexual desire but have a right to expect sexual fulfilment. Her search for a sexual identity for women is dominant in her novels. Her novels are burdened with tension between a female independence of spirit and action and a feminine dependence in love relationships.

Charlotte Bronte found that women were treated as inferior specie in the Victorian England. Daughters were seen a burden on the family. Women were seen as fit only for the marriage market in England. If a woman lost this market, her life would be miserable. In the novels of Charlotte Bronte, the life of unmarried woman is depicted. The state of the Victorian woman was miserable since she was treated as inferior to man. The gender role of the Victorian woman was only a mother, cook, or everything related to the house.
Charlotte Bronte is looking for a sexual identity for the Victorian woman. Charlotte Bronte would not tolerate this blot on her sex. So, she would appeal to fathers and guardians of society to take this critical situation of women as a theme worthy of thought and request them to bring about improvement. Charlotte Bronte felt very strong about the dilemma of women who, though no fault of their own, were forced to this position. In general, Victorian women could only gain recognition through marriage and were expected to content themselves with domesticity. Charlotte Bronte expresses herself through Jane Eyre’s voice when she declares “women feel just as men feel: they need exercise for their faculties” *Jane Eyre* (p.93). Charlotte Bronte wants equality to both genders. Both men and women have the same feelings. So, it makes no difference between the gender roles of men and women. This is the equality that most eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists, like Jane Austen, Dickens, George Eliot, and Charlotte Bronte, struggled for.

Charlotte Bronte is considered as a feminist and social revolutionary of the Victorian period in the realm of the English novel. She has been quite radical and untraditional in the English fiction unlike Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. She opens to the readers of the English novel the very bosom of the suffering heroines with a note of intimacy. Charlotte Bronte talks of women’s love from women’s point of view. “Love was the breath of life to Charlotte Bronte; the be-all and end-all of human life.”¹ Frances, Jane, Caroline and Lucy have all the aching, naked heart throbbing with a maximum of intensity of passion for love and marriage.

Charlotte Bronte is a prominent figure in the English novel. This is because she lived in a literary atmosphere. She describes her home when she was twenty five, Charlotte wrote:

> My home is humble and attractive to strangers, but to me it contains what I shall find nowhere else in the world – the profound, the 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 – when they have clung to each other from childhood and when disputes have neversprung to divide them.

This house is the source of affections for Charlotte Bronte. It is the best literary atmosphere for her. It is the microcosm for Charlotte. This microcosm includes a family of writers. Their father Patrick Bronte – from whom the Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne and Branwell the only brother – seem to have developed literary aspirations, had a cluster of publications to his credit. He published two volumes of poems and prose tales. Her mother, Maria Bronte also wrote an essay entitled *On the Advantage of Poverty* in the religious concerns. “Intelligent companionship and intense family affection” allowed
Charlotte Bronte to thrive as a woman and an author, concluded Ellen Nussey in her 1871 “Reminiscence of Charlotte Bronte”\(^3\). Biographers have widely recognized the importance of the family atmosphere to the formation of the Bronte sisters as mid-Victorian writers and various critics have seen the family a precondition and motive for the Brontes’ writing. Ernest A. Baker in the *History of the English Novel* sees Charlotte Bronte’s novels as the late expression of the Romantic Movement in fiction. She has the Romantic spirit in her feeling of nature, in her touches of the supernatural.\(^4\)

The Bronte sisters are of literary origin. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne created fantasy worlds which created the starting point of their ventures into fiction. Anne Bronte teamed up with Emily Bronte and developed the idea of imaginary country called *Gondol*. Charlotte and her brother Branwell created an imaginary country called *Angria*.

Charlotte Bronte struggled to prove herself and to prove woman’s identity during the Victorian period. It was strange to find a woman writer during that period. So, Charlotte Bronte wrote under the pen name *Currer Bell*. Charlotte Bronte’s choice of Currer Bell enabled her to generalize her authorial power in a way that she thought her name could not. The female authorship was difficult to recognize. Charlotte Bronte indicates in describing her and her sisters’ decision to adopt pen names:

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Elis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to decline ourselves, women, because we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice.\(^5\)

By choosing ambiguous names the Brontes concealed their identity whether masculine or feminine. This was because of the nineteenth century’s more attitudes towards women writers. The Brontes’ decision to use pen names was validated. James Lorimer published a review of their novels asserting if they are the production of a woman, she must be a woman pretty unsexed.\(^6\) It was something unusual to find a woman writing in such a way. Up to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the domain of writing as a craftsmanship was men dominated. The Brontes have collaborated and successfully participated in the production of novel as a new literary genre especially as a landmark of the Victorian period.

Charlotte Bronte sent Robert Southey some of her poems hoping for his feedback and advice. Unfortunately, his reply was:

> 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. To those duties you
have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for
celebrity.\footnote{7}

This reply portrays the masculine dominance of the Victorian society. Literature, according
to Southey is the business of man’s life only. The reply is not encouraging. However,
Charlotte Bronte was up to challenge this duty at the nineteenth century till literature
became a business of women and allowed them to dominate the fiction market.\footnote{8} Southey’s
response indicates that there were political hurdles women faced as they tried to enter the
literary field in Victorian England. Domestic responsibilities were expected to require all
their energy, leaving no time for creative quest. Despite a lack of support from the outside
world, Charlotte Bronte found sufficient internal motivation and enthusiasm from her sisters
to become a successful writer and author.

Many critics agree with the poet Robert Southey that literature is the business of men.
George Lewes is with this view especially before his relation with George Eliot (Mary Ann
Evans). George Lewes asks: “Does it never strike these delightful creatures that their little
fingers were meant to be kissed, not to be inked.”\footnote{9} George Lewes is with the opinion that
woman is an angel in the house. So, the hands of these delightful creatures – women – must
be kissed rather than inked. The Victorian society was against woman in all the fields of
life. It was dominated by men even those educated critics were patriarchal in their
behaviour. Patriarchy was not only social but also literary. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen,
George Eliot and many other female writers fought against the oppression of men in a
society which was mainly male dominated. Such novelists were the harbingers of the
feminist movement which flourished during the twentieth century.

However, George Lewes\footnote{10}, the critic, has a very significant effect on Charlotte Bronte.
After publishing \textit{Jane Eyre} he sent a letter to Currer Bell telling [her] “the delight with
which her book filled me [Lewes] and seemed to have ‘sermonized’ her; to judge from her
reply.”\footnote{11} She replied that she really appreciated his letter since it had been rejected several
times. Gaskell argues that this is the first letter of homage which Charlotte Bronte received
from a literary critic, and the correspondence which it began, had considerable effect on her
later novels, \textit{Shirley} and \textit{Villette}. George Lewes has a positive effect on Charlotte Bronte in
spite of his view that their little fingers were meant to be kissed, not to be inked. Charlotte
Bronte wanted to hide her identity; however it is George Lewes who discovered the identity
of Currer Bell as a woman.
George Lewes incurred Charlotte Bronte’s wrath by intimating that she might profit by writing less melodramatically and gave her Jane Austen as an exemplar and inspiration. George Lewes was an admirer of Jane Austen. He wrote in *Frazer Magazine* that “Fielding and Miss Austen are the greatest novelists in our language”.  

It was this review that inspired Charlotte Bronte to read *Pride and Prejudice*. In his article, *The Lady Novelists* he wrote that:

> Jane Austen was the greatest artist that has ever written, using the term to signify the most perfect mastery over the means to her end…., and to read one of her books is like an actual experience of life.

Charlotte Bronte was outraged by Lewes’ suggestion. She was astonished asking him in a reply: “Why do you like Jane Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. ... What induced you to say that you would rather have written *Pride and Prejudice* or *Tom Jones* than any of the *Waverly Novels*?.. I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book.” She told him that she could not find any poetic sense in Miss Austen’s writing. She excused him that it was nothing than the ‘fine eyes’ of Miss Austen.

Extravagant comparisons and claims for Bronte’s status as a novelist accompanied the notice of her work. For example, the *Era* of November 1847 declared that “all serious novel writers of the day lose comparison with Currer Bell.” The *Era* review asserts that *Jane Eyre* must be written by a man. This reflects the reviewer’s perception that it is unlike the novels of the contemporary women writers. This view highly appreciates the works of Charlotte Bronte since it was thought of a man or ‘unsexed’. After the disclosure of her pen name as a woman, there was a marked increase in the negative criticism on Charlotte Bronte’s work. This reflects the nature of the patriarchal society of the Victorian period.

Charlotte Bronte wrote to George Lewes after disclosing her identity:

> I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed ‘Currer Bell’ to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. ... Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. Out of obscurity I came, to obscurity I can easily return.

Charlotte Bronte wishes that the critics would not know her identity because they would value her works positively as a man. Charlotte Bronte has this opinion that “they would have ‘praised the book [Jane Eyre] if written by a man, and pronounced it ‘odious’ if the
work of a woman”.

Charlotte Bronte is aware that the critics are busy with gender assessment rather than the topic of the novel itself. She is struggling for a woman identity, though firstly disguised under the pen name Currer Bell. This pen name makes the critics recognise her skill as a novelist. The gender role of a woman cannot be of a writer. This is the real state of women during the Victorian era. They cannot afford even any identity even if they were literary women like that of the male writers and novelists.

Charlotte Bronte was viewed positively by some critics like William Thackeray and Elizabeth Gaskell. Charlotte Bronte admired some male writers like Thackeray for his novel attacks on the follies and weaknesses of the English society during the Victorian period. She dictated *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray saying:

> There is a man in our own days whose words are not famed to tickle ears; who, to my thinking, come before the great ones of society. She adds - I feel honoured in being approved by Mr. Thackeray because I approve Mr. Thackeray. One good word from such a man is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges.  

Charlotte Bronte found a critic who is able to appreciate the value of her works. Thackeray, compared to other nineteenth century critics, positively valued the works of Charlotte Bronte. So, she felt that one good word from such a man was worth pages of praise from ordinary judges. She was disappointed by George Lewes and Robert Southey that literature is only the business of men. Thackeray in a letter to Smith, the publisher of Charlotte Bronte, expressed his praise of *Jane Eyre* saying that the novel “interested me so much that I have lost a whole day in reading it… Give my respect and thanks to the author whose novel is the first English one”. Charlotte Bronte informed her publisher that she was particularly pleased by Thackeray’s comment because she found that Thackeray was able to distinguish the dross from ore, the real from the counterfeit.

In the literary career of Charlotte Bronte, we find her as a novelist rejecting the Victorian concept of the ideal woman who had no intrinsic worth:

> The woman is the priestess of the home, and she put herself into it and its affairs and conditions. Her talents and tastes have given her a natural ordination to this holy office. She is most herself and most satisfied, and useful when the affairs of her home occupy chiefly her mind and heart. If she goes out into the world to engage in of its affairs, she does it for the benefit in honour and love of her home. What she does for the world is done at arm’s length and from her home as her office – headquarters – fortress. Men will wander half their lives without a home and seem happy, but women are seldom without a home of some sort …Woman’ worth to man comes partly from her strong home instincts.
We find that no Bronte’s heroines ever begin to follow this traditional model of the Victorian period, much less to aspire to it. Friendless and alone, Lucy Snowe, like Jane Eyre before her, is left to make her way in a friendless world. In all her novels, Charlotte Bronte removes her heroines from home just to give her heroines a kind of autonomy of the dominance of men. She wants to give them more power than those in the home considered as the ‘Angel of the House’. She revolts against the decorum of the ‘Angel of the House’. This is because it limits the liberty of woman kept in the boundaries of the man and left as an architect of his house. So, all the heroines of Charlotte Bronte ran away from home in order to prove themselves. They are no more than another copy of their creator, i.e. they are autobiographical of Charlotte Bronte.

