

**THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROCESS:
WRITING THE LIVES OF
CHARLOTTE BRONTË**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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Focusing on multiple versions of the life of Charlotte Brontë, I explore the development of biography over a period of 140 years, examining a range of biographical forms, the process of re-visioning the subject, and the relationships between biographies and their historical placement. Eight versions of the life of Charlotte Brontë, from Elizabeth Gaskell's first Life published in 1857 to Rebecca Fraser's 1988 biography, are examined in detail, with consideration of ten additional Brontë biographies. The impact of the discoveries of new documents is noted, but of particular interest is how strategies of interpretation and form have altered, thereby influencing the conceptualization of the subject. A study of versions of Charlotte Brontë's life illustrates that, within one relatively stable set of documents, there can be numerous stories. Versions of Brontë biographies interact with one another manifesting an interesting development from competitive displacement to complementary inclusiveness. In following the development of the genre, I examine the impact on biography of changing attitudes to subjectivity and objectivity, completeness and definitiveness, the relationship of the biographer to the subject, the construction of self, and the use and types of novelistic strategies. One dominant mode of conceptualization, the view of Charlotte as a divided personality, has significantly changed over this period, particularly as a result of the different emphases adopted by feminist biographers and by the postmodern challenges to the concept of a unitary self. Each chapter of the thesis deals with specific developments in the genre, illustrating the particular contributions of individual biographers and the correlation between interpretation, form and historical placement.

I cannot measure or judge of such a character as hers. I cannot map out vices, and virtues, and debateable land.

Elizabeth Gaskell
The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857)

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used to refer to these frequently cited works:

- BB T. Winnifrith, The Brontës and Their Background: Romance and Reality, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan Press, 1988).
- BST Brontë Society Transactions
- Circle Clement K. Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896).
- FFF Ira B. Nadel, Biography: Fiction. Fact & Form (London: Macmillan, 1984).
- Letters The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed., J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester University Press, 1966).
- LFC The Brontës: Their Lives. Friends and Correspondence, ed., T.J. Wise and J.S. Symington (Philadelphia, Porcupine Press, 2 vols. 1980. First published: 4 vols. Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1932).
- LL The Brontës: Life and Letters, ed. Clement K. Shorter, 2 vols. (New York: Haskell House Publishers. 1969. First published: London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908).

INTRODUCTION

THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROCESS: WRITING THE LIVES OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

By 1850, five years before her death, Charlotte Brontë had already become a legend. In a letter to a friend she writes of the gossip in Yorkshire about her socializing in London, and, on the other hand, the rumours in London of her strange Yorkshire existence: "the London quidnuncs make my seclusion a matter of wonder, and devise twenty romantic fictions to account for it" (LFC III 164). Indeed she, herself, contributed to the "romantic fictions," by taking the pseudonym of Currer Bell and creating what one early biographical essayist called a "furore": "Jane Eyre was written by a man! no--Jane Eyre was written by a woman."¹ Those "twenty romantic fictions" have grown to twenty full length biographies since her death, and the romanticizing or fictionalizing of the subject is still an issue. The first Brontë biographical study was, in fact, Charlotte's "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell"² which appeared in the 1850 reprint of Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey. Paradoxically, her few pages have been construed as initiating "romantic fictions" about her sisters: the view of Anne as a morbid, didactic and slightly inferior writer; the view of Emily as a genius but also an unworldly and immature writer. Many of the conditions and attributes she ascribes to her sisters are incorporated in Elizabeth Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë³ and often transferred to Charlotte. Both the divided personality model and the correlation between writing and landscape are concepts that Gaskell found already formulated by Charlotte in the "Biographical Notice" and in the "Preface" for this new edition."⁴ Another biographical version

¹ "A Few Words About 'Jane Eyre'," Sharpe's London Magazine June 1855: 340. It was this article which, because of its "malignant falsehoods," prompted Ellen Nussey to suggest to Mr Brontë and Mr Nicholls that Mrs Gaskell be asked to undertake an authorized biography (LFC IV 189).

² Charlotte Brontë, "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell," Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë (1850; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990) 313-319.

³ Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, ed. Alan Shelston (1857; London: Penguin, 1975).

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, "Preface", Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë (1850; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990) 320.

which pre-dated Gaskell's Life was Harriet Martineau's tribute to Charlotte published in the Daily News in April 1855, just after Charlotte's death. She presents in miniature the portrait that Gaskell rounds out in her Life; Charlotte is seen as "morbidly sensitive," having the "habit of self-control, if not of silence," living a "secluded and monotonous life" and, contradictorily, being both "a perfect household image" and a writer whose books contained a degree of "coarseness."⁵ Thus, the "romantic fictions"⁶ that Gaskell is often accused of initiating, the feminine, passive, long-suffering view of Charlotte, are encoded in the culture and discourse of the time well before she writes her Life, underlining the very complex process involved in writing a life of Charlotte Brontë.

Since the death of Charlotte Brontë, 31 March 1855, nearly one hundred and forty years ago, there have been between fifty and sixty full-length biographies of the lives of the Brontë family.⁷ Aside from the twenty full-length biographies of which she is the main subject, Charlotte is frequently the focus of the biographies of the family since the approximately 380 letters (BB 6) to her friend, Ellen Nussey, constitute the main source of material for the history of the family. Katherine Frank, critic and biographer of Emily Brontë, writes that the Brontës are "perhaps the most exhaustively documented and well-studied figures in literary history."⁸ The field of Brontë biography is particularly animated by the presence of such a unique first

⁵ Harriet Martineau, "Death of Currer Bell," LFC IV 180-184.

⁶ Harold Nicolson in The Development of English Biography (London: Hogarth, 1927) referred to Gaskell's Life as a "sentimental novel" (128), and Alan Shelston in his introduction to the Penguin edition of the Life wrote of Gaskell's "instinctive 'fictionalization'" (25).

⁷ Such statistics depend on what is meant by "major" and "full-length." Katherine Frank in 1979 states that there are "forty major lives of the Bronte family" ("The Brontë Biographies: Romance, Reality and Revision," biography 2 (1979): 141). Margot Peters in 1976 states that "more than fifty booklength biographies have appeared since 1945" ("Charlotte Brontë: A Critico-Bibliographic Survey 1945-1974," British Studies Monitor VI (1976): 17). The Haworth Parsonage Library indicates over seventy-five biographies although not all are full-length. Since 1979 there have been at least five biographies including three of Charlotte which will be discussed here.

⁸ Frank, "The Brontë Biographies," 141. Her sense that the Brontës might be the most documented figures seems somewhat suspect. Nadel in Biography: Fact, Fiction & Form indicates that there are approximately 225 biographical studies on Johnson, 71 on Joyce, and 57 on Dickens (102-103), and S. Schoenbaum claims that he read a million pages of the 'lives' of Shakespeare written up to 1970 for his book, Shakespeare's Lives (although neither of these critics differentiates small, or unoriginal, or group biographies from full-length studies). Katherine Frank published Emily Brontë: A Chainless Soul in 1990.

biography as Elizabeth Gaskell's Life. The close relationship between Charlotte and Gaskell, as friends and as female authors writing under similar conditions, accounts, in part, for the importance of this work. Although it is considered a classic study, it is also blamed for creating myths about the Brontës. Yet, no subsequent biographer of the Brontë family has been able to ignore the impact of Gaskell's vision. Rebecca Fraser, who published her biography in 1988,⁹ echoes Gaskell in her opening and closing, and Lyndall Gordon,¹⁰ the most recent biographer, deliberately recasts some of the images so firmly established by Gaskell: the moors and the quiet space of the parsonage. Gaskell's biography holds a central place in Brontë and Gaskell criticism, but, as Carolyn Heilbrun notes, it has "paid for its uniqueness with its virtual invisibility, not to readers but to historians of biography."¹¹

Margot Peters points out that "like the life of their hero Byron, the lives of the Brontës have always commanded more attention than their works,"¹² and in the introduction to her biography, Unquiet Soul, she writes that "only Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, draws more tourists [than Haworth]."¹³ In 1895 ten thousand people visited the Brontë Museum, and now between 150,000 and 200,000 people visit each year. Even before Charlotte died, the curious came to Haworth to catch a glimpse of her in Church, and soon after her death, her father, upon request, would send out to her many admirers "piece[s] of [his] dear Charlotte's handwriting" (LFC IV 232). Peters believes that it is the "glamor" of a tragic life (xiv) that inspires so much interest in the lives of the Brontës. Certainly Victorian biographers and readers found in the lives of the Brontës heroic models of moral rectitude and noble suffering. As a result of the mythic dimensions of the subject, Brontë

⁹ Rebecca Fraser, Charlotte Brontë (1988; London: Methuen, Mandarin, 1989).

¹⁰ Lyndall Gordon, Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).

¹¹ Carolyn Heilbrun, "Women's Biographies of Women: A New Genre," Review 2, 1980: 337. She notes that A.O.J. Cockshut in Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century did not mention Gaskell's Life. In my survey of over twenty of the most prominent critics of biography, only six mention Gaskell: Waldo Dunn (1916), Harold Nicolson (1927), Richard Altick (1965), Alan Shelston (1977), Robert Gittings (1978) and Ira Bruce Nadel (1984).

¹² Peters, "A Critico-Bibliographic Survey" 17.

¹³ Margot Peters, Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975) xiii.

biography has generally paid attention to, and, at times, catered to, public as well as academic interest. The specific fascination of recent biographers, however, has been the disjunction between Charlotte's seemingly ordinary and dutiful public self and the extraordinary, passionate and independent spirit that emerges through her fiction. The challenge to locate the authentic self (or selves) behind all the "romantic fictions," including the fictionalized self in Brontë's novels, has become a major impetus for recent biographers.

Mr. Brontë provided Mrs. Gaskell with an anecdote that is emblematic of Charlotte's divided nature and of the biographical impulse to uncover the authentic self. Recognizing the creative natures of his children, Mr. Brontë discovered that to "make them speak with less timidity" (Gaskell 94) he could provide them with a mask so that they could reveal, as Gaskell writes, their "hidden characters" (95). His view that only "under the cover of the mask" (94) could the real Charlotte be discovered raises many essential questions about the process of biography in uncovering the self. Which is the authentic self, the one speaking behind the mask, or the timid self? By extension, does Charlotte expose or conceal her "hidden character" under the mask of her letters or her fiction? Recent theories have forced biographers to ask questions about the artfulness of all writing and about the notion of a unitary or authentic self. When Mr. Brontë asked Charlotte "what was the best book in the world" she answered "The Bible" and then "The Book of Nature" (Gaskell 94), but whether these were her own answers (somewhat sophisticated for a girl of about six), whether Charlotte was simply echoing both her father and the ideological values of the time, or whether the anecdote was a fiction (reflecting more of Mr. Brontë than of Charlotte), complicates the value that can be ascribed to Charlotte's answers. What seemed a simple and revealing anecdote to Mr. Brontë and to Gaskell has accumulated challenging and contradictory meanings as a result of questioning the 'masking' characteristics of language. Questioning the reliability of sources, admitting the partiality of interpretations, and manipulating the form of presentation profoundly affect the process of writing lives and result in a range of biographical versions of any one subject.

One of the most significant admissions by twentieth century biographers, as Virginia Woolf wrote in "The Art of Biography" (1939), is that there can be

"contradictory versions of the same face."¹⁴ The biographies of Charlotte Brontë afford an opportunity to study contradictory and complementary versions, to explore how one relatively stable set of facts can result in many stories. Factors other than the discovery of new documents impel new biographies. Cultural and historical ideologies influence, not only interpretation, but the form of biography. As biographies work with and against one another, questions about sources, form and interpretation are raised which alter the face of biography as a genre. The biographies of Charlotte Brontë are not entirely representative of all stages in the development of biography in general, nor do they cover the entire range of biographical modes, but they do represent a multitude of biographical possibilities.¹⁵ Many Brontë biographers are novelists, and Brontë biography is marked profoundly by an intense relationship between biographer and subject and by the frequent use of novelistic strategies to explore the inner world of the subject.

Biography has always had a popular audience and, until relatively recently in England, has largely been undertaken by women and men-of-letters or journalists, but it has found little favour with academics (in spite of the fact that since the 1960s many biographers have been academics). As Valerie Ross writes in her essay in Contesting the Subject, "biography...has since the formalization of departments of literature been granted no legitimate place in academic literary discourse."¹⁶ Because of its ambiguous status and function, existing primarily as an adjunct to history and literature, it loses credibility as a discourse in its own right. Victorian biography which celebrated the virtues of worthy public figures was generally considered historical although it also served to educate and entertain.¹⁷ The

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Biography," Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf vol 4 (1939; London: The Hogarth Press, 1967) 226.

¹⁵ Two specific types are unrepresented: the Victorian multi-volumed biography; and a detailed and pure documentary biography typical of the academic biographies of the 1960s.

¹⁶ Valerie Ross, "Too Close to Home," Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism, ed., William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991) 156.

¹⁷ Nadel writes that biography developing as a profession during the Victorian period "reflect[ed] the period's absorption with detail, accuracy and objectivity" (FFF 68). Alan Shelston, in Biography (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), notes that "the motivation of the [Victorian] biographer had been seen primarily as a functional one, whether to record, to praise, or to instruct" (62).

biographies of the early twentieth century, though adopting what was called a scientific (psychoanalytic) interest in the subject, became more literary. Between the 1930s and the 1960s when the New Critics dominated the literary scene, biography was considered negligible to the purely intrinsic study of literature. The gap between popular and academic audiences widened during this period, and the biographies of Charlotte Brontë, neither innovative in form, nor rigorous in research, were designed primarily for a popular audience. During the 1940s and 50s "biography received very slight consideration in critical discourse," and when it was mentioned by literary theorists it was considered "in no way specifically literary."¹⁸ Biography was further undermined by theorists of the late sixties and seventies who challenged many of the traditional assumptions of biography: the view of the self (or the author) as a unified and independent entity; the concept of truth as a singular and recoverable value; objectivity as a possible value-free perspective; and the belief in language as a reflection of reality. Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" in 1969¹⁹ and Michel Foucault in "What is An Author?" in 1970²⁰ challenged the notion of the author as the creative originator or source of meaning of a work. Barthes shifted the meaning of a work from the author to the text and the reader, and Foucault, answering Barthes, redefined Author in terms of "author-function" (that is, a network of cultural relations). These theories, however, did encourage the investigation of cultural, political, and social systems that influenced (if not produced) the subject and the work.²¹ Feminists who welcomed the challenge to the traditional view of the past which had omitted women were reluctant, though, to relinquish the notion of authorship and its accompanying concepts of identity and agency. Cheryl Walker

¹⁸ David Novarr, The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880-1970 (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1986) x-xi. Novarr looks at the treatment of biography by such literary theorists as Wellek and Warren (1949), Northrop Frye (1957) and David Daiches (1958).