There have been many biographers writing about Charlotte Bronte such as Winifred, Elizabeth Gaskell and Lyndall Gordon. However, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* has been regarded as the standard work. The relationship between Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell is one of the greatest literary friendships of nineteenth century. The two are viewed as intertwined and indistinguishable. It was Patrick who asked Gaskell to write a biography on Charlotte Bronte suggested by Ellen Nussey, Bronte’s friend. The letters of Charlotte Bronte were the main source for Gaskell to write the biography. Gaskell also used her letters and notes to write *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* which was published in 1857.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* displays a distinguished form of a literary competition with Bronte. Gaskell’s biography illustrates how Charlotte Bronte rejected affiliation with womanish domesticity in order to embrace a masculine romantic ideal of genius. Gaskell has divided the life of Charlotte Bronte into two parts; the first part that of Currer Bell, the author, and the second part is that of Charlotte Bronte as a woman. Gaskell argues:

> Henceforward Charlotte Bronte’ existence becomes divided into two parallel currents – her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character – not opposing to each other. 21

This biography charges Bronte of ‘coarseness’ which was not because of Bronte’s nature but her environment that made her wild. The common perspective of Bronte’s life according to this biography is one of loss and grief. Charlotte Bronte’s uniqueness of her pain is the guarantee of her creative vision. To this, Elizabeth Gaskell attributes the features of
Bronte’s writing and personality that were acceptable during the Victorian period. Gaskell writes:

Miss Bronte never dare to allow herself to look forward with hope; and I thought when I heard of the sorrowful years she had passed through, that it had been this pressure of grief which had crushed all the buoyancy of expectation out of her. 22

Charlotte Bronte was writing for a different age when women were to be seen and not heard. Gaskell views Bronte’s life as reflected in Jane Eyre; her passion is the result of her suffering and the society’s view towards woman. Lyndall Gordon in her book Charlotte Bronte: A Passionate Life, argues that Gaskell is aware of the Victorian ideal for women and herself and deplor es an occasional coarseness in the novels. She adds that Gaskell has presented “a life of desolation and the pathos of overwhelming grief, an excuse for Bronte’s excess passion.” 23

Only for five years, Gaskell has been in contact with Charlotte Bronte between the years 1850 – 1855. Elizabeth Gaskell depicts Charlotte Bronte as Victim Supreme. This is because of the death of her family including her mother, her sisters Maria, Elizabeth, Anne and Emily and her brother Branwell. Charlotte Bronte’s sense of weariness and irritation of life is because of the loss of her dearest family members. Moreover, she was an old spinster. She worked as a teacher but hated to teach. She expressed this saying:

Must I from day to day sit chained to this chair prisoned with these four bars walls, while the glorious summer suns are burning in heaven and the year is resolving in its richest glow and declaring at the close of every summer day the time I am losing will never come again. 24

Charlotte Bronte was suffering in a society which cared only for men and their needs. The Victorian dogma was that women should be seen not heard. Charlotte Bronte was suffering from the passing of time without fulfilling her desires. She was not interested in teaching children. She was eager for a man as a woman, but remained spinster. Charlotte Bronte tried to prove herself as a woman and to find an identity not only for herself but also for other women. Her search for identity is reflected in her novels. The study of her life is the study of her novels and the study of her novels reflects her life. She was rough in her treatment regarding social matters because of the rough treatment of her society towards her.
3.2 Masculinity in *Jane Eyre*:

Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* was her first published novel. It was her most successful work and has remained the most popular of her books. *Jane Eyre* has a fable-like quality, depicting the personal pilgrimage of a heroine whose struggles for autonomy, survival and justice are basically no less relevant for women today than for those who received the novel with enthusiasm in 1847. Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* reconstructed a new version of masculinity which is different from those masculinities during the Victorian period. Jane Eyre, the heroine is the tool for measuring the masculinity of the men of Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield and Ferndean. Charlotte Bronte constructed masculinity through the eyes of woman. At the first publication, it was entitled, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, by Currer Bell. The novel is an autobiography for Charlotte Bronte.

After its publication, *Jane Eyre* received good acclaim as a perfect work of art especially under the pseudonym Currer Bell. Many reviews of the novel were issued by several critics. Some of them were anonymous. One of the anonymous critics in the *Westminster Review* calls *Jane Eyre* “decidedly the best novel in the season”. This critic praises its ‘natural tone’ and the ‘originality and freshness’ of its style. The reviewer adds that the scenes are lifelike and characters have great reality. He admires the grim of Mr. Brocklehurst, the ladylike Miss Temple, sweet Helen Burns, prim Mrs. Fairfax and the odd Mr. Rochester whom with all his faults and eccentricities one cannot help getting to like.

George Lewes in *Fraser’s Magazine* acknowledges that he “wept over *Jane Eyre*”, a book after his own heart. The author, he says, has “perception of character and power of delineating it; picturesqueness; passion; and knowledge of life”. Lewes is in favour of *Jane Eyre*. He has a positive opinion about it in this review. Charlotte Bronte is delighted with Lewes’s review and with his letter which precedes it. However this positive opinion is before the disclosure of the identity of Currer Bell. Later on, when he knows the identity of *Jane Eyre* he changes his mind attacking the ‘coarseness’ of her work. This is because Charlotte Bronte is challenging his ideas on the nature and sphere of women writers. She has clarified in a letter to him about his judgment:

> You have a sound clear judgment as far as it goes, but I conceive it to be limited; your standard of talent is high, but I cannot acknowledge it to be the highest; you are deserving of all attention when you lay down the law on principles, but you are to be resisted when you dogmatize on feelings.

Charlotte Bronte is not satisfied with Lewes’ judgment as a woman. George Lewes changes his mind after he knows her real identity as the author of *Jane Eyre*. He critiques *Jane Eyre*
as an ‘unwomanly book’, saying that it is “a more masculine book, in the sense of vigour, was never written. Indeed that vigour amounts almost to coarseness-and is certainly the very antipode to lady-like.” 28 This is the prejudice against woman as a writer since Jane Eyre’s author is Currer Bell, George Lewes finds ‘originality and freshness’ in it. When its author is known as Charlotte Bronte, George Lewes finds Jane Eyre as an ‘unwomanly book.’ Thus, Charlotte Bronte asks Lewes to judge her as an author not a woman and here is the dilemma. The identity of woman is something difficult to prove in the male - oriented society of the Victorian period. Charlotte Bronte knows that she will be better judged as an author rather than a woman. Moreover, the publishers are not interested in books written by women. This affects the interest of the readers if they know that the author is a woman.

Elizabeth Rigby’s review is the most unfavourable of the reviews. Rigby, in the Quarterly Review, thinks that Jane Eyre combines genuine supremacy with horrid taste, coarseness of language and laxity of tone. She condemns its popularity of Mr. Rochester with lady readers. Elizabeth Rigby finds Rochester a coarse and brutal character who secretly seeks to violate the laws of both God and man. Rigby also dislikes Jane, finding her unattractive both as a child and as an adult. Rigby’s dislike for Jane is questionable because Jane is meant to be unattractive deliberately by the author to make her a heroine with such qualities. Jane’s behaviour is also the standard of her judgment as an ideal woman similar to her creator. Rigby’s review finds that the novel must be the work of a man since it possesses great mental powers, a great coarseness of taste and a heathenish doctrine of religion. All these qualities are not likely in a woman. The author’s identity of Jane Eyre prevails over the quality of its contents. The question of woman is central to both Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane Eyre is a story of “enclosure and escape”. Gilbert and Gubar refer to Jane’s feelings of oppression and suppression physically or mentally. It is a story of enclosure into society with new woman identity which is different from that available in the Victorian society. Also, Gilbert and Gubar refer to escape to the means of Jane’s escapes from the patriarchal society in which she is silenced. The title of their famous work, The Madwoman in the Attic is taken from Jane Eyre about Bertha Mason, who stands for the reflection of the “difficulties of Everywoman in a patriarchal society.”29

In spite of the literary controversy over the reception of Jane Eyre positively or negatively, Jane Eyre is a landmark in the history of English novel in general and the women literature in particular. It is a novel of rebellion against the male dominance at all the levels
of life in the Victorian period. It is a novel of woman autonomy. Charlotte Bronte constructs a new theory of male-female relationship. Man is always in need of woman as an equal partner in life and woman is always in need of man as an equal partner too. Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* seems to some critics coarse because of the harshness of life that she faced in life within a patriarchal society that considers literature the only business of men. *Jane Eyre* excels both as authored by Currer Bell or Charlotte Bronte.

The concept of masculinity and gentlemanliness was changing during the Victorian period. The traditional concept was changed under the pens of the female novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Charlotte Bronte reconstructs the concept of masculinity and gentlemanliness in her novels especially in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The word ‘man’ is no longer used to denote the dominant gender or to have the dominant gender roles. *Jane Eyre* changes such traditional gender roles. Rochester has become the icon of the ideal and equal male partner for the ideal woman, Jane Eyre. Rochester has fallen down from that traditional place of man of the Victorian era. Rochester has fallen to a place where no one except Jane Eyre can help. Rochester, the man and the gentleman, has no other option than the help and the shoulders of the accomplished woman, Jane Eyre.

The concept of the gentleman was also changing during the Victorian period. The gentleman was no longer the one by birth or the one related to courtly love. The ‘gentleman’ began to take moral righteousness. The role of a gentleman is focused on behaviour rather than on property or wealth. Several men can be called gentlemen in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*. Rochester is a gentleman in the eyes of Jane Eyre not because of his birth but because of his conduct towards her. The same case is with Paul Emanuel in *Villette*. So Charlotte Bronte is inventing a new construction of both masculinity and gentlemanliness in a patriarchal age and society.

Rochester is a new version of masculinity reconstructed by Charlotte Bronte in the novel *Jane Eyre*, in a period when she was advised not to approach literature since it is not the field of women. The construction of masculinity should be better understood through the eyes of women. “What men ought to be?” is the main point in the construction of masculinity from the women’s points of view.

“One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman”, Raewyn Connell rewords the words of Simone de Beauvoir and writes in her book *Gender* that “one is not born masculine, but has to become a man” and she makes it applicable to the construction of masculinity as it is to femininity. This theory of Raewyn Connell is applicable to the construction of the
masculinity of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Bronte constructs a new version of masculinity to Rochester; a new masculinity which is totally different from that of the nineteenth century masculinity. Before meeting Jane Eyre, Rochester is a traditional masculine character. He feels superior to all other people at Thornfield. He is also a pure Victorian gentleman; gentleman by birth. He has a considerable amount of lands and tenants at Thornfield. He has made so many love relationships with several ladies and mistresses like Clara, Giacinta and Celine whose daughter is Adele who is brought up by Rochester himself. Rochester has an illicit past before the coming of Jane to his house. He is a dominant figure at Thornfield. However, he is not a happy man since he is wandering hither and thither aimlessly.

Rochester is described as “proud, sardonic, and harsh to inferiority of every description”, *Jane Eyre* (p.125). He is totally engrossed in pride and coarseness as a Victorian man. He is looking at other people with inferiority. His past is full with his “former faults of morality”, *Jane Eyre* (p.125). His life is full of secrets related to his love relations and marriage. He has kept the story of Bertha, the madwoman in the attic. However, Jane is aware of Rochester’s former faults of morality, she does not blame him, assuming that they “had their source in some cruel cross of fate”, *Jane Eyre* (p.125).

Jane’s first encounter with Rochester is significant in the relationship between Rochester as a gentleman and Jane as a rebellious woman. After her coming to Thornfield, one evening she is alone watching the moon rise. She perceives a horse approaching with a rider. The horse slips on a patch of ice and the rider falls down to the ground. Jane helps Rochester - the rider - to rise. He asks her for help saying:

‘Necessity compels me to make you useful’. He laid a heavy hand on my [Jane] shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse. Having once caught the bridle, he mastered it directly, and sprang to his saddle; grimacing grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his sprain. *Jane Eyre* (p.98)

It is only the necessity that compels him to get her help. The tone of his speech indicates the sense of superiority towards others since he is the master of Thornfield. The word ‘master’ has its connotative meaning with slavery that divides the Victorian society. Rochester’s fall from the back of the horse is symbolical. It is a fall from his traditional Victorian status of masculinity. Jane’s help and his leaning on her shoulder are symbolically significant. She is his saver from all his falls in life. The moment of his encounter with Jane Eyre is a barrier between his past with his ‘moral faults’ and his future with his redemption though the hands of Jane Eyre. The first meeting presents Rochester as weak so it is
necessity that compels him to get the help of a woman. Jane is presented as strong offering help for a strange man. At their first encounter, Jane, not Rochester, offers assistance. Jane presumes the role of the man and guides her would-be lover to safe place. This is what has happened till the end of the novel. Charlotte Bronte presents Jane Eyre strong to suggest that man must be in need of the help of woman.

Elsie Browning Michie in her book, *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Women Writer*, argues that the first encounter emphasizes the power differences between Jane and Rochester. Michie adds that this difference in power is represented in terms of size and gender, later of wealth and class through oriental imagery of Mahomet and the mountain. Jane cannot control his horse, but Rochester is able to ‘master’ that horse though he is injured. He asks her to bring the horse to him, she cannot; instead he asks her to help him to walk to the horse. He tells her “the mountain will never be brought to Mahomet, so all you can do is to aid Mahomet to go to the mountain; I must beg of you to come here”, *Jane Eyre* (p.98). The first encounter between Mr. Rochester and Jane also disrupts the power dynamics as thought by the Victorians - the male is in the position of authority – by reducing the authority of Mr. Rochester, making him as an equal to Jane. The first meeting is the first step in the construction of the new masculinity in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. Deflating Rochester’s masculinity to be equal to Jane and to be in need of her assistance is the first step in Charlotte Bronte’s new version of masculinity. Rochester’s fall from the horse to the ground is a moment of paramount significance in *Jane Eyre* because it changes Jane’s relationship as a servant inferior to her employer. At this moment, the novelist Charlotte Bronte intervenes in her history and begins to speak to Rochester as a man with sense of equality. The moment of Rochester’s fall is the first step in the new construction of masculinity proposed by Charlotte Bronte. This step can be figured out as the step of equality.