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" Image--Music--Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-148.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in The Foucault Reader, ed., Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984) 101-120.

²¹ The only truly post-modern biography of which I am aware is David Nye's The Invented Self: An Anti-biography, from documents of Thomas A. Edison (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983). Endorsing the theories of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Hayden White (12), he begins by stating that "this study rejects the existence of its subject" (16).

comments in "Persona Criticism and the Death of the Author":

It continues to seem to me important to identify the circumstances that govern relations between authors and texts, as between texts and readers, because without such material we are in danger of seeing gender disappear or become transformed into a feature of textuality that cannot be persuasively connected to real women.²²

Feminist biographers point to ways in which the female subject challenges, not simply reflects, ideological bonds which entrap the individual. Within this new feminist framework Charlotte has been presented as an important model of women's struggles for identity in a male-dominated culture. Thus, for some feminists there proved to be a link between criticism and biography. Sharon O'Brien in "Feminist Theory and Literary Biography" predicts that feminist theory will continue to influence biography because of the "compatibility between feminism's stress on the different voice [of women] and traditional biography's emphasis on the coherent and knowable self."²³

In general, biography has been less influenced by contemporary theories than have fiction, history or even autobiography. Contemporary biographers are reluctant to give up the notion of identity or the concept of fact. Nevertheless, there have been significant changes. Biographers recognize the many factors impinging upon the construction of identity whereas nineteenth century biographers subscribed to the view of the author as genius with his or her particular history. As Walker notes, biographical explanation now takes account of the subject as "representative" of a shared culture and not simply as an "individual genius" ("Persona Criticism" 116). Freed from reading the works solely as a result of the personal intentions of the author, the biographer can place the subject in the ideology of her era as Fraser does, or can read the subject in the context of contemporary feminist views as Peters does. Traditional absolutist concepts of truth and fact have been disrupted by skepticism about the factual nature of material formerly considered reliable, such as letters. A

²² Cheryl Walker, "Persona Criticism and the Death of the Author," Contesting the Subject, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1991), 110.

²³ Sharon O'Brien, "Feminist Theory and Literary Biography," Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991) 128.

significant change in biographic theory is the recognition that contradictory versions of personality do not necessarily obliterate one another, and there has arisen a new respect for and incorporation of multiple versions of truth about the subject. The biographer has become more conscious of how his or her own subject position affects interpretation and frequently establishes that position in an introduction. Recognition of the narrativity of all discourse has eroded the boundaries between fiction, history and biography and resulted in the more accepted use of novelistic strategies to enter the interior world of the subject and to dramatize the text. Recent feminist biographers of Charlotte Brontë have brought about significant interpretative changes by attempting to free the female subject from what Alison Booth and Nancy Miller describe as "the divided-plot convention,"²⁴ that is, "Freud's plot" of the "either/or antinomy" which sees women as either "ambitious" or "erotic."²⁵

Recent biography critics such as Ira Bruce Nadel stress the fictional properties of biography. In general, he works from the "assumption that biography is a work of literature" (FFF 154), but there are contradictions in his study, as a result, I believe, of being caught in the traditional binary oppositional arguments about biography as either history or literature. Although he remarks at one point that the biographer is "bounded by fact" (154), he also claims that "language rather than fact organizes and structures a biography" (FFF 158) and that modern biography is created "often at the sacrifice of historical fact" (205). While theorists such as Nadel and Hayden White (who argues for the awareness of narrativity in historical discourse) have contributed to the theoretical discussion of biography by breaking down the categories of fact and fiction and insisting on the significance of form in the construction of meaning, I believe that biography is a mode of explanation different from, although sharing properties of, both history and literature. Thus, oppositional arguments, that language rather than fact controls biography or that "fictive form rather than historical content dominates" (FFF 9) are, in my opinion, too exclusive.

²⁴ Alison Booth, "Biographical Criticism and the 'Great' Woman of Letters," Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1991) 103.

²⁵ Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory ed., Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 346.

The function of form needs to be recognized, but I resist the hierarchical argument to see one or the other (fact or form) taking precedence over the other. Nevertheless, concern with style and language have become increasingly important to biographers, ever since, as Ruth Hoberman remarks in Modernizing Lives, biography took on a "more artful form" around the 1920s.²⁶

In this study I will be concentrating on eight major biographies that specifically focus on Charlotte and have played a role in the development of Brontë biography. In addition, I discuss ten more full-length biographies that, in a less significant way, have influenced the writing of the lives of Charlotte. Nadel believes that contemporary biographical criticism needs to look less "at the historical development of the genre and more at the formal properties of individual texts" (FFF 153-154). I aim, however, to discuss both the process involved in writing an individual text and the development of the genre through 140 years of the lives of Charlotte Brontë. I argue that the biographer's point of entry in historical time significantly affects the "formal properties" of a biography (as well as its interpretation and scholarship). I am not interested here in devising a typology of biographical modes, or in arguing with those that have been established. I believe that there is a range of expectations beyond which a biography, taking on the dominant aspects of another genre, becomes something else such as a novel on one end of the spectrum or criticism, on the other. Rather than an hierarchical scale which assumes that an ideal or proper balance of the elements of fact, interpretation and form will produce a definitive biography, I believe that there is a large range of biographic possibilities. Katherine Frank, in "Writing Lives: Theory and Practice in Literary Biography," argues that,

...in contemporary literary biography it seems that it requires two books by two authors to approach biographical completeness, and that we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that the narrative and analytic biographical modes are very different impulses. There will continue to be biographers who want to tell us a life story, and others who want to tell us what the story

²⁶ Ruth Hoberman, Modernizing Lives: Experiments in English Biography, 1918-1939 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987) 1.

means, but few or none will attempt to do both.²⁷

Although I would not agree with her narrowing of biography into two types, narrative and analytic, nor with her view that biographers do not attempt to both tell and explain, I agree with her general point about the inevitability of versions of a life, and that versions are more productively seen as "complementary rather than competitive" (Frank 510).

Chapter One of my thesis focuses on Elizabeth Gaskell's biography which dominated the scene until the 1960s and even today holds emotional sway over many Brontë biographers. Her biographical techniques, like her vision of Charlotte, are products of the Victorian age, but there are hints of subversive or unconventional elements. Because Gaskell was a friend of Charlotte and because she was a novelist, two specific issues are raised: the relationship of the biographer to her subject, and the use of novelistic strategies. The hagiographic approach of the Victorians gave way to the impressionist style and psychological approach of the early twentieth century writers, May Sinclair,²⁸ Rosamond Langbridge,²⁹ and E.F. Benson,³⁰ the biographers discussed in Chapter Two. The latter two biographers, revolting against Victorian biography, introduced to Brontë biography the Stracheyan de-mythologizing tendency and a concentration on style. One of the questions raised about their approach is the degree to which style reveals more about the biographer than about the subject. Chapter Three focuses on Winifred Gérin³¹ and the introduction of the scholarly approach, showing the development of this through the corrective and

²⁷ Katherine Frank, "Writing Lives: Theory and Practice in Literary Biography," *Genre* XIII (1980): 513.

²⁸ May Sinclair, *The Three Brontës* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1912).

²⁹ Rosamond Langbridge, *Charlotte Brontë: a Psychological Study* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929).

³⁰ E.F. Benson, *Charlotte Brontë* (London: Longmans, Green & Co Ltd., 1932).