The next step in the new masculinity presented in *Jane Eyre* is Bertha, the madwoman in the attic of Rochester’s house. The madwoman in the attic is no more than the mad cat in the red room, *Jane Eyre* at the Gateshead. Bertha destroys not only the house of Rochester but she destroys the hegemonic masculinity of Rochester. Bertha is the dark side in the life of Rochester and the Victorian man. Charlotte Bronte presents the character of Bertha to critique the bad treatment of the patriarchal man during the Victorian period to woman. She is put inside the attic of Rochester’s house. She is locked in a room for ten years. She goes crazy like ‘some wild animal’. She is mad and she wants to destroy
everything in the house of Rochester. Jane first sees Bertha when the madwoman tears her veil before the wedding day. Jane Eyre describes Bertha as “It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments”, Jane Eyre (p.242). These are the physical features of Bertha which reflect the psychological nature of Bertha. Bertha becomes the icon of the rebellious woman against the hegemonic masculinility of the Victorian man. The following lines describe the real situation of the Victorian woman in the form of Bertha kept in her room. Jane Eyre depicts the scene saying:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. Jane Eyre (p.250).

Bertha has become the most famous figure in literary criticism. This is because her case provides the title of a major 1979 book of feminist theory, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic. Basically, the concept is that the strongly powerful, fervent, and brilliant woman, who is seen as crazy and in need of confinement by the masculine world, embodies the nineteenth-century woman novelist, whose abilities threatened the dominant patriarchal literary society in the nineteenth century. Clearly, Bertha’s case has a lot of remarkable implications for Charlotte Bronte as an author, and for the “Autobiography” of the character of Jane Eyre. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Bertha is a kind of dark double for Jane, symbolizing Jane’s “ire”, the anger and hatred contained socially in all women, until at times it threatens to burst forth in madness. Jane Eyre sees her past – especially the red room in Gateshead – and the fears of her future.

The madwoman in the attic becomes a prominent figure of resistance towards patriarchy in the Victorian period in particular and onward periods in general. She is a mirror of Jane Eyre to reflect the worries of her future if she accepts to marry the patriarchal Rochester. Rochester feels to be superior to Jane and others at Thornfield. Rochester is superior to Jane, not only because he is her employer, but because of his financial status and sexual experience as well that he has been familiar with. Jane feels that there is a secret inside the house of Rochester. Finally, she discovers that this mysterious thing is the story of Bertha. Rochester never tells Jane of his lunatic wife, Bertha. He wants to marry Jane without telling her the truth. This is the behaviour of the traditional Victorian man.
Charlotte Bronte presents the shallowness of the patriarchy of the Victorian men. Bertha Mason could represent the horror of Victorian hegemonic masculinity towards women. Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, could embody the imprisoning and brutal aspects of Victorian wifehood. It suggests that the lack of independence and freedom in marriage chokes women, destroying their mental and emotional health.

Jane Eyre plays a significant role in the construction of Rochester’s masculinity. From the first meeting, she plays a major part in the reshaping the character of Rochester. She initiates to help the falling man. Charlotte Bronte presents Rochester as powerless in the hands of Jane Eyre. Jane is in the position to offer assistance to Rochester. So, she is powerful since the beginning. Rochester acknowledges that it is only ‘necessity’ that compels him to get help from a woman. He is astonished to see Jane brave to help a strange man like him. At this moment, Jane enters powerfully into the life of Rochester. Rochester explains that the horse is disturbed by the supernatural felt power of Jane.

The gaze is a significant tool in the hands of Charlotte Bronte to construct her new masculinity in the Victorian society in general and the Victorian literature in particular. The gaze plays a role in the power dynamics between men and women; between the gazer and the gazed. The gazer is considered the subject and the gazed is considered the object. From such point of view, Charlotte Bronte presents the concept of masculinity in terms of power, authority and dominance compared to powerlessness and subordination. John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing*, observes that “men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated … men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at... Berger adds that in European art from the Renaissance onwards women were depicted as being “aware of being seen by a male spectator”. Rochester’s gaze on Jane Eyre is strong and masculine since the first meeting, thinking that she is of the fairy tales. Jane Eyre is aware of being seen. She is an artist. She draws a portrait – painting – for herself and for Blanche Ingram for Rochester to compare the two. The eye is the most active organ of Jane Eyre. The paintings of Jane Eyre present the issue of the gaze whether male or female. Jane paints several paintings; amongst these are the portrait of Blanche Ingram based on the description of Mrs. Fairfax, the portrait of Jane Eyre and the portrait of Rochester. Rochester finds the portfolio and starts searching the portraits. While questioning Jane Eyre on her painting,
with a piercing gaze not only into the physical charms but also into the mind of Jane. He
starts questioning her:

‘Where did you get your copies?’
‘Out of my head.’
‘That head I see now on your shoulders?’
‘Yes, sir’.
‘Has it other furniture of the same kind within?’
‘I should think it may have: I should hope—better.’ *Jane Eyre* (p.106).

Rochester is astonished to see the beautiful ‘furniture’ before him. He is also gazing to
discover “other furniture of the same kind within”. He is gazing at the head “on her
shoulder”. Now Jane Eyre is the object of his gaze, gazing at the outer and inner ‘furniture’
of Jane. The word ‘furniture’ has an erotic suggestion. Jane Eyre responds to the language
of the gaze of Rochester saying: “I should think it may have: I should hope—better”.
Rochester, while going through the portraits, finds his portrait, asks Jane Eyre “Were you
happy when you painted these pictures?” *Jane Eyre* (p.106). He wants to discover her state
of mind during painting his portrait. He is gazing to discover the female gaze on his portrait.
Jane responds positively which makes her happy to be gazed at. At this moment, Jane and
Rochester are both the gazer and the gazed. Jane sits well in the firelight so Rochester can
examine her. However, Rochester examines her, Jane examines him right back. Both are
the subject and the object simultaneously. They are both equal. It makes no difference who
is the dominant or the subordinate or who is the subject or the object. The traditional
Victorian view is that man is the subject and woman is the object of the man’s gaze and
other love relations. S. N. Singh argues that “despite all his agreeableness, kindness, and
goodness to Jane, Rochester seems ‘proud’, ‘sardonic’ and ‘kept a strange fire in his look’
to her”.35 Charlotte Bronte reconstructs the concept of masculinity and femininity in *Jane
Eyre* as it was perceived. She presents a new version of masculinity in which man and
woman are equal with equal gender roles. It makes no difference ‘who is the gazer?’ and
‘who is the gazed?’

*Jane Eyre* describes the qualities of his gaze, his piercing eyes, and the coruscating
radiance of his glance. Jane refers to Rochester’s eyes as “flaming and flashing”; “and in
his great, dark eyes; for he had great, dark eyes, and very fine eyes too” *Jane Eyre* (p.111).
Accordingly, his eyes are more powerful and masculine according to the hegemonic
masculinity of the Victorian society. Jane is aware she is being looked at and she is happy
to enjoy the state of ‘be-looked-at-ed-ness’. She looks at Mr. Rochester and she made him
look at her. Charlotte Bronte usurps Rochester’s eyes at the end of the novel making him
helpless and makes him see through the eyes of Jane Eyre. Every power he has is snatched from him through fate to reduce his power to be equal to that of Jane Eyre or to be under the mercy of Jane. She becomes his eyes; the eyes of the two are mingled into the eyes of Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre becomes everything for Rochester. Jane Eyre says:

Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him: never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. Jane Eyre (p.384).

Jane’s gaze becomes the gaze of Rochester and Jane is no more than the “Apple of his eye”. Charlotte Bronte has based unity and equality for her new construction of masculinity through the tool of the gaze. No one is dominant or subordinate. Though Rochester is of high social status and wealth, Bronte has reduced his masculine powers like wealth and his social rank. His house, as a sign of his wealth, is destroyed through Bertha Mason who is the “double character” of Jane Eyre. The male gaze of Rochester is the icon of his masculinity, power and dominance. Charlotte Bronte levelled his powers to be equal or united within Jane Eyre’s. The gaze is the best example used by Bronte to bring Jane Eyre and Rochester into one area with equal gender roles.

The gaze of Jane Eyre, according to my point of view, is stronger than the gaze of Rochester as the second name ‘Eyre’ suggests. Rochester is not too much beautiful as Jane describes Rochester’s features “were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his” Jane Eyre (p.149). The beauty is in the eyes of the gazer, Jane Eyre. Charlotte Bronte does not focus too much on the physical charms to construct her concept of masculinity. She focuses on the gaze and gives the gaze more significance to see beauty. Jane Eyre is powerful in the use of the gaze; Jane says that “I might gaze without being observed”, Jane Eyre (p.148) when Rochester is distracted by others at his party. However, she cannot control her gaze; her “eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face: I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him”, Jane Eyre (p.148). This shows that the power is not only in the gazer but also in the gazed. So, her eyes are drawn involuntarily towards his face. His face makes her irids fixed on him. There is equilibrium with reference to power between
the gazer and the gazed. The gazer becomes the gazed and the gazed becomes the gazer, so far they are equal. The gaze is the source of power for both of them. In the new version of masculinity constructed by Charlotte Bronte, woman is given a new gender role, i.e. the gazer with power over the male gazed.

Jane Eyre is not passive; so far the gaze is concerned, according to the male gaze theory of Laura Mulvey. Mulvey asserts that there is an implicit visual hierarchy since man is in the dominant position as the viewer and woman is in the subordinate position. She suggests that the active spectator position of a viewer imposes “masculinity as point of view for the audience as the spectator identifies with the active protagonist – Rochester – for whom the gaze is a form of power and masculinity”. Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze states that woman is only a passive object for the gaze of the active subject. According to Mulvey, women are always the objects of the gaze. They are never the possessors of the gaze. Jane Eyre breaks off the Victorian norms of the gaze. The woman’s gaze to men’s bodies was problematic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jane Eyre becomes the gazer and the gazed; the subject and the object of the gaze.

Charlotte Bronte presents Jane Eyre as a powerful woman; though she is a governess, she objectifies Rochester - the gentleman with wealth and rank – and makes him enslaved to her eye and heart through her powerful gaze. Finally, Rochester succumbs to the ‘flame flickers’ in her eyes. Rochester says:

I knelt. She did not stop towards me, but only gazed leaning back in her chair. She began muttering— the flame flickers in the eye, the eye shines like dew: it looks soft and full of feeling; it smiles at my jargon: it is susceptible; impression follows impression through its clear sphere; where it ceases to smile, it is sad; an unconscious lassitude weighs on the lid: that signifies melancholy resulting from loneliness. It turns from me; it will not suffer farther scrutiny; it seems to deny, by a mocking glance, the truth of the discoveries I have already made,  Jane Eyre (p.171).

The flame flickers in her eyes force him to reveal a truth which he cannot reveal because of his ex-marriage. Under the effect of her powerful gaze, Rochester finally reveals his strong love and proposes marriage. In turn, Jane reacts quickly to the strange gleams in his eyes and accepts his proposal. She would never accept his proposal unless no equality is there. Charlotte Bronte engulfs the social and patriarchal gap between Jane and Rochester through the tool of the ‘gaze’. The gaze plays an essential role in the power dynamics between the masculine and the feminine in the Victorian period.
Rochester is a patriarchal gentleman of the Victorian society with the most qualities of the dominant society over women. Bertha Mason is the reflection of his hegemonic masculinity. However, his amenability to change plays an important role in the construction of the modern masculinity that Charlotte Brontë has established in *Jane Eyre*. Had Rochester never changed, Jane Eyre would be the second Bertha. He is hiding the secrets of love relations and his marital relations with his wife, Bertha Mason. Such secrets make him a man of mystery. His marriage to Bertha is not a real love marriage; that is why he has suffered a lot of this marriage. He indulges himself into lots of love relations. He puts Bertha in the attic of his house justifying that she is mad. This may not be true, because putting a woman in one room for ten years actually makes her mad. This is against her emotions and her rights as a woman. The destructive behaviour of Bertha is a reaction against the humiliation of her feelings. Destroying the bedroom of Rochester and the wedding veil of Jane is a revenge of Rochester’s marriage to Jane. Unless Rochester tends to change his patriarchal behaviour, an inferior feeling towards women, he will not marry Jane Eyre. Charlotte Brontë destroys his sense of dominance over women and makes him finally dominated by Jane Eyre. After meeting Jane Eyre for the first time, he wants to silence her; he wants her to leave him alone. He is astonished to see such a brave girl. This is not the normal girl that he used to deal with at Thornfield. This girl is not of the private sphere. Rochester at the beginning is treating her with a sense of superiority. Jane Eyre sees in his face a gaze of the ‘sultan’ before a ‘slave’. This is when he tends to give her gifts and dresses before engagement. Jane refuses the sultan/slave relation. She describes that moment:

> I ventured once more to meet my master’s and lover’s eye; which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure, *Jane Eyre* (p.229).

Jane Eyre wants both Rochester and her to be equal partners not sultan/slave partners. She wants Rochester to be changed; to be soft not harsh and to come down to an area of equal roles. Rochester develops according to the wish of Jane Eyre. The sultan/slave relationship in reality has begun to change at the moment of Rochester’s fall at the first meeting. The relation of servant/employer; the dominant/submissive or even the masculine/feminine is changed. At this moment, Charlotte Brontë intervenes in her history through Jane and began
to speak to the man, Rochester as an equal. This is the real change in the character of Rochester that develops step by step till the hegemonic masculinity of the Victorian man has disappeared; till both Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester become totally of the same stuff. Tessa Adams and Andrea Duncan argue, in their book *The Feminine Case: Jung, Aesthetics and Creative Process*, that the male character, in *Jane Eyre* does not develop as an animus hero figure in the classical sense. Transformation takes place through inversion and Rochester experiences an enantiadromian – inversive – metamorphosis, a rendering down as he is the ‘lapis’ of alchemical transformation.\(^{38}\) The mad behaviour of Bertha is similar to the manly and harsh behaviour of Charlotte Bronte towards her society. Bertha, Jane and Charlotte Bronte are different faces for one woman struggling against the follies of the Victorian society in general and the Victorian man in particular. The rebellious behaviour of Charlotte Bronte makes the Victorian society accept her as an equal partner to man.

The need for Rochester to change his masculine behaviour is important for the marital happiness in *Jane Eyre*. Earlier in the novel, Rochester declares that what he likes in a person is adaptability; a “character that bends but does not break”, *Jane Eyre* (p.222). Rochester is the centre of change and his change is alchemical. He is affected by Jane Eyre and challenges his society to fall in love with Jane, the governess, which is not the norm of the patriarchal society. Mrs. Fairfax is astonished to see both Rochester and Jane fond of each other. She warns Jane that she is still young and does not know men. Mrs. Fairfax is right because she knows the story of Bertha. Rochester finally tells Jane the truth of his previous marriage; in turn Jane Eyre refuses to be his mistress. After Jane Eyre’s leaving Rochester, he has experienced a total change doing penance for his attempt to trap her into bigamy and to seduce her. Rochester reconciles to God and to both Jane and Bertha. He has done his best to save Bertha when she burns his house. He suffers the loss of his sight and his right hand.

The physical change is not separated from the psychological change within Rochester. He abandons the amorous love relations out of the circle of marriage life. He has changed his view about Jane Eyre as an inferior to him. Now she is the best woman with whom he will enjoy his life. Charlotte Bronte destroys every potentiality of Rochester’s hegemonic masculinity. His house is a sign of his wealth and social rank. His sight is the sign of his power, so is his right hand. His blindness means that he cannot reshape Jane through his gaze which is discussed as a sign of power. Charlotte Bronte weakens every power he has a man; the power over Jane Eyre is his hegemonic masculinity.
Rochester has experienced an inner change in his thought about Jane Eyre as a woman. He changes step by step till he recognizes the sense of equality. He denies his superiority as a man over Jane as a woman. He explains “I don't wish to treat you like an inferior: that is (correcting himself), I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years’ difference in age and a century’s advance in experience”, Jane Eyre (p.114). So, he claims superiority because of differences in age not because of differences in social rank or because of gender. Rochester finally acknowledges her as his equal and his likeness. He says before his proposal: “My bride is here,’ he said, again drawing me to him, ‘because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?’ Jane Eyre (p.217). He finally reconciles his faults which make him feel superior not only to Jane but also to the other people around him. He sacrifices his sight and right hand to save Bertha. Rochester becomes a new man with a new masculinity in which he repents to God and reconciles his relations with other people. Rochester deviates from the traditional Victorian ideal of masculinity. Jane Eyre is the catalyst for this change that makes him a gentleman not by birth but through his behaviour. Jane Eyre is also the reward for this new masculinity in Rochester. She finally accepts him as a husband. She feels also rewarded. Jane Eyre finally acknowledges:

   Mr. Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life—if ever I thought a good thought—if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer—if ever I wished a righteous wish,—I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth, Jane Eyre (p. 379).

Finally, the changed Rochester is more beautiful to Jane. She declares that “I love you better now when I can really be useful to you than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and the protector”, Jane Eyre (p. 379). Because of this change in Rochester, she feels to be an equal partner and she is proud to be the happiest wife on earth.

This is what Charlotte Bronte wants from the ‘man’ of the Victorian era to be. This masculinity is based on the needs of woman and the gentle behaviour of man. This is what men ought to be according to mutual respect and equality of both genders. As a result of this happiness, Rochester’s sight is restored. The hidden message of Jane Eyre is that till and unless a loyal woman is not beside a man, his life is destroyed. The opposite is true; the absence of man in the life of a woman makes her totally destroyed. This is what happened to Charlotte Bronte. She was an old spinster. She suffered because of her unrequited love with M. Heger.
Charlotte Bronte presents different kinds of masculinities in *Jane Eyre*. These masculinities are featured as dominant and superior over women. Jane Eyre is suppressed by men since childhood. John Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John Rivers are patriarchal men. Every one forces Jane Eyre through physical force and Christian threats to be the perfect Victorian woman as thought during that era; to be the ‘Angel of the House’. Every one of these men presumes mastery over Jane as natural right and everyone forms a phallic symbol of power and masculinity over her. They are suppressing Jane at different steps of her life and at different places.

John Reed’s masculinity is a stark traditional Victorian masculinity. Because of his suppression, Jane Eyre is put into the Red Room which is symbolic of the prison-like Victorian masculinity at Gateshead. Jane Eyre revolts against John Reed’s masculinity addressing him: “You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors”, *Jane Eyre* (p.08). Besides physical aggression, he wants her to call him ‘master’. The word ‘master’ indicates that woman was thought to be no more than a slave. This is the real reason for the female novelists of the Victorian period to pursue freedom and to run away the hegemony of the nineteenth century man. This masculinity is hegemonic masculinity in which Jane Eyre is suppressed physically and mentally. The traditional Victorian masculinity is resembled to the Red Room in which Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte too, are deprived from freedom and equality. Jane is made like a ‘mad cat’ inside the Red Room. This madness is because of the male dominance over Jane. It is similar to the madness of Bertha inside the Attic. Both Jane and Bertha want to get away from the prison life – like, beside the Victorian man. The life of woman during the Victorian era was similar to the life of a prison. The Red Room of Jane Eyre is not different from the Attic Room of Bertha. The red colour indicates the serious and severe situations that women were living in. Charlotte Bronte depicted the real dilemma of women in *Jane Eyre* because these situations were familiar to her.

Elaine Showalter in her book, *A Literature of Their Own*, describes the Red Room as a “paradigm of female inner space” and as “an adolescent rite of passage into womanhood”. She argues that “with deadly and bloody connotation, its Freudian wealth of secret compartments, wardrobes, drawers and jewel chest, the Red Room has strong associations with the adult female body”. Anyhow, it remains a symbol of the Victorian male dominance against woman. This dominance is social, psychological, and sexual. Jane Eyre, however, revolts against this male supremacy as Charlotte Bronte did. Though John
Reed is a gentleman by birth and wealth, this gentlemanliness is not accepted by Charlotte Bronte. The ideal gentlemanliness is a result of genteel behaviour and gender performance.

At another step of Jane Eyre’s life at Lowood, she has faced another hegemonic masculinity based on the standards of religion represented by Brocklehurst the master of Lowood School for orphan girls. He is using religion for his power and to justify his punishment of the girls. He is another form of hegemonic masculinity in the guise of religion. He is another enemy of the freedom of Jane Eyre. The masculine behaviour of Brocklehurst dominates every movement of the girls inside the school. He follows certain rules of discipline that limits the normal needs of girls as human beings. When Jane first encounters Brocklehurst he is not presented as a man. He is presented as a statue towering over Jane like a “black pillar”, *Jane Eyre* (p. 26). Jane Eyre describes him like a ‘black pillar’ with a head like a carved mask and a heart made up equal to parts of whalebone and iron. These qualities stand for his cruelty and dominant masculinity. The ‘black pillar’ stands for the Brontean rejected masculinity based on religion which is based not on the teaching of the Christ but on personal needs. This masculinity is like a statue towering over Jane Eyre. This masculinity is not similar to the masculinity of Rochester who is falling and lowering towards Jane Eyre since their first meeting.

Charlotte Bronte presents the traditional masculinity based on the fake religion in the character of Brocklehurst. He is aggressive towards Jane Eyre telling teachers of the Lowood School: “you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul”, *Jane Eyre* (p.56). His aggressive behaviour towards orphaned girls does not make him an ideal man or a true gentleman. His actions are not according to his preaches. He pretends to be moral, but in reality he is not. He does not have any trait of the ideal masculinity or gentlemanliness because of his double standards. His wife and daughters dress in fashionable dresses and the girls, under his dominance, are left to plain-looking clothes and left freezing and hungry. This is not the way to be a man and a gentleman. Religion proposes equality for all human beings, males or females. His masculine behaviour should command him to ensure pleasurable conditions for those under his control. Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, have argued that Brocklehurst is the best example of the “Victorian super-ego” because of his description in phallic terms in his first meeting with Jane Eyre as ‘black pillar’.
Brocklehurst’s male sexuality is a threatening to the female sexuality. His gender role in the society is an oppressor of female sexuality. This is clear in his speeches at the school. He says:

I have a master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted of, *Jane Eyre* (p. 54).

His mission is to desexualize the girls who are under his dominance including Jane Eyre at Lowood which represents another suffocating enclosure “where orphan girls are starved or frozen into proper Christian submission”.41 His masculinity is the best example in which men use religion to justify their dominance over women and the poor. Such masculinity which is based on religion oppresses women focusing on their desexualization. This is the essence of Brocklehurst’s masculinity that his mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh. So, Jane Eyre finds it another red room. Therefore, Jane rebels against the religious masculinity because of men’s exploitation of religion. Charlotte Bronte denounces the suppression of women at the level of the family and society’s institutions and at the level of the society as a whole. She finds oppression at home, at school and at the society.

The masculinity of St. John Rivers is no exception from the dominating masculinity of both Brocklehurst and Rochester. St. John is a religious dominating man, though he plays a significant role in Jane’s mature process. Jane Eyre describes him as “a good yet stern, a conscientious yet implacable man”, *Jane Eyre* (p.349). At his first encounter with Jane, he appears to be an ideal Christian man. He welcomes Jane into his house. He seems to be a charitable man, “willing to aid [her] to the utmost of his power”, *Jane Eyre* (p.295). He promises her to get a job. His relation with Jane Eyre starts to be that of slave-master relation which is not different from the one with Brocklehurst or Rochester. St. John Rivers sees Jane in a servitude position. When St. John offers Jane Eyre the job of a governess at school, Jane accepts the job with all her heart. The reason for her astonishment is that “it was independent; and the fear of servitude with strangers entered her soul like iron”, *Jane Eyre* (p.303). However, St. John Rivers has just “seemed leisurely to read [her] face, as if its features and lines were characters on a page”, *Jane Eyre* (p.302). Her acceptance to be a governess and his surveillance of her face as a page indicates the slave-master relationship between her and St. John Rivers.
The slave-master relation of both Jane Eyre and St. John Rivers changes a little bit after she recognizes him as her cousin and her inheritance is about twenty thousand pounds. St. John Rivers is attracted to Jane Eyre because of her courage and finds her not as beautiful as Rosamond Oliver. This will make her a useful helpmate since he has devoted his life to missionary life. Then St. John proposes to marry her not for the sake of love but for his duty. Charlotte Bronte presents St. John Rivers as “a cold cumbrous, column”, Jane Eyre (p335). He is the opposite of Rochester, who is the passionate man. St John is cold, hard hearted and repressed. His handsome appearance indicates a moral and spiritual superiority which is not found in Brocklehurst. Jane Eyre refuses the masculinity of St. John Rivers. This religious masculinity will snatch her heart and the liberty of her mind. Neither Jane nor St. John find each other born for love, which Charlotte Bronte considers essential for mutual understanding of the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Love makes no one superior or inferior.