³¹ Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

moderating influence of Margaret Lane³² and Margaret Crompton³³ in the 1950s. Together chapters Two and Three explore the question of whether biography is a craft or an art, the central issue of the first half century of contemporary biography. Chapter Four discusses the impact of feminist studies on biography during the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on Margot Peters's socio-cultural exploration and Helene Moglen's psychoanalytical study.³⁴ These feminist biographers foreground the aspects of personality that Gaskell either omitted or marginalized. The issue of partiality in interpretation is central to this approach, and, in some respects, they, like Gaskell, present Brontë as a model woman for their own era. The final two biographers, Rebecca Fraser and Tom Winnifrith,³⁵ whose biographies appeared in 1988, return to an emphasis on research and a more distanced approach. Opposing the drift towards subjectivity that has pervaded biography, Winnifrith attempts the objective, documentary mode and writes, primarily, from a corrective impulse. Fraser employs a conciliatory or, to use Frank's term, a "complementary" mode, integrating past versions of the life of Charlotte with her own perspective. Fraser views Charlotte's life as a "mosaic" which is steadily being constructed by the accumulation of biographical and critical work over 140 years. Biography is a process of interpretation and re-interpretation, of mythologizing and re-mythologizing, of encoding and re-coding. Acknowledging the impact of multiple versions of a life and showing an awareness of post-modern challenges to the unity of self, the objectivity of fact, and the definitiveness of interpretation, Fraser provides a fitting final study of how biography as a genre has developed. Lyndall Gordon, author of the most recent biography which was published too late for extensive study here, claims to enter "that unseen space" that "lies between the facts" (5). By focusing on the textuality of Charlotte's fictions and letters, Gordon explores the development of

³² Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story: A Reconsideration of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë" (London: William Heinemann, 1953).

³³ Margaret Crompton, Passionate Search: A Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: Cassell & Co Ltd., 1955).

³⁴ Helene Moglen, Charlotte Brontë: The Self-Conceived (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976).

³⁵ Tom Winnifrith, A New Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

self through the assumption of various linguistic roles. This biography which proclaims its complementary and versional truth will be briefly discussed in the conclusion with a view to pointing to new directions in Brontë biography.

CHAPTER ONE

WRITING THE FIRST LIFE

ELIZABETH GASKELL: THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË (1857)

Gaskell has a privileged position among Brontë biographers as the author of a life-relationship¹ biography. Not only did Gaskell and Brontë share a similar space, time, gender, ideology and, to some extent, personal history (the loss of a mother, separation from siblings, a writing career), but they became friends for the last five years of Brontë's life. Thus, Gaskell's Life manifests an intimacy and an "understanding" (60) different from that of subsequent biographers. While such closeness to the subject leads to exclusion of material through ideological and personal constraints, it also allows for inclusion of what is now lost in time. As the initiator, some say myth-maker, of the life-story of Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell's biography stands first in a number of ways.

Mr Brontë believed, and subsequent Gaskell biographers such as Winifred Gérin have endorsed his view, that the Life "ought to stand, and will stand, in the first rank of Biographies till the end of time..."² Behind the text is the authoritative weight of evidence coming directly to the biographer from the subject: "I have heard dear Miss Brontë herself..." (Letters 360). The power of such witnessing produces a complicated tension between subjectivity and reliability with which future biographers must contend. First-hand knowledge, as Richard Altick comments in Lives and Letters referring to Samuel Johnson, carried a strong measure of reliability for eighteenth and nineteenth century readers:

...[Johnson] subscribed to the modern principle of what might be called biographical propinquity--the axiom that, other things being equal, the evidence provided by the man nearest the event is more dependable than that

¹ This term is used by Katherine Frank, "The Brontë Biographies: Romance, Reality and Revision," biography 2 (1979): 142.

² John Lock and W.T. Dixon, A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters and Times of The Rev. Patrick Brontë (Edinburgh: Nelson 1965), 508-509. Supporting this assessment see: Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford University Press, 1976) 195; Angus Easson, Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1979) 150; Arthur Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell, Novelist & Biographer (Manchester University Press, 1965) 171; A.B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work (London: John Lehmann, 1952) 199.

from later, more distant sources.³

However, Gaskell's dependability as a biographer became an almost immediate concern after the publication of the Life and is still the subject of controversy. The Life was published 25 March 1857 to much acclaim until Lady Scott (who, Gaskell implied without naming, had seduced Branwell) and Carus Wilson (the founder of the Cowan Bridge School that Charlotte attended) threatened libel suits. By June, Mrs Gaskell was preparing a third edition (the second edition was almost the same as the first) in which the offending passages were removed. Mrs Gaskell maintained privately that she had printed the truth (Letters 452-455). Mary Taylor, one of Charlotte's closest friends, claimed that "libellous or not, the first edition was all true" (LFC IV 229); and Wise and Symington, the editors of the Brontë letters (1932), concluded that "Mrs Gaskell agreed to withdraw the statements referred to, not because they were untrue, but because she had not sufficient evidence to substantiate them" (LFC IV 218). Over the years, Gaskell's admirers and detractors have continued to argue about the nature of her myth-making. This debate has been further problematized by recent challenges from theorists who argue that the inherent subjectivity of fact and language has drawn history and literature, fact and myth, closer together, so that all biographers engage in some degree of myth-making. I hope to unravel some of the questions concerning Gaskell as myth-maker by examining her intentions and her practice, and by placing her in the context of the Victorian biographical tradition.

The initial, favourable critical reception indicated that Victorian critics and readers had no difficulty accepting the dual nature of The Life which is both literary and historical. The first reviews and the comments by Mr Brontë, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor were enthusiastic and favourable. Mr Brontë called the portrait "full of truth and life" (LFC IV 221), and it was variously praised as "a work of Art" by the Athenaeum, a "real picture" by the Daily News, a "moral" book by the Spectator

³ Richard D. Altick, Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) 56.

and a "model biography" by the Christian Remembrancer.⁴ However, when the Athenaeum heard of the threatened law suit by Lady Scott and the retractions and apology from Gaskell's solicitor, they printed an editorial qualifying their initial praise: "An accurate collector of facts....we regret to state, Mrs. Gaskell proves not to have been."⁵

Sir Wemyss Reid (1877)⁶ and Augustine Birrell (1887),⁷ the next two biographers of Charlotte Brontë, paid homage to Gaskell even while offering some revisions and new information. Reid praised The Life as "one of the most fascinating and artistic biographies in the English language" (Reid 1). Clement K. Shorter, author of Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle (1896), had no problems with its novelistic characteristics and awarded it "a place side by side with Boswell's Johnson and Lockhart's Scott:

There are obvious reasons for this success. Mrs. Gaskell was herself a popular novelist....She brought to bear upon the biography of Charlotte Brontë all those literary gifts which had made the charm of her seven volumes of romance. (Circle 1)

He assesses her inaccuracies and concludes, "when all is said, Mrs. Gaskell had done her work thoroughly and well" (Circle 20). Waldo Dunn in English Biography (1916) likewise considers Gaskell's Life to be one of the "great models" of nineteenth century biography.⁸ Harold Nicolson, however, maintained that Gaskell's inaccuracies were not minor, and that she had produced an "impure" biography, his term to describe a celebratory, subjective, and thesis-driven biography. In his

⁴ This overview of the critical reception of The Life is taken from Gérin's biography, Elizabeth Gaskell, 190-197. See also Jenny Uglow, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 426-435.

⁵ Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell 195.

⁶ Sir Wemyss Reid, Charlotte Brontë (London: Macmillan & Co., 1877).

⁷ Augustine Birrell, Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: Walter Scott, 1887).

⁸ Waldo Dunn, English Biography (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1916) 180.

estimation, Gaskell's Life was a "sentimental novel."⁹

Such divided criticism continues. Gaskell critics today generally praise Gaskell for her fair-mindedness, her narrative style and her research¹⁰ whereas Brontë critics criticize it for its subjective and sentimental vision of Charlotte. Katherine Frank in "The Brontë Biographies" attempts to locate a middle ground of acceptability for Gaskell's Life. She believes that "Mrs Gaskell was both the initiator and high point of this tradition" of writing biography as if it were the "last Brontë novel," a practice which is "anathema to serious Brontë critics and scholars" (Frank 142). She accuses Gaskell of "unforgettable character assassination" in her portrayal of Mr Brontë (144), of a "didactic vision" (142), "a novelistic vision" (144) and of "display[ing] and exploit[ing]" the "obligatory atmospheric effects" (146) in her opening chapters. However, Frank also describes The Life as "a remarkably sound, as well as indisputably accomplished, literary work" and one that is "exhaustively researched" (144). Her hyperbolic adjectives on both sides of the question point up the difficulties of objectively assessing the unique force of this first biography. The uneasy relationship between literary and scholarly techniques, between a personal and an objective vision and between innovative and conventional strategies, characteristic of the practice of biography in general, is pronounced in Gaskell's Life.

The Life has a remarkably dual nature. Ira Bruce Nadel in Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form categorizes Gaskell as a dramatic/expressive narrator because of her "participation" in her own narrative, but he also acknowledges that she "found commentary essential and provided interpretation of the material and life" (FFF 171). The duality of the narrative is evident in more than the double role of the narrator. In method, Gaskell is both traditional and innovative. She follows prescriptively many of the Victorian standard practices of biography, the tendency to moralize and instruct, the extensive use of letters, and the impulse to eulogize the subject, but she challenges them at other points, by employing novelistic and interpretative strategies. In addition to this dual methodology, she employs a divided plot approach, separating

⁹ Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography (London: Hogarth, 1927) 128.

¹⁰ For example, see comments by A.B. Hopkins, 199; Arthur Pollard, 139; Winifred Gérin, 210; and Coral Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis (London: Paul Elek, 1975) 129.

her subject into difficult-to-reconcile opposites, woman and author. In what follows I would like to explore the dual nature of this biography, exposing Gaskell's premeditated, and occasionally subversive, methodology. That Gaskell had a pre-determined thesis about her subject, that she was limited by her own ideological context and her personality, and that she made some errors of judgement cannot be denied. However, she recognized the problems of bias, and she was aware of the different demands of biography over fiction. This is hinted at in the biography and becomes clear in the letters she wrote during the course of writing the biography.

Even the most documentary of biographies cannot escape the subjectivity of language and the use of some novelistic strategies such as selection and arrangement of material, adoption of a point of view, chronological telling or other story mechanisms such as anecdote. Gaskell, however, exploited some of these strategies in a markedly innovative fashion. In my first section, I will look at the composition of her beginning and ending, her patterning tropes and her divided plot model. In the next section I will discuss her use of letters, anecdotes and an intimate point of view. Although we now recognize the fictive and subjective elements of these latter features, they were considered part of the standard historical approach of Victorian biographical practice. I will argue that in some subtle ways Gaskell altered, if not subverted, the conventional, just as she conventionalized or made acceptable the innovative.

I. NOVELISTIC STRATEGIES

George Eliot praised Gaskell for her admirable work, for "the industry and care" in gathering and selecting material and for "the feeling" in presenting material which made it as "poetic as one of her own novels."¹¹ As a way of expressing "feeling," as George Eliot called it, Gaskell employs novelistic techniques¹² such

¹¹ G.S. Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters 9 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954-78) vol. 2: 319.

¹² Ruth Hoberman in Modernizing Lives: Experiments in English Biography, 1918-1939 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987) writes: "Novelistic biographies are not novelized. There are no invented occurrences" (59). I have chosen the term novelistic rather than fictional throughout this thesis because I wish to emphasize that biography is only like a novel in

as contrast, dramatic scenes, and organizing tropes (duty, suffering and death). Furthermore, she imposes a pattern of meaning evident, thematically, through her integration of character and environment, and, structurally, through her beginning, ending, and double plotting of Charlotte's life. However, these strategies do not pervade the entire biography and, unlike a modern novelistic biographer such as Strachey, Gaskell only occasionally impersonates her subject's inner world with the use of inner monologue. The main thrust of biography in the nineteenth century was towards accumulation and compilation rather than artistic or interpretative arrangement of material, and the body of Gaskell's biography is dedicated to a chronological recording of Charlotte's letters. It was not until the twentieth century that artistic form in biography became a pervasive, self-conscious aim. "From Strachey on," writes Ruth Hoberman in Modernizing Lives, "biography is aestheticized and psychologized" (Hoberman 13). However, as Richard Altick observes, Gaskell's Life and a small number of other nineteenth century biographies such as Lockhart's Scott, Moore's Byron, Southey's Cowper, and Froude's Carlyle have "artistic merit" (Altick 231-232).

Gaskell's novelistic strategies have provoked disapproval from recent critics. Tom Winnifrith is the harshest critic of such methods stating that "it is not too harsh to blame her for being the prime source of the fatal blurring of fiction and fact which has bedevilled Brontë studies" (BB 1). Alan Shelston questions Gaskell's "instinctive 'fictionalization'" which molds Charlotte Brontë into a Gaskell heroine but adds that the picture is not "definably 'untrue'" (Gaskell 25). Nadel, while aware of the "dangers" of intimate biography, has more respect for the biographer who uses fictional devices to imaginatively recreate his subject: "Such a biography may sacrifice detail and, possibly, accuracy but not truth" (FFF 205). Nadel's more postmodern recognition of the inability to escape subjectivity even through 'scientific' (analytical or documentary) exploration because of the ideological bias of language itself leads him to assert that Gaskell's biography "succeeds in its own right as a literary work" (FFF 127).

certain respects, and while biographers borrow techniques from writers to dramatize or heighten effects, they do not do so to invent or create their subjects or their events.

1. Beginning and Ending as Structures of Meaning

Elizabeth Gaskell's striking beginning to The Life of Charlotte Brontë is novelistic in its deliberate composition of meaning and character through the use of contrast, image and point of view. The traditional Victorian biography generally begins with the factual relating of the subject's origins, and most of the Brontë biographies (both in the nineteenth and twentieth century) begin chronologically either with Patrick's or Charlotte's birth. Although even these chronological beginnings can suggest a biographer's stance as will be discussed later when I look at Moglen's or Peters's prioritizing of the mother's influence, Gaskell not only breaks with tradition by writing descriptively and thematically of the environment rather than the person, thus establishing it as a primary force in Charlotte's life, but she unconventionally begins with Charlotte's death rather than her birth.