Helene Moglen, in her book Charlotte Bronte: The Self Conceived, argues that “Jane recognizes that St. John would buy her body with the coin of spirituality hypocritically posing as God’s agent”. \textsuperscript{42} “Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? - He asks her- Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire”, Jane Eyre (p. 346). So his power to enlist her as a wife is directly from God. The hegemonic masculinity of St. John is more powerful than that of Rochester; it is rooted in God’s power as St. John believes. Gilbert and Gubar have argued that the patriarchal values, that St. John Rivers represents, are unequivocally visible already in his ‘blatantly patriarchal name’ suggestive of St. John the Baptist, ‘whose evangelical contempt for the flesh manifested itself most powerfully in a profound contempt for the female’. \textsuperscript{43}

Charlotte Bronte rejects the religious masculinity that suppresses woman’s love and sex into duty. Jane Eyre rejects St. John’s idea of love because she will lose her identity as a woman. Jane Eyre firmly tells him “I scorn your idea of love…. I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it”, Jane Eyre (p.348). Jane Eyre does not want to suppress her sexual identity with a man who denounces his desire and totally involved in his mission. She differentiates between the sexuality of love and the sexuality of power. When he proposes to marry her, St. John annihilates her sexual identity as a woman getting the help of the power of religion. He says:
It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service. *Jane Eyre* (p343).

According to his masculinity, Jane is born for labour not for love. She recognizes that what St. John Rivers wants is not a wife, a woman, but in his own words, “a sufferer, a labourer, a female apostle”, *Jane Eyre* (p319). She will be no more than a possession like any other ones. It was customary during the nineteenth century that a woman is not born for love or at least she cannot express her desire about love. This was naive to speak about her sexual identity. She must be the angel of the house. Her gender role is to be a good helpmate for her husband. St. John misuses religion to prove his wishes. Religion is a weapon in his hand. Jane Eyre has refused St. John’s masculinity since it is no more than Brocklehurst’s pillar of patriarchy. He has a dominating masculinity that makes him deviate from real Christianity. Through Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte rejects the religious patriarchal masculinity that was prevailed during the Victorian era.

Charlotte Bronte presents several types of masculinity represented in the male figures: John Reeds, Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John Rivers. The four male figures dominate over Jane Eyre. They assume superiority over Jane. Rochester and John Reed assume superiority due to wealth and power; while Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers assume superiority due to the power of religion. St. John is overzealous to his job as a missionary man forgetting his sexual desire as a man. Moreover, he wants to destroy Jane’s sexual desire as a woman. This is equal to death for Jane and her creator, Charlotte Bronte. Brocklehurst’s masculinity is rooted in hypocrisy and selfishness. Religion is also a weapon in his hand to suppress women and sending them into “A pit full of fire”, *Jane Eyre* (p.26). Brocklehurst stands for the religious tyranny which attempts to submit the young orphan girls into surrender by starving them. This masculinity, represented by Brocklehurst, is rejected by Jane and Charlotte Bronte.

Rochester is another patriarchal male figure, who initially tries to overpower Jane Eyre. He wants her initially as a mistress which outrages Jane Eyre and makes her run away from him. However, unlike John Reed, Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers, the other patriarchal male figures whom Jane so powerfully resists, Rochester acknowledges her identity and her power, almost right from the start of their first encounter. Later, he acknowledges her as an equal partner claiming “I do not wish to treat you like an inferior”, *Jane Eyre* (p.114). His amenability to change his patriarchal behaviour gives her reasons to
come back via his supernatural cry “Jane, Jane, Jane” though he is “a thirty-six hour coach ride away”, *Jane Eyre* (p.496). Jane responds to the voice of equality, independence and power. She comes back and finally marries the man who respects her identity and womanhood. This is the ideal masculinity that Charlotte Bronte establishes to dominate the nineteenth century Victorian society.

Jane Eyre has a significant role in the construction of the new version of the masculinity of Edward Rochester. After the coming of Jane Eyre, not only into Thornfield but also into the life of Rochester, his life is changed from the wandering through Europe searching love with different mistresses to a life of stability at Thornfield. Stability is another base for his new masculinity. She plays three major roles in his life; she helps him while falling from his horse at the first encounter, she rescues him from the bed fire done by Bertha, and finally she comes back to him after the burning of his house and becomes his sight and his hand. Rochester describes her as his angel and his comforter. Rochester says:

Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions; now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter. *Jane Eyre* (p. 221)

So, Jane becomes his comforter and the substance of healing and cleansing of his soul. Jane Eyre is the purgatory factor in his life. She has snatched him from the status of the traditional Victorian masculinity that he is living in. Rochester has kept Bertha in the attic for ten years. He is ‘half mad’ wandering through Europe for ten years too. The effect of Jane on his character is so strong that he changes his sense of inferiority towards the position of women, like Bertha’s in his house. Rochester justifies his sense of inferiority saying:

I don’t wish to treat you like an inferior: that is (correcting himself), I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years’ difference in age and a century’s advance in experience. *Jane Eyre* (p. 114)

Charlotte Bronte, through Jane Eyre, wants to reconstruct the masculinity of Rochester. Bronte attacks the Victorian masculinity and gentlemanliness that are based on inferiority of women and the superiority of men. The strong and rebellious character of Jane Eyre enforces Rochester to treat her as an equal no as an inferior. This is the essence of Charlotte Bronte’s construction of the new masculinity which is based on equality of both genders.

Jane Eyre is the fire extinguisher of his bedroom. Jane saves Rochester from the fire of Bertha. The fire is symbolic. It is the sexual fire of his disturbed life with Bertha. Bertha
puts on sexual fire in his bed with other lovers. She has excessive sexual desire but not quenched by Rochester. Instead, Rochester enjoys his love with mistresses all over Europe. The patriarchal society punishes woman for illegal relations and does nothing for man. All in all, Jane comes to extinguish both fires in the life of Rochester. She has suppressed fire within her soul. She feels as Rochester feels. Jane cannot forever “keep the fires of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital”, *Jane Eyre* (p. 347). After she rescues his life in his bedroom, he again represses himself when he says, “Goodnight, my —,” when he stopped and bit his lip”, *Jane Eyre* (p.154). Rochester cannot say ‘my love’, though too much is expressed. He is a wealthy man in his prime while she is an impoverished eighteen-year-old governess in his employ. He is her master and employer; accordingly there is a hierarchal gap between the two. Jane Eyre, as a saver of his life, destroys the patriarchal gap between them. This scene of the bed fire empowers the status of Jane from a governess to the saver of Rochester’s life. After this scene, their relation becomes erotic that Jane finds Rochester’s bed on fire, alone, at night, and being the only one who can save him. The power dynamics is changed at the bed fire scene. Jane becomes powerful compared to the helpless Rochester.

Up to the fire scene, Jane Eyre feels that they are not equal because she is financially dependent on him. In the final fire, she comes back financially independent, but he is blinded and his right hand is broken. She finally accepts him as an equal to her. Jane Eyre tells him at Ferndean:

I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress. And you will stay with me? Certainly—unless you object. I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live. *Jane Eyre* (p.370)

Jane Eyre plays a significant role in the construction of Rochester’s masculinity which is totally different from the hegemonic masculinity of the Victorian period. Charlotte Bronte presents a new version of masculinity through the presentation of both Jane Eyre and Rochester. Jane is the catalyst for Rochester to change and deviate from his Victorian masculinity and his past. Such masculinity, according to Bronte, is based on equality of the feminine and the masculine. It is also based on the needs and desires of woman.

Charlotte Bronte depicts the struggle of Jane Eyre in her novel to attain equality, independence and self-assertion. Jane Eyre proves to the world of the Victorian era that a
woman beating the odds to become independent and prosperous on her own, was not as far-fetched as it may have seemed. This is the main goal of Charlotte Bronte on which she reconstructs masculinity. The assertion of the feminine identity is the other face of the coin of masculinity. The concept of masculinity cannot be attained without the knowledge of femininity. Charlotte Bronte not only reconstructs masculinity but she reconstructs the concept of femininity as well. Both Rochester and Jane Eyre at the beginning of novel are restricted to the traditional concept of masculinity and femininity. Rochester is bound by the wealth and social class to assign masculinity and gentlemanliness. Similarly, Jane Eyre is shackled by the barriers of the society. At the Gateshead, she is considered as an outsider. At Lowood, she is put into starvation and oppression under the guise of religion. At Thornfield, she suffers the emotional exploitation by Rochester. However, she revolts against the gender roles given by her society.

Charlotte Bronte revolts against the inequality between men and women during the nineteenth century. She portrays this refusal in the resistant behaviour of Jane Eyre. She resists the male dominance at the Gateshead and to be enslaved by John Reeds and to call him master; instead she calls him Nero, the Roman dictator. She refuses the hypocritical behaviour of Brocklehurst in the name of religion resisting his threats to be sent into hell. She is rebellious more than the other girls of Lowood School. It is Helen Burns who teaches her the morals of Christianity better than Brocklehurst. Moreover, she is a rebellious in every step of her life. When she gets emotionally mature, she resists the emotional exploitations by Rochester to be his mistress. She leaves him and goes aimlessly without a supporter till she comes across St. John Rivers, the missionary at Moor House. The state of being homeless and helpless is the state of woman in the Victorian society in which the woman identity was destroyed by the traditional masculinity. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane’s situation being homeless and helpless symbolizes “the nameless, placeless and contingent status of women in a patriarchal society”. This is the essence of Charlotte Bronte’s struggle in her society. Finally, she is financially independent when she discovers her relatives with the amount of money that she inherits from her uncle. Charlotte Bronte lets Jane Eyre’s qualities of womanhood develop step by step. However, she demolishes Rochester’s traditional qualities of masculinity. This reconstruction of masculinity and femininity is done with organic unity. She brings Rochester and Jane into one place where they are equal economically and socially.
The most important thing in Charlotte Bronte’s new construction of masculinity is the equality of the gender roles of both Rochester and Jane. Jane Eyre struggles for equality. She declares that:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. *Jane Eyre* (p.93)

This text presents the ideas of Jane Eyre as the mouthpiece of Charlotte Bronte on the concepts of masculinity and femininity and the gender roles of both men and women. The women of nineteenth century were supposed to be calm and confined themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags which were the roles of the domestic sphere. Jane Eyre wants to change the stereotypical roles given to women. Women are equal to men; nevertheless they need to use their faculties. Charlotte Bronte challenges her society and proves her feminine identity. She exercises her faculty. Hazel Mews, in the book *Frail Vessels: Woman’s Role in Women’s Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot*, explains that “Just as women need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do, so in the relationship of love two human souls are equal in spite of custom and conventions”. On the basis of such equality Jane wants to have a lover. She refuses to marry Rochester as an unequal like a mistress. She proclaims to Rochester that:

I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are!. *Jane Eyre* (p.216)

To this appeal of equality, Rochester responds to the flesh and spirit of an equal. “As we are!’ repeated Mr. Rochester—‘so’, he added, enclosing me in his arms, gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: ‘so, Jane!’”, *Jane Eyre* (p.216). At this moment, Jane enjoys the moment of total involvement, power and equality. This is the ideal masculinity that Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte want to establish in a society dominated by males. Charlotte Bronte portrays her love relationship with M. Heger which is similar to the love relationship between Jane Eyre and Rochester. Charlotte Bronte wants love based on
equality and justice. However, in a patriarchal society she could not find ideal love. This part is discussed in the aforementioned part of this chapter.

Jane Eyre finally becomes powerful. According to the new identity that she has attained especially after the financial independence, her relationship with others is changed. She is no longer a governess. She is a powerful member of the society. She has overcome all the odds in her life. The final odd is her resistance not to marry St. John Rivers. She responds to the supernatural cry of Rochester to come back. She knows the final story of Rochester as a blind man with crippled hand. The final chapter starts with “Reader, I married him”, *Jane Eyre* (p.382). The syntactic structure of this sentence shows us that Jane is the subject and the object is Rochester. She is the doer of the action. This indicates that Jane Eyre becomes fully mature. Rather than announcing ‘Reader, we got married’ which would indicate their equality in defiance of gender roles, she declares ‘Reader, I married him’.

Charlotte Bronte lets her heroine marry Rochester after a certain change in the gender roles in which Jane get fully mature socially and economically. She agrees to marry him when she is equal to him. Also, she is aware of his change physically and mentally. He is the ideal man in her life. Rochester changes to be totally different from all the male characters in her life. In return, she becomes his eyes and his hand. Though he is too old to marry her, she accepts to marry him. Charlotte Bronte constructs a new version of masculinity where there is no marginalization of the identity of woman. This masculinity sees woman as an equal partner in life. Charlotte Bronte has destroyed all the barriers between men and women that were common during the nineteenth century. Moreover, as in *Jane Eyre*, she has belittled the powers of man. She could think this is the best way to make man dwindle into her position. She has destroyed the concept of the domestic sphere that was given to woman. Jane Eyre does not belong to that domestic sphere. This masculinity is the outcome of her writings in a patriarchal society. Her novel *Jane Eyre* has shaken the societal system of the Victorian period especially after publishing it under the name of Currer Bell. As a novel written by a man, it was praised by critics. When it was known that it was written by a woman, the critics devalued it. Consequently, Charlotte Bronte shocked the patriarchy of the literary elite in particular and the patriarchy of the Victorian society in general.
3.3. Masculinity in Villette:

*Villette*, written after the hugely successful publication of *Jane Eyre*, was initially greeted with mixed reviews: critics G. H. Lewes and William Smith Williams treated the novel with polite ambivalence. When *Villette* was published in 1853, George Lewes wrote an immediate review of it for the *Leader*. In the review the *Leader*, Lewes pleased himself with saying that it was not a novel in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather an unforgettable book, filled with interesting matter for discourse and containing great passages of prose poetry. However his wife, George Eliot was so influenced by the work that she called her elopement— with the already married Lewes—‘a trip to Labassecour’.

George Eliot wrote to a friend in 1853, “I am only just returned to a sense of the real world about me, for I have been reading *Villette*, a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*. There is something almost preternatural in its power”. Most male novelists and male critics did not welcome it because of ‘something almost preternatural in its power’. Also, it is so uncompromising and so original. It was so innovative for its time, and remains to this day so potently strange, that critics have struggled to find words to describe it.

The poet Matthew Arnold detested the work so much that he called *Villette* a “hideous, un-delightful convulsed constructed novel” that is one of the most utterly disagreeable books I have ever read”.

“Why is *Villette* disagreeable?”, questioned Matthew Arnold—“Because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact put into her book”. The rebellious contents of this novel makes it unwelcome by the critics and novelists of this Victorian period. The style in such writing by Currer Bell is bitter and cannot be found by another novelist at that time.

*Villette* did not receive much more critical attention until the publication of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Woman in the Attic* in 1979. Gilbert and Gubar regard it as Charlotte Bronte’s most overtly and despairing feminist novel. Charlotte Bronte, in a letter to her publisher and friend George Smith about the completion of *Villette*, declared “you will see that *Villette* touches on no matter of public interest, I cannot write books handling the topic of the day; it is of no use trying”. Her public life was over. For the remaining two years, her life was dominated by Arthur Bell Nicholls.

In *Villette*, Charlotte Bronte depicts directly from her earlier days in Brussels, and her one-sided love for a married professor. Instead of creating a romantic portrait filled with passion and childish love, Bronte takes her unrequited love with M. Heger in stride and
creates Lucy Snowe, one of the most humane, honest, and independent heroines in English Literature.

Charlotte Bronte’s *Villette* confronts the same agonizing question like her other novels specifically the dilemma of how a powerless woman can struggle to realize self-independence and self-emancipation in the midst of a male-dominated society. As Judith Mitchell points out *Villette* finds a way for a woman to “negotiate a realistic pathway to both love and independence without submission to the dominant hierarchy”.51 *Villette* is Charlotte Bronte’s last and the most grown-up work. Its heroine Lucy Snowe is a barely veiled representation of the author. In a response to Charlotte Bronte’s publisher, William Smith Williams on his criticism of Lucy Snowe, Bronte concedes that “Lucy may be thought morbid and weak …. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid”.52 Charlotte Bronte gives Lucy excuses for such morbid and weak life because Charlotte lives her life similarly as Lucy does. So, it makes no difference between Lucy and Charlotte Bronte.

The woman’s identity in *Villette* can be seen through the portrayal of Lucy Snowe. In order to understand the nature of Lucy’s identity one must understand the other models of femininity that Bronte presents in *Villette*. Charlotte Bronte presents the traditional identity of women in the Victorian period represented by the Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe. Paulina Home stands for the Victorian ideal of the Angel of the House. Her name Paulina Home keeps her positioned in a place that invokes images of warm fires, tidy rooms and pleasant company. Paulina exists to cater the needs of her father and Graham. Charlotte Bronte portrays Paulina drawing her energy from others especially those whom she is closest. Lucy describes the loss of Paulina’s identity saying:

One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham and seemed to feel by his feeling and exist in his existence. *Villette* (p.27)

So, Paulina’s existence is annihilated in the existence of her father and Graham. Her identity is lost in the identity of others. As a woman portrayed like an Angel of the House, she lost her identity. She is like any part of architecture of the house. This gender role of Polly or Paulina is not accepted by Lucy Snowe. Lucy does not want to be treated like Polly and to feel socially inferior to man like what Paulina dose. Paulina acts according to the traditional gender role of woman in the nineteenth century. She is bound by the patriarchal conventions.
of her times. Moreover, she is bounded by her unceasing belief and obedience to those conventions. She is given the permission to marry Graham in a way which affirms the angel ideology: “Cease to be a daughter; go and be a wife”, *Villette* (p.519). This is her fate to be a daughter or to be a wife.

Paulina can have no other gender roles in her society. She is satisfied with the social role assigned to her as an angel of her house after being a dear, docile daughter to her father. This is because without the protection of a man, Paulina believes, she cannot lead a happy life. This can be explicitly seen in her own words: “I am not endeavouring, nor actively good, yet God has caused me to grow in sun, due moisture, and safe protection, sheltered, fostered, taught, by my dear father; and now—now—another comes. Graham loves me”, (*Villette*, p.449). Thus, Paulina blesses and approves her stereotypical social roles that bring her comfort without any struggle for anything in her life.

Charlotte Bronte presents Ginevra Fanshawe as a frivolous girl who explains that one of five sisters must marry elderly gentlemen with cash. Lucy describes her as a spoiled girl. Ginevra is always rambling and chatting about two things; clothes and men. She stands for the physical manifestations, flirting with men from Dr. John to de Hamal. She is enjoying her life with cloths and men. She is the epitome of physical love. Her plot teams with intrigue and adventure. She is all about having fun and hunting down the bet match she can find. She is the opposite of Paulina living in the world of herself and her self alone. Paulina stands for marriage, whereas Ginevra stands for romance. She disregards the feelings and wants of others.

Charlotte Bronte, while constructing this parallel between Paulina and Ginevra, presents the ideal identity for Lucy as an independent, unconventional young woman who is looking for her own identity in a patriarchal society. She is in between Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe. Charlotte Bronte presents Lucy beyond the domestic sphere of Paulina and the demi-public sphere of Ginevra. Lucy refuses to be totally docile to the men of her society, for example, she has refused to wear certain clothes according to the desires of Paul Emmanuel. She has also refused to undress her female clothes before the role-playing scene. She is neither docile as Paulina nor more romantic like Ginevra. Despite her linguistic and cultural displacement in *Villette*, the foreign surroundings act as a positive factor that allows Lucy to overcome the hurdles placed upon her by the patriarchal Victorian society. Her journey per se from Britain to France acts as a catalyst for self-discovery and self-independence.
In the portrayal of Lucy in *Villette*, Charlotte Bronte is against the hegemonic masculinity that the Victorian society consents to masculinity as dominant and superior to femininity suggesting that men have more rights to certain roles which inherently disadvantages women. Charlotte critiques the limitation of women rights for Paulina, and Ginevra to be a daughter or a wife. Lucy denies to be docile, submissive and a toy for the pleasure of Dr. John and Paul Emanuel. She has worked outside the realm of the house, has voiced her own ideas and opinions and has shown her thirst for knowledge and independence. Lucy is the original copy of her creator.

Lucy plays different roles in the public sphere and the private sphere. Also, she plays men’s role. On Madame Beck’s fete-day, Lucy has to play a disagreeable part – a man’s – an empty headed fop’s. In this occasion Lucy has to be somebody, other than herself in order to please others. This transformation is not easy for Lucy. At first, she refuses to be dressed like a man:

> To be dressed like a man, did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man’s name and part; No. I would keep my own dress, come what might. M. Paul might storm, might rage: I would keep my own dress. *Villette* (p.166)

Paul forces her to put on male clothing. She finally succumbs to put on a man’s clothes on top of her own. To act like a man, Lucy has to undress as a woman and put on man’s clothes. This action requires Lucy to give up her identity as a woman and assume the image of a man. Lucy’s refusal to undress herself demonstrates her resistance to be read as a text. She keeps her own female clothes to protect and hide her bodily space. At the same time, she plays the role of a man to obtain the power of holding an active position to see, to woo, and to act what is forbidden for her to do as a woman.

In analysing Lucy’s role playing, Gilbert and Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* state:

> By refusing to dress completely like a man onstage and by choosing only certain items to signify her male character, Lucy makes the role her own. But at the same time she is liberated by the male garments that she does select, and in this respect she reminds us of all those women artists who signal their artistic independence by disguising themselves as men or, more frequently, by engaging in a transvestite parody of symbols of masculine authority. Though cross-dressing can surely signal self-division, paradoxically it can also liberate women from self-hatred, allowing for the freer expression of love for other women. ^53

This reminds us of the women novelists’ disguising as men like George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Anne Bronte and other eighteenth and nineteenth century’s female
novelists. Unless they did not choose pen names, their work would not be accepted or even published. So, Lucy does not want to have a male identity and to lose her female identity. This is similar to Currer Bell, the male author name of Charlotte Bronte. Lucy through her journey from England to France is looking for her identity. On the stage, she puts on the male clothes on her own. She refuses to show her body which is the icon of her female identity. Paul Emanuel clearly places the male sex above the female as Robert Southey does with Charlotte Bronte assuming that literature is the business of men. Paul Emanuel announces to Lucy when she is to participate in the school play as a male character that she must wear something that announces her as the nobler sex. With this statement Paul indicates that he sees women as subservient to men and in need of their guidance. He believes that the male sex is the superior one. However, Lucy plays on the phrase “nobler sex” *Villette* (p.167), as if her version of masculinity will be inherently nobler because performed by a woman.

When Lucy is enforced to have played the male role onstage, this empowers her and makes her more masculine. Similarly, to claim this power of self-determination that Lucy has, Charlotte Bronte would need to enter the male-dominated world and if possible wrest power away from men. This is what she did in literature as thought to be male dominated. Nineteenth century is devoted to the literary genre novel, which became dominated by female novelists who broke the rule of dominance. It was education that made them challenge the male dominance. Education is also the source of rising Lucy Snowe to a school teacher in a society where the gender roles for a woman are to be a docile daughter or a wife. Both Lucy and Charlotte struggle with their imaginative spirits and they rise above their restrictive social sphere. Accordingly, Lucy is more than a fictional personality. Instead, she becomes a universal icon of the desired woman of Charlotte Bronte.

Through Vashti, Cleopatra and the four images *La vie d’une femme*, Charlotte Bronte expresses a deep resentment of the masculine construction of feminine identity during the nineteenth century England. Charlotte Bronte portrays the traditional conception of both femininity and masculinity in Lucy’s visit to the gallery of Villette. She has seen the performance of the actress Vashti.⁵⁴ Vashti is full of active female empowerment that inspires Lucy, whereas the passive Cleopatra disgusts her. As Lisa Surridge notes the painting of Cleopatra “formed a closed circle of male artist and male viewer”.⁵⁵ Lucy, like Vashti uses performance to assert an identity that challenges gender role during the
Victorian period. The conception of both masculinity and femininity is only a matter of performance.

Lucy expresses a deep resentment of the masculine construction of feminine identity. Lucy is against the judgment of Dr. John and M. Paul of Vashti and Cleopatra. Dr. John judges Vashti “as a woman not as an artist”, Villette (p.312). While performing the role of a man onstage, Lucy transgresses both culturally – defined gender and sexuality. Like Vashti and unlike Cleopatra, Lucy becomes active through her performance as a man on the stage. The linking concept among Vashti, Cleopatra, the four images of women and Lucy’s role playing on the stage is the construction of both masculinity and femininity by men and women of the Victorian period. Bronte scrutinizes this construction based upon the dominance of men and weakness of women. Vashti stands for the strong and ideal woman for Lucy. She is the mirror of both Lucy and Charlotte Bronte. Cleopatra is the symbol of a woman full of bodily sexual desires for men. The feminine identity of Cleopatra is no more than a sexual identity for the men of Villette.