Through a correlation of the landscape and the mind, Chapter I establishes the subject's character through the central conventional Victorian tropes of dying, suffering and purity, adding a subversive note of strangeness or uniqueness. The first chapter also establishes Gaskell's methodology for the remainder of the biography: a shifting narrative movement from outside to inside, from objective to subjective commentary. The beginning of The Life echoes the tension at the core of Gaskell's previous novel North and South (1855) in which the heroine Margaret Hale, from a small village in the South, confronts and is eventually reconciled with the hero John Thornton, a Manchester mill-owner. In evoking her previous novel Gaskell would seem to be encouraging a similar reconciliation of understanding between her subject, Charlotte, who is from the ungentle and rugged North (Yorkshire), and the reading public, generally the cultured upper middle class who had attacked Brontë's novels for what they saw as their vulgarity and unrestrained passion. Thus, the beginning of The Life apprises readers of the cultural and economic differences between North and South:

In fact, nothing can be more opposed than the state of society, the modes of thinking, the standard of reference on all points of morality, manners and even politics and religion, in such a new manufacturing place as Keighley in the north, and any stately sleepy, picturesque cathedral town in the south. (53)

In the first few pages Gaskell moves from the comfortable environment of the South through the industrial world of Bradford and Keighley and into the remote and unfamiliar territory of Haworth. Her language suggests uneasiness; she hears "discordant" tones, expects brilliancy but discovers with disappointment the "grey neutral tint of every object" (54). Even for "an inhabitant of the neighbouring county" (Gaskell lived in Lancashire) the landscape is "strange" (54). The moors around Haworth are even more unsettling with their ominous "sinuous wave-like" aspect and their capacity to affect the "mood of the mind" with "loneliness," and "oppressive" or "monotonous" feelings (54). That this landscape evokes for her an "illimitable barrier" and an aspect "almost like that of a wall" (54) anticipates Gaskell's unwillingness or inability to cross the boundary into the strange territory of Charlotte's writings. Nevertheless, by acknowledging this strangeness, Gaskell attempts to move it into acceptability. While the moors are unsettling, Gaskell is attracted to the parsonage itself:

Everything about the place tells of the most dainty order, the most exquisite cleanliness...Inside and outside of that house cleanliness goes up into its essence, purity. (56)

The parsonage reflects some of the primary aspects that Gaskell wants to emphasize in Charlotte's character--femininity, order and purity.

Gaskell assumes the role of the unobtrusive observer-biographer throughout most of Chapter I. As she enters the Haworth Church at the end of the chapter, she retains that detachment, describing the interior and, then, without narrative interruption, she reproduces, just as she saw them in 1857, the tablet inscriptions of all the dead Brontës: the mother, Maria, then the siblings, Maria, Elizabeth, Branwell, Emily and Anne. But Charlotte's name is put on another tablet because "there is room for no other" (59) on the family tablet. Before transcribing Charlotte's inscription, Gaskell, with novelistic impulse, interrupts the listing of the deaths with her own commentary, a strategy which magnifies Charlotte's separation from the rest of her family. Underlining the tragic unexpectedness of so many deaths, Gaskell

comments that the "lines [on the tablet] are pressed together, and the letters become small and cramped" (59) so that Anne's death is the last that can be recorded in that space. Such cramped space, like the "terribly full" graveyard (56), symbolizes an environment that has suffocated the family, not allowing a natural space for living, marrying and aging. The gap between the inscriptions of the others and Charlotte's is textually filled by Gaskell's emotional interjection:

But one more of that generation--the last of the nursery of six little motherless children--was yet to follow, before the survivor, the childless and widowed father, found his rest. On another tablet, below the first, the following record has been added to that mournful list: [then follows the inscription]. (59)

The poetic repetition of the suffix "less" emphasizes the poignancy of the Brontë history of loss: Charlotte was motherless, her five siblings had predeceased her, and her father, childless, survived them. Gaskell's biography "makes room" for Charlotte (who, in her opinion, is unappreciated by the public). Indicative of her overall methodology, Gaskell ends the chapter by following her emotional interjection with the factual "record," the inscription on the tablet:

ADJOINING LIE THE REMAINS OF
CHARLOTTE, WIFE
OF THE
REV. ARTHUR NICHOLLS, A. B.,
AND DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË, A. B., INCUMBENT.
SHE DIED MARCH 31ST, 1855, IN THE 39TH
YEAR OF HER AGE.

The first introduction to Charlotte, then, is, not to the living person, but to a name inscribed on a tombstone. Although this is obviously a novelistic strategy aimed at engaging sympathy, it ambiguously suggests Gaskell's vision of Charlotte. The tombstone inscribes Charlotte in the roles of "WIFE" and "DAUGHTER" (59), the very aspects of character upon which Gaskell chooses to focus in the biography. Writing to Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's dearest friend, on September 6, 1855, soon after she had decided to write the biography, Gaskell says, "I am sure the more fully she--Charlotte Brontë--the friend, the daughter, the sister, the wife, is known, and known where need be in her own words, the more highly will she be appreciated" (Letters

370). Yet, the biography is predicated upon the fame of the author; it is this very disjunction between author and woman that motivates Gaskell to write the biography. Gaskell believed that Charlotte as author had been castigated because she had not been appreciated in her womanly roles, and Gaskell's project, to reclaim the woman, is achieved by marginalizing the author. So, in "making room" Gaskell also creates gaps. In this first chapter, then, Gaskell establishes the controlling tropes by which she will envision Charlotte: her suffering and death, her difference (from both family and the South) and her divided roles of author and woman. This concluding-beginning reflects both the dual and ambivalent nature of Gaskell's vision of Charlotte as conventional and unconventional, and Gaskell's dual approach, omniscient and personal, recording and novelistic.

The dual narrating voice in the beginning chapter, observer and participant, omniscient and personal, is repeated but reversed in her ending. There are, in a sense, two final chapters: Chapter XIII, Volume II deals with Charlotte's death and thus constitutes the natural completion of the subject's narrative; Chapter XIV, a short two-page chapter, is Gaskell's completion of her own narrative, the biography. The first is an inside, intimate view; the other is an outside perspective which turns to the "world" (526) for a judgement.

Unlike the traditional lingering Victorian death scene,¹³ Gaskell's account, though emotional, is sparse and simple. There are only a few descriptive details, the "woe-worn face" of her husband, and Charlotte's final, perhaps apocryphal, words to him: "I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy" (524). At this point Gaskell does not go on to speak of Charlotte's funeral or summarize her life as is frequently done. Rather she concludes with the following dramatically short vignette:

Early on Saturday morning, March 31st, the solemn tolling of Haworth church-bell spoke forth the fact of her death to the villagers who had known her from a child, and whose hearts shivered within them as they thought of the two sitting desolate and alone in the old grey house. (524)

¹³ For example, Lockhart's famous description of the death of his father-in-law, Sir Walter Scott, is dramatically built up over about eight pages through the accumulation of details about the weather, the room, the visitors, the state of Scott's mind, what the common man is saying about Scott, and selected lines of poetry.

As her beginning was radical in reversing the natural chronology of life and death so here she focuses on the living rather than on the dead. Husband and father, bitter enemies who had quarreled over her, now, ironically, are left to live together. Thus, the shiver-response suggests mixed emotions--not simply sympathy for the survivors, but, rather subversively, horror that the child of promise whom the villagers had known should perish while the two domineering forces in her life should continue.

Although Gaskell, for conventional Victorian reasons, had "closed" the "sacred doors of home" (519) when Charlotte married, she had not, in the large part of the biography, closed the door on family life in the parsonage. Indeed she had been bold in her descriptions of Patrick Brontë as an eccentric and domineering father. However, she more ambiguously presents her view of Charlotte's marriage to Arthur Nicholls. She quotes Charlotte expressing some reservations about her marriage, but speaks of the "almost perfect happiness of [Charlotte's] nine months of wedded life" (512). Yet, there is a tone of pathos and an emphasis on exclusion in her declaration that "we, her loving friends, standing outside, caught occasional glimpses of brightness" (519), and these feelings are echoed in the ending lines that refer to the villagers who "shivered" at the thought of Nicholls and the father sitting "desolate" after Charlotte's death. There is a hint that Gaskell did not simply and delicately close the door, but that the door was closed by others. The force of the image of that "closed" door and Gaskell "standing outside" becomes clearer through Gaskell's own letters. In a letter to her friend, John Forster, she announces Charlotte's engagement and expresses her feelings about Nicholls:

...she would never have been happy but with an exacting, rigid, law-giving, passionate man--only you see, I'm afraid one of his laws will be to shut us out, & so I am making a sort of selfish moan over it & have got out of temper I suppose with the very thing I have been wanting for her this six months past. (281)

Gaskell keeps her "selfish moan" out of her portrait except here when she re-opens that door just enough to present, ambiguously, through the picture of the villagers' shivering hearts, both the conventional view of the bereft relatives, and the more subversive reminder of Charlotte's unhappiness in that "desolate...old grey house"

(524). Poignantly Gaskell refers to Charlotte as the "child," reversing again the natural order of things as she had in the beginning where she spoke of death.