Anna K. Silver, in her book Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body, argues that the difference between the “the full-fed-flesh”, Villette (p.309) of Cleopatra and the slender Vashti depends according to Lucy on each woman’s willingness to be consumed. Cleopatra is merely a display of the flesh in a male-dominated society who sees no more than the sexual identity of women.56 The men of Villette see Cleopatra as a sexual display to please themselves. The woman identity of Cleopatra is merely sexual. Charlotte Bronte and Lucy are against this masculine conception of Cleopatra. Vashti is not a model of sexual display and this makes her for Lucy a figure to be respected. She is a model of strong and independent woman for Lucy. She is the antonym of the traditional model that the Victorians see as an angel of the house or a sexual model merely for flesh display a in the case of Paulina and Cleopatra. Cleopatra is the object of the gazes of men. In such a case women are the object of men’s gazes. They are not the subject of the gaze. They are passive and powerless. Cleopatra is an object since she is only a painting. In contrary, Vashti, alive, strong with an oriental eye, is the object as well as the subject. She challenges men with her gaze objectifying them based on Mulvey’s male gaze theory.

Lucy attends the performance of Vashti. She observes her enthralling:

It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.  
It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.  Villette (p.309)

In Lucy’s fascinated eye, the actress’s performance is at once “a marvellous sight, marvellous sight”. Lucy is articulating her knowledge that Vashti violates the canons of
female virtue not only by presenting herself as ‘a sight and spectacle’ but by displaying raw
and powerful emotion: “Vashti was not good, I was told, and I have said that she did not
look good”, Villette (p.310). However, she is very strong and independent in her
performance. Lucy is shocked to see Dr. John judge Vashti “as a woman, not as an artist”,
Villette (p.312). He judges her in terms of the conventional roles of a woman. This means
that she is not powerful as Lucy finds Vashti a sign of powerful women. Dr. John judges
Vashti according to her sex not to her art. Such judgment is the traditional view of woman
as powerless. Charlotte Bronte portrays Dr. John’s judgment similar to the judgment of
Currer Bell as a woman not as an author. On the nineteenth of January 1850, Charlotte
Bronte wrote to George Lewes that “she was not hurt by severe criticism but [she] wished
critics would judge [her] as an author not as a woman”. The question of sex was regarded
as a standard of measuring the literary work during the Victorian period. The literary work
is judged not on the standard of talent. Currer Bell, thought to be a man, was judged better
than Charlotte Bronte. Critics and publishers devalued the works of women despite their
talent. Similarly, Dr. John judges Vashti as a woman not as an artist.

Charlotte Bronte wants to have a different conception of both masculinity and
femininity from the traditional conception of the Victorian era. This new conception of
Bronte is based on equal gender roles for both men and women. She believes that women
should have more options than those available in the Victorian England. Charlotte Bronte
transmits such ideas through the portrayal of Lucy Snowe in Villette. Lucy is a totally
different character from the stereotype women in the novel such as Paulina Home and
Ginevra Fanshawe. She is the autobiographical reflection of Charlotte Bronte. Lucy
indicates the development in her identity that she has struggled for when she states: “I am
a rising character: once an old lady’s companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-
teacher”, Villette (p.312). The final result she gains her autonomy as a strong woman in a
totally patriarchal society similar to that of her creator, Charlotte Bronte.

Charlotte Bronte has presented different types of masculinity in Villette; the
traditional masculinity that prevailed the Victorian period, the effeminate masculinity, the
ideal gentleman masculinity and the aforementioned masculinity of the heroine. The
traditional masculinity is represented through Dr. John Graham Breton. The effeminate
masculinity is represented by de Hamal and the ideal gentleman masculinity is represented by Paul Emanuel.

Dr. John is a pure traditional Victorian man with whom Lucy falls in love. Lucy finds herself in trouble. She realizes that Dr. John is a man who loves to dominate and to be served. He looks for a beautiful woman who is meek, serving and submissive to him. One day he asks Lucy: “Could you mange that, think you, Lucy and make me ever grateful”. She responds angrily saying:

Could I manage to make you ever grateful?” said I. “No, I could not.” And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr. John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. Villette (p.381)

Lucy finds that it is better for her to stay alone than being with a man she loves and giving up her real self. She gives up his love at this moment. Lucy realizes that her love for Dr. John has vanished. She states that her affection does not die until it has reached its realization. Moreover, Dr. John’s failure to see her, forces her into a new stage in her life. Dr John is blind to see Lucy’s passion. He cannot read her eyes, face, or her gestures. He can see nothing more than “a being inoffensive as a shadow”, Villette (p. 380). Lucy is able to read Dr. John but Dr. John is not able to read her. He cannot read her character. He cannot read her needs as a woman. Her identity cannot be read by John Graham though he is familiar with her since childhood. Really, he gives her some help when she comes to Villette. However he cannot penetrate deeply into her inner identity. Lucy admits that “his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed”, Villette (p.296). His public self – generous, benevolent, and modest – approves her to his private self – vain, selfish, and full of masculine egotism – she is unacceptable. Because of such masculine egotism, Lucy gives up his love. She feels that it is love from one side and such love is not lasting forever. It is temporal. This love is similar to that of Charlotte Bronte’s unrequited love of M. Heger. Lucy has to give up such love in order to get her freedom. Her burial of his letters stands for Lucy’s triumph in achieving control over her destiny to be controlled by a man. It is a conflict between reason and feeling, however reason wins. After the burial of his letters, Lucy becomes a woman who controls her life. She becomes more powerful to dismiss a man who is treating her not as an equal. She is looking for a man who is not feeling superior to her. She wants an ideal gentleman to fill
the gap of this unrequited love. Lucy is looking for a good reader of character per se. She wants someone who is able to read her body and soul.

Dr. John or John Graham Breton as called by Lucy is the stereotype man of the Victorian era whom Charlotte Bronte critiques his masculinity. His masculinity is the one prevailing in the nineteenth century. It is a hegemonic masculinity in which the artist is judged as a woman not as an artist as in the case of Dr. John’s judgment of Vashti, the skilful artist. This masculinity does not care about the freedom of woman or independence. The Victorian society is a patriarchal society in itself.

The icon of the effeminate masculinity, de Hamal is described by Lucy “as “pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated…What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands! How daintily he held a glass to one of his optics!” Villette (p.247). He is feminine in his size, his dress and his curls. de Hamal is effeminate in his character because he behaves in womanish demeanour. He is a woman in man’s disguise. He is the sexual partner of Ginevra Fanshawe. Lucy thinks that he must be a man “Not a woman of my acquaintance had the stature of that ghost. She was not of a female height. Not to any man I knew could the machination, for a moment, be attributed”, Villette (p.566). He is attractive and smooth, but these features make him feminine to Lucy. In such a case, it is Lucy who decides the masculinity. It was thought that masculinity is decided by men only, but Charlotte Bronte deviates from this norm by creating characters who are losing masculinity. Moreover, woman can decide what masculine is or is not. Lucy decides that de Hamal is neither a man nor a woman. de Hamal’s masculinity is measured through the eyes of Lucy Snowe. Gilbert and Gubar in The Mad Woman in the Attic argue that:

de Hamal and Ginevra represent the self-gratifying, sensual, romantic side of Lucy. Posturing before mirrors, the fop and the coquette are vacuous but for the roles they play.  

Gilbert and Gubar add that Charlotte Bronte shows us how the apparently female image of the nun masks the romantic male plots of de Hamal. Lucy finds nothing masculine in de Hamal. Furthermore, she played his masculine role as a fop in the school play. Both de Hamal and Ginevra stand for the romantic and physical love. de Hamal has eloped with Ginevra breaking the norms of gentleman masculinity and even the norms of the traditional masculinity.
Charlotte Bronte’s portrayal of masculinity in the character of de Hamal is intentional to construct a new form of masculinity. The biological gender differences between men and women are not a standard tool for measuring masculinity. Lucy is astonished to see “What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands!” Villette (p.247). He is a man with a womanish feet and hands. Lucy, though a woman, has more masculine behaviour than he has. Her role-play as a fop for his coquette lover is symbolically significant. The behaviour is the only significant factor to evaluate the masculinity. So, masculinity according to R. W. Connell and Judith Butler is performative. This is the new construction of masculinity that Charlotte Bronte and other female novelists of the nineteenth century want to establish through their novels. Lucy is the mouthpiece of Charlotte Bronte while estimating the masculinity of de Hamal and other male characters in Villette.

The ideal gentleman masculinity is represented by Paul Emanuel in Villette. As mentioned earlier that Dr. John cannot read Lucy, Lucy gives up his love. He cannot read her eyes, her gestures and her identity. Paul is the opposite of Dr. John. Lucy and Paul are the only characters who truly see one another and are able to create a strong bond that develops into love. The masculinity of Paul is differentiated from that of both Dr. John and de Hamal. It is different from that of Dr. John which embodies the materialistic mentality or from that of de Hamal which is effeminate. At the beginning he is cruel against Lucy. He is attacking her style of teaching, her manners, her knowledge, her nationality, and even her religion. At the beginning he is patriarchal. He wants to dominate every movement of Lucy. Lucy is enough strong to resist all his attacks. She defies him in every attempt to destroy her personality.

As Lucy Snowe continues to resist Paul’s attacks, he becomes kinder, more compassionate and gentle till they fall in love with each other. Lucy observes that:

His tenderness had rendered him ductile in a priest’s hands, his affection, his devotedness, his sincere pious enthusiasm blinded his kind eyes sometimes, made him abandon justice to himself to do the work of craft, and serve the ends of selfishness. Villette (p.593)

Lucy knows the causes of his selfishness and sometimes his attacks. It is his tenderness that has blinded his kind eyes. His jealousy reveals his interest in Lucy. Though tough and cruel, Paul plays a role in stirring Lucy’s “ambitious wishes” Villette (p.421). Paul seeks to stimulate Lucy into an active realization of her own powers. This is the difference between him and Dr. John who fails to read her character. Paul has power and empowers others like
Lucy. His masculinity is the best one for Lucy because she finds her real identity as a woman. It is M. Paul’s demand that Lucy acts in the school play, that in spite of its atmosphere of sexual violation, “the door opens … two eyes first vaguely struck upon, and then hungrily dived into me”, *Villette* (p.159). It is not merely a sexual violation but an awaking to her potential as an acting subject. It is Paul who pushes her into a masculine gender role. Paul also is the first who proposes a friendship to Lucy Snowe. Paul suggests that there is an affinity between the two, saying that:

I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike—there is affinity between us. Do you see it, Mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine—that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. *Villette* (p.440)

Paul Emanuel discovers an affinity between him and Lucy. This affinity is physical as well as scientific. His ability to read her, to see her, to hear the same tones of her voice brings them closer together. Paul has ability to touch both her soul and body. Lucy’s ability to read him makes their relationship mutual. Their ability to read each other brings them together in spite of the religious barrier between them, her being a Protestant and his being a catholic. Charlotte Bronte’s use of the word ‘affinity’ denotes a cultural resemblance between him and Lucy.⁶⁰

Though M. Paul wants her to change into Catholicism, his ability to read her physically and psychologically makes him respect her religious identity. He assures her “Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm”, *Villette* (p.593). He recognises her religious identity. His love of her Protestantism is a part of his love towards Lucy. It is Paul Emanuel with whom Lucy has changed from the cold, self-regarding Miss Snowe to the fulfilled spiritual mate of her teacher. With him, Lucy assures her place in the universe. Finally, she acknowledges his role in her self-knowledge and self-fulfilment, saying: “A cordial word from his lips, or a gentle look from his eyes, would do me good, for all the span of life”, *Villette* (p.577).

Charlotte Bronte’s heroines are looking for such a man who can read their inner world as well as their outer world. This is the masculinity that Charlotte Bronte constructs for her heroines in which they find their existence as women; as equal partners in life. Such masculinity, Charlotte Bronte could not find in the Victorian society. At least, her heroines
can find this new proposed masculinity by Charlotte Bronte. Besides, the women of Victorian period might find Charlotte Bronte as a model for them to follow. They could find the heroines of her novel as exemplars for them too. They could follow the steps of Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. Women of modern age can appreciate and follow the struggle of such Victorian women novelists like Charlotte Bronte. Men also can see the real, ideal and gentleman masculinity presented in such novels like *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.

The male gaze plays a significant role in the construction of masculinity in Charlotte Bronte’s novels especially in *Villette*. According to Laura Mulvey’s theory of male gaze, there is an implicit visual hierarchy since man is in the dominant position as the viewer and woman is in the subordinate position. She suggests that the active spectator position of a viewer imposes masculinity as point of view for the audience as the spectator identifies with the active protagonist – Paul – for whom the gaze is a form of power and masculinity. According to Mulvey, the bearer of the look is necessarily masculine: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active or male and passive or female”. The presence of the male gaze in the scenes of *Villette* is very significant in Paul’s reading of Lucy Snowe. When Lucy arrives in Villette and wants to get a job, Madame Beck asks Paul to evaluate Lucy: “Mon cousin,” began Madame, “I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance. The little man fixed on me his spectacles: A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him”, *Villette* (p.78). Nicholas Dames argues that: “Lucy is literary transparent, completely unveiled, by M. Paul, and the reading he produces is validated by the narrative itself”. According to his reading he advises Madame Beck to accept her.