Gaskell was unable to attend Charlotte's very small wedding and, in fact, never visited her in her married life. It was, she writes in the biography, "to [her] lasting regret" (521) that she cancelled a proposed visit for September or October 1854. Her first letter after Charlotte's death, to the Haworth stationer, John Greenwood, indicates keenly her sense that she had lost touch, had been "standing outside":

My dear dear friend that I shall never see again on earth! I did not even know she was ill. I had heard nothing of her since the beginning of December....
(Letters 335-336)

Chapter XIV, the last chapter, is an attempt to re-establish her presence in Charlotte's life. She now highlights her involvement with personal statements: "I have always been much struck with...." and, "I appeal to that larger...public...." and "To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë" (525). As in her beginning she novelistically uses contrasting images to heighten the pathos: the now famous Charlotte "whom the nations praised far off" is mourned only by "humble friends" (525) from the village; the "pale white bride" who had entered the church only a few months ago is now being "laid beside her own people" (525); and a "critical unsympathetic public" who previously judged her books is set against another readership who, Gaskell hopes, will constitute a "more solemn...and full heart[ed]" public (526). Her urgent appeal for reconciliation between Charlotte and her public echoes the sub-text of the beginning chapter, the reconciliation of north and south attitudes.

Throughout the biography, Gaskell attempts to reclaim Charlotte as a conventional, feminine woman who is pure, dutiful and long-suffering. Some critics had accused Brontë of unfemininity, and Gaskell's personal anger is unleashed on one particular reviewer when she comments on a review of Jane Eyre which appeared in

the Quarterly Review (360).¹⁴ The anonymous reviewer (later revealed as Elizabeth Rigby), although noting the "genuine power" of Jane Eyre, was highly critical of its "coarseness of language and laxity of tone" (Allott 106), its "anti-Christian" attitude (Allott 109) and its rebellious philosophies (Allott 110). One sentence in particular galled Mrs Gaskell as it had Charlotte. After discussing whether or not the author of such a book was male or female, Rigby writes, "if we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex" (Allott 111). It is this sentence which Gaskell singles out in her biography.¹⁵ The challenge for Gaskell is to prove to the public that Charlotte is not unfeminine, thereby making acceptable Charlotte's more radical side as manifested in her novels.

How to judge becomes a central concern of this final chapter. Gaskell's strategy is to provoke the public into what she considers responsible judgement. Her own admission that she, who had known Charlotte and who had read all her letters, "cannot measure or judge of such a character as hers" (526) is intended to urge the public to a conciliatory position. At the end of her biography, Gaskell quotes a portion of a letter sent to her from Mary Taylor, one of Charlotte's closest friends. Gaskell, at the last minute, transferred Mary's words from an earlier section in the biography¹⁶ to this significant position, drawing attention to Charlotte's friendship with the feminist Mary rather than with the conventional Ellen Nussey. Mary's "appreciation" of Charlotte acknowledges both the conventional and radical aspects of her personality, her womanliness and her authorship:

[Charlotte] thought much of her duty, and had loftier and clearer notions of it than most people....All her life was but labour and pain; and she never threw down the burden for the sake of present pleasure....She herself appealed

¹⁴ Miriam Allott, ed., The Brontës: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 105-112. For Gaskell's comments see p. 360 where, after a series of emotional questions, including the suggestion that the reviewer thinks himself better than Christ on the cross, she beseeches the reviewer to abandon his Pharisaic attitude to Charlotte.

¹⁵ Gaskell quotes inaccurately here: "'She must be one who for some sufficient reason has long forfeited the society of her sex'" (360).

¹⁶ Uglow 410. Uglow has consulted the MS of The Life in the John Rylands library and refers to other critics who mention this transference.

to the world's judgement for her use of some of the faculties she had....They heartily, greedily enjoyed the fruits of her labours, and then found out she was much to be blamed for possessing such faculties. Why ask for a judgement on her from such a world? (526)

Following the conventional words about Charlotte's dutifulness and suffering, Mary cynically condemns the world that has judged her as an author. Gaskell is subtly subversive here. First, she gives Mary the final assessment of Charlotte, letting her speak of the conventional aspects, but also of the more radical author-self about which Gaskell herself has expressed doubts; and second she uses Mary to goad the public to think about its harsh judgement. Thus, in her final paragraph, Gaskell can be seen in a conciliatory role: "But I turn from the critical, unsympathetic public" (by implication, the Miss Rigbys), and "I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors" (526).

In this final chapter Gaskell very cleverly presents Charlotte in "the society of her own sex," but, subversively, in the company of marginalized or radical women. Gaskell mentions that one member of every parish family attended the funeral, but she focuses specifically on two girls who came to grieve, thus giving the sense of surrounding Charlotte with female mourners. One of the mourners was a young woman who had been seduced and who "had found a holy sister in Charlotte" (525). Another mourner, a blind woman, walked four miles to attend the funeral. Such active involvement with her parishioners, and specifically with the "outcasts" (525), is seldom mentioned in biographies of Charlotte but is something with which Gaskell herself would strongly identify, for she had recently published *Ruth* (1853), a story about a seduced woman, and she had personally attempted to help one young prostitute (Uglow 246). Implicitly, then, Gaskell expresses a personal, moral bonding with Charlotte against the conventionally minded who had objected both to *Ruth* and to Charlotte's work.¹⁷ Furthermore, she recalls Elizabeth Barrett Browning whose words she quotes in her epigraph, thus establishing both a strong female presence and a feminist testimony in this final section. Jenny Uglow points out that the last line

¹⁷ Charlotte wrote in her "Preface" to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*: "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion." *Jane Eyre* ed. Richard J. Dunn, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 1.

of the five-line epigraph which Gaskell takes from Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, "And hear the nations praising them far off" (Gaskell 43), is "deliberately echoed" (Uglow 411) by Gaskell in the line: "Few beyond that circle of hills knew that she [Charlotte], whom the nations praised far off, lay dead that Easter morning" (525). Thus, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mary Taylor frame the beginning and end "by hints of rebellion and self-exile" (Uglow 411). They had both rebelled against their limited lots as women; Browning had escaped her "dominating father" (Uglow 411) by going to Italy, and Mary Taylor had escaped an empty life as a dependent spinster by emigrating to New Zealand where she set up a business.¹⁸ Browning's poetic exploration of the position of women and Taylor's practical solution serve as subtle reminders of both the ideological and personal environment that influenced Charlotte. Mary Taylor's ideas on the need for education and financial equality for women and for freedom from familial sacrifice were more radical than Charlotte's (who still valued duty and sacrifice as moral positions for all women) and were certainly more radical than Gaskell's (who believed in motherhood as the natural destiny for women). However, by situating Charlotte among these women--feminists, writers and "outcasts"--Gaskell both restores her to the "society of her own sex" from which Rigby had excluded her and hints at a more rebellious, independent and active Charlotte, the side that Gaskell says she is unable to "measure or judge" (526). Here, then, at the conclusion, Gaskell abandons an omniscient authority and a harmonized text and speaks personally and uncertainly, recognizing the disharmony of her subject (her "faults and errors" and her "genius"), the divided nature of her audience (both "unsympathetic" and "warm, full heart[ed]"), and the difficulties of judgement.