Charlotte Bronte critiques the aggressive male gaze against the women of her time. The male gaze is full of power and authority. Women are being looked. The state of being looked-at-ed-ness makes women helpless, passive, and merely the object of male’s gaze. Lucy is everywhere being watched by Dr. John, Paul, and even by women like Madame Beck. However, she resists being the object of their penetrating and aggressive gazes. She becomes the observer of their gazes.

From the beginning, Paul’s gaze is in favour of Lucy, though Lucy feels objectified under the focus of a male gaze. Watchful eyes are everywhere, and Lucy, who deeply values
her privacy, observes that her privacy is constantly invaded. The penetrating gaze enters into her rooms, her personal compartments, and at times even into her mind as in the case of Paul’s reading of her skull. His eyes are so powerful to examine the truth and find knowledge. This is because his eyes touch what they see. Lucy finds that his eyes are diving into her inner world and privacy. She describes his eyes before playing the role of a man on the stage: “the door opens …two eyes first vaguely struck upon, and then hungrily dived into me”, *Villette* (p.159). Here, Lucy is offended because of the hungry gaze of Paul. However, Paul assures that such gaze is for the benefit of Lucy. He tells her “You need watching, and watching over,” he pursued; “and it is well for you that I see this, and do my best to discharge both duties”, *Villette* (p.435). The gaze of Paul seems to be dominant but it is the best gaze for the well-being of Lucy. Comparatively, Madame Beck is aggressive and penetrating to the privacy of Lucy. Paul’s gaze is to evaluate the character of Lucy and to develop her personality emotionally, socially and intellectually. It is Paul who helps her to be a teacher and be finally a school headmaster. These developments start with the masculine and powerful gaze of Paul Emanuel. Through his gaze on Lucy’s skull at Madame Beck’s pension, to his diving into her room before role playing, to his gaze from his room at college next door, Paul is an active participant in Lucy’s life.

In spite of Paul’s good will in gazing at Lucy, she resists his gaze strongly assuming that this “It is not right, monsieur … Discoveries made by stealth seem to me dishonourable discoveries”, *Villette* (p.436). She feels that the incursion of the gaze is immoral, and also shocking enough to raise her scorn. Lucy breaks his spectacles as a resistance of his gaze. Her breaking of his glasses indicates that she is now powerful to resist his powerful gaze. He treats her kindly. This is the action that reveals his gentlemanliness. As a professor in the Pension School, he is powerful to punish her, but his ideal masculinity prevents him to do that. His gentle behaviour encourages her to be powerful to resist his gaze. Lucy has another purpose from the breaking of Paul’s glasses. She wants to appear equal with him. She describes the advantage of this action saying “I now found the advantage of proximity: these short-sighted “lunettes” were useless for the inspection of a criminal under Monsieur’s nose; accordingly, he doffed them, and he and I stood on more equal terms”, *Villette* (p.390). Lucy feels that the male gaze is a dominant feature of men. Gaze is a weapon in their hands. Her purpose is to have snatched equality from the dominant gender. So, she wants to stand on more equal terms with Paul.
Lucy gets annoyed by the constant gaze of Paul Emanuel and his intrusion. This intrusion does not exempt every corner of her house and every corner of her soul. Paul’s gaze indicates that Lucy becomes an entity of his life. He cannot live without seeing his reflection in her eyes. Up to this moment, Lucy interprets his gaze as an inclusive intrusion into her life. She portrays this intrusion, saying:

As I said before, I was sitting near the stove, let into the wall beneath the refectory and the carré, and thus sufficing to heat both apartments. Piercing the same wall, and close beside the stove, was a window, looking also into the carré; as I looked up a cap-tassel, a brow, two eyes, filled a pane of that window; the fixed gaze of those two eyes hit right against my own glance: they were watching me. I had not till that moment known that tears were on my cheek, but I felt them now. *Villette* (p. 276).

Moreover, Lucy defies Paul’s gaze opposing it with a powerful gaze. She is watching someone who is watching her. Paul’s gaze is tactile. His eyes hit right against Lucy’s own gaze. Lucy is aware of something touching her skin; she feels a tear drop over her cheek. Lucy notes that Paul’s ‘look’ may be communicative, but it is his hand that draws her forward; his hand searching her desk. Charlotte Bronte has used the five senses to bring together Lucy and Paul into one area in which they feel they are equal partners. As a result of the power of his gaze, Lucy responds to all his senses like touching, hearing the sound of his footsteps. Lucy finally, succumbs to the power of his gaze; she acknowledges that “A cordial word from his lips, or a gentle look from his eyes, would do me good, for all the span of life that remained to me; it would be comfort in the last strait of loneliness”, *Villette* (p.577). Now, the hungry penetrating gaze into her own privacy is changed into ‘a gentle look’ which would do Lucy good for all the span of her life. Lucy finally realizes the real significance of Paul’s gaze. Paul’s gaze becomes the comfort in the last strait of her loneliness. Paul’s gaze brings Lucy into a more active and physical relationship to the society in which she lives.

Change plays a vital role in the construction of masculinity of Paul Emanuel in *Villette*. Paul is a character with bad and good qualities like any other hero. According to Miriam Allott in her book, *The Brontes: The Critical Heritage*, Charlotte Bronte believed it was necessary to “give full effect to the good qualities of M. Emanuel, with which his fierce and domineering temper contrasts, and to make the reader accept him more cordially at the last” 63 At the beginning, Paul seems to be domineering and dominating like the stereotype men of the Victorian society in which Charlotte Bronte was living. There is a gradual change in the character of Paul till the end. The Paul of the beginning is totally
different from the Paul of the end. Charlotte Bronte makes readers like him when Lucy likes him and his behaviour. So, in the reconstruction of masculinity in the hands of Charlotte Bronte, the ideal masculinity is that which parallels with the needs and desire of the women of her novels as well as her society.

As a school headmaster in a school of girls, this gives him power over his pupils including Lucy. The narrator describes him as a Napoleonic “little man”. At the beginning of the novel, Lucy and readers hate Paul’s display of power and authority. Allott justifies this point clearly:

When Paul first comes upon the stage, the reader does not like him. He has, however, like Rochester, the fascination of power, and when, later in the book, that power is developed, not grotesquely, but nobly, the reader smiles, and willingly puts Lucy's hand in Paul’s . . . The skill of the treatment is shown in the gradual melting of the dislike of Paul, until it is entirely replaced by esteem; and this, by no means which seem forced, and which are not quite naturally and easily evolved from character and circumstance. 

Paul’s relation with Lucy is changed from hatred to friendship, to esteem, and finally to love. Paul’s gaze is a catalyst in this change. He penetrates deeper into the psyche of Lucy and changes his behaviour accordingly. In the new constructed masculinity by Charlotte Bronte in Villette, it is found that Lucy plays a great role to demolish the patriarchal masculinity of Paul Emanuel that is seen at the beginning of the novel. With the help of her gaze, she makes Paul see the real picture of Lucy. She helps him to run away from his previous patriarchal masculinity and to come to the new gentleman masculinity in which both man and woman are equal. Lucy has found new gender role to change the man she wants and make him up to her needs.

Paul has treated Lucy badly at the beginning. His treatment is merely patriarchal. He indulges himself in the way she wears. He does not want her to wear pink dress. He orders her not watch Cleopatra in the garden of Villette. Instead, he orders her to see the four images La vie d’une femme of the traditional woman during that period. He imposes on her to wear what he prefers to and to see whatever he wants her to see. He wants his power to dominate her power. Before playing the male role in the school as a fop of Ginevra, Paul locks her in the room and takes the key with him. Against Lucy’s will, she is taken to “the solitary and lofty attic” by Paul and takes the key with him. His behaviour towards her at the beginning is patriarchal per se. Yet, Paul starts to befriend Lucy as a result of his reading of her character. He believes that Lucy is suffering from loneliness and strangeness, so he
suggests her to be friends: “You are solitary and a stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known. We will be friends: do you agree?” Villette (p.187).

This is the first change in his hegemonic masculine behaviour towards Lucy. His conscience and gentlemanliness force him to feel the same loneliness that Lucy suffers from in Villette. Lucy accepts this friendship. This friendship grows into love. Paul, in order to marry her, wants her to convert into Catholicism. He wants to dominate her. However, he changes his mind and accept her religiously independent. This change plays a significant role in the construction of his masculinity. He assures her to “Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for Lucy”, Villette (p.593).

The Paul of the final part of the novel is totally different from the Paul of the first part. The hegemonic and patriarchal Paul becomes the ideal gentleman of Lucy. Finally, he accepts her beliefs, her attitudes and her independent identity. Paul finally accepts her need to find her own identity through work and independence. He has prepared a house and a school for Lucy. Paul is the man who has given Lucy her autonomy and freedom. Kate Millett, in her book, Sexual Politics, writes of this freedom that Charlotte Bronte bestows Lucy in Villette, saying:

Lucy is free. Free is alone; given a choice between ‘love’ in its almost agreeable contemporary manifestation, and freedom, Lucy chose to retain the individualistic humanity she had shored up ever at the expense of sexuality. The sentimental reader is also free to call Lucy ‘warped’ but Charlotte Bronte is hard-minded enough to know that there was no man in Lucy’s society with whom she could have lived and still free. 65.

Charlotte Bronte has struggled to get individual freedom. As a result of such freedom, Lucy accepts Paul’s proposal: “Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth”, Villette (p.590). Paul proves her identity based on equality and mutual understanding. Paul stands for the school master, M. Heger in Brussels with whom Charlotte was attached to. Charlotte Bronte felt alienated in Brussels like Lucy Snowe in Villette. Change in Paul’s character makes Paul a man of ‘inward insight’ whose mind is her ‘library’ and collyrium to the spirit of her eyes.

Charlotte Bronte has chosen Paul, the French lover with Catholic faith and Lucy, the English girl with Protestant faith because she wishes to assert the primacy of love over all religious, social or national differences. Paul’s traditional masculinity has undergone certain changes to be softened and refined into the gentlemanly masculinity in which love is the
union between two souls. Lucy finally finds her identity in Paul. Both of them become good readers of each other. Paul reads Lucy as a ‘book’ while Lucy finds the mind of Paul her ‘library’.

In *Villette*, Charlotte Bronte depicts her unrequited love with M. Heger in Brussels. Similarly, Lucy’s love is unrequited. Paul’s death at the sea leaves Lucy alone. The ending of the novel is not a happy ending from the point of view of the readers and the father of the author of *Villette*. The ending is acceptable to Charlotte Bronte and Lucy. For Lucy she declares “M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life”, *Villette* (p.591). Lucy Snowe explains the happiness of the three years as the outcome of her autonomy, work and freedom. His absence does not mean her happiness. Her happiness is because of masculinity that brings about Lucy’s maturity and autonomy. Lucy gets her maturity when she gets the heart of the gentleman, Paul. It is Paul who helps her to gain her financial, social, and educational independence. Lucy ultimately, gets satisfaction in her work; however the sexual satisfaction remains beyond her reach as in the case of her creator, Charlotte Bronte.

Charlotte Bronte neglected the significance of marriage as an institution of society, because she could not fulfil her sexual satisfaction and remained spinster till the age of thirty eight. Charlotte Bronte could ‘leave sunny imaginations hope’ but unfortunately it was the dark and cloudy sky of the Victorian society in which patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity are prevailing that era.

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George Henry Lewes was a very different sort of critic. In 1847 he was just thirty years old, a year younger than Charlotte Bronte. He was the Lewes that most people know as the husband of the famous George Eliot, the biographer of Goethe and the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*.


Smith 58.


Paul Emanuel’s masculine and gentlemen behaviour will be further discussed in the portion of *Villette* in the second part of this chapter.
Here, by ‘both fires’ I mean the sexual fire and the real fire inside his bedroom. Jane extinguishes the sexual fire of Rochester as well as her sexual fire. When Rochester deviates from Jane to Blanche Ingram, to make her jealous and to test her love, Jane angrily responses: “Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you, —and full as much heart!” Jane Eyre (p114). Charlotte Bronte focuses on the equality of both genders even in the sexual desire. This equality is important to her new masculinity.
The original Vashti, Ahasuerus’s queen from the book of Esther, refused to show herself to the crowds at the behest of the king to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on. Vashti is modeled on the real life Rachel Felix, the French actress that Charlotte Bronte saw in London and enjoyed the charisma of such type of women.


Gilbert and Gubar 436.


Ibid, p. 214