¹⁸ Joan Stevens, ed., *Mary Taylor: Friend of Charlotte Brontë: Letters from New Zealand and Elsewhere* (Auckland University Press, 1972). Mary Taylor also wrote about the position of women in articles and in a novel (1890).

2. Tropes: Mapping New Territory

Mrs Oliphant in "The Sisters Brontë" (1897)¹⁹ refers to Gaskell's biography as "a new kind of biography," which attempts to locate in Charlotte's environment the explanation for the coarseness and vulgarity of her novels. Oliphant is critical of Gaskell's apparent deterministic approach, commenting that it "originated in [Gaskell's] bewilderment, let us hope without other intention" (26). Gaskell indicates that the environment is not to be seen as "mere upholstery" as it was, according to Richard Altick, in the majority of Victorian biographies (Altick 390). As in Gaskell's novels, the depiction of the environment serves to do more than establish the mood and the scene:

For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received. (Gaskell 60)

Gaskell goes on to delineate the eccentric, rough and self-sufficient character of the Yorkshire people among whom Charlotte grew up. The "lawless, yet not unkindly population" (76) and the "oppressive"(55) landscape influence Charlotte's character and her fiction. The use of the environment as a psychological correlative opens up a new course of investigation of the inner world of a subject and, in this instance, Gaskell associates the unrestrained population and the wild moorland with Charlotte's author-self. Yet Gaskell does not see Charlotte as entirely victimized by forces beyond her control, for she was a "genius" (326) and "while her imagination received powerful impressions, her excellent understanding had full power to rectify them before her fancies became realities" (121). However, in Gaskell's opinion, Charlotte seems not to have had the "power" to correct her "coarseness" which Gaskell excuses as arising from "external life" rather than her "imagination" or "internal conception"

¹⁹ Mrs. Oliphant, "The Sisters Brontë," Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1897) 26.

(335). Thus, Charlotte's flaws are environmentally determined, but her genius is transcendent. In spite of this philosophical tension in reading her subject, Gaskell's use of the environment is much more than "bewilderment" as Oliphant commented and constitutes more than the "obligatory atmospheric effects" for which Katherine Frank criticizes Gaskell (Frank 146).

Gaskell uses the environment, as in her novels, to signify, not just Charlotte's "coarseness", but a whole range of characteristics. It is clear that Gaskell had in mind a specific "character of the place," as she commented to George Smith her publisher (Letters 444), and that this defined for her Charlotte's own personality. It had been decided that a view of the parsonage and moors would be used for the frontispiece to Volume II, but Gaskell was disappointed with the photographer's views. Although he had captured the "wildness and desolation" of the moors, she felt that the parsonage and church were "very faint in all" (Letters 442). She was so dissatisfied that she sent Smith her own sketch of which she wanted an engraving made "on tinted paper--with white light{s}" (Letters 444):

I send you a sepia drawing from a sketch of mine of Haworth Parsonage, Sexton's Shed, School-house, Sexton's (tall) House (where the Curate lodged,[]) & the Church. (Letters 443)

The photographer's view could not convey the resonance of landscape that Gaskell wanted. For Gaskell the buildings were as important as the moors and needed to be brought into focus. Thus Gaskell re-mapped the territory, indicating that her sketch "would be better than the Photograph" (Letters 443).

Except for one shaft of light, the sketch is dark and ominous. The foreground, like her first chapter, is dominated by the crowded grave-yard, with tombstones all askew. The Church and the Parsonage share equal space on either side of the drawing, but a white shaft of light illuminates the Parsonage giving it a friendly and special presence. In the background the hills on the moor are large, ominous and quite out of proportion to the actual perspective. The village is barely seen in one corner, next to the Church. In Chapter I Gaskell verbally highlights these four elements of the sketch:

The parsonage stands at right angles to the road, facing down upon the church: so that, in fact, parsonage, church, and belfried school-house, form three sides of an irregular oblong, of which the fourth is open to the fields and moors that lie beyond. (56)

Charlotte is presented in this landscape as almost boxed in on three sides by church, school and home with the third side "open" to the wild moors. The village itself plays no part in either the pictorial or verbal representation. While all these aspects of the landscape have a particularly graphic reality, Gaskell seems drawn to the tension between the Parsonage and the grave-yard. As if to demarcate the borders, the parsonage stands "within the stone wall, which keeps out the surrounding churchyard" which is "terribly full of upright tombstones" (56). Later on she returns to this image: the parsonage is "surrounded by it [the churchyard] on three sides--and with the sights and sounds connected with the last offices to the dead things of everyday occurrence" (148). This quartet of images circumscribes Charlotte's physical and mental world: the parsonage binds her in familial duty but offers comfort; the church school where she taught and attended Sunday school teas suggests her involvement in the parish; the church and the graveyard create an oppressive aura of self-sacrifice and doom; finally, the moor, that fourth side which is "open," represents a creative and passionate nature, but one which, in Gaskell's interpretation, is dark and agitated, threatening to dominate.

The parsonage is the centre of order, of "delicate regularity" (507), but also of isolation. Gaskell describes its "exquisite cleanliness" and "its essence, purity" (56), but she emphasizes the loneliness: "no one comes to the house; nothing disturbs the deep repose" (506). This lack of human contact is conveyed by the sounds of "the ticking of the clock" and the "buzzing of a fly" (506). While Gaskell must have experienced here a great contrast with her own lively household of four children, and a writing area in the dining room where she could supervise all activities (not separate as was Charlotte's), there is a novelistic exaggeration for emphasis in this scene-painting. Gaskell even admits a few sentences later how "happy" the visit had been, how Mr Brontë told stories of "past times" and how she "understood [Charlotte's] life the better for seeing the place where it had been spent--where she had loved and suffered" (508). That Charlotte had "loved" here (her sisters, her brother, her school

friend, Mr Nicholls) modifies both the character of the place and the character of her subject.

The moors are more mythically described, looming large in words as they had in her sketch. Described figuratively (rather than more naturally like the interior of the parsonage) they are "sinuous" like the "Great Serpent which the Norse legend says girdles the world" (505); they are "glorious wild" (86); and they are the location where the winds are like "wild beasts striving to find an entrance" (96) to the parsonage. Although most of the descriptions of the moors have an ominous quality about them, one lengthy passage reverses the pattern just discussed--the hills become golden and the parsonage is a "Shadow" from which the sisters can "escape" (318). This passage is redolent with sensual images and although brighter in tone, its novelistic descriptiveness seems more contrived than natural and is suggestive more of Gaskell's distance from rather than closeness to the environment.

Gaskell inscribes Charlotte's divided personality in her landscape, the parsonage representing order, the moors suggesting passion. The moors are used to hint at Charlotte's rebellious and passionate side, those aspects of the personal landscape that Gaskell says she "cannot map" (526). Pushed outside the knowable or "measure[able]" territory into "debateable land" (526) are any expressions of intense emotion, such as Charlotte's attachment to her tutor, Monsieur Heger, and her fiction which Gaskell largely avoids discussing. Employing a mapping trope, Gaskell dismissively describes Charlotte's juvenilia as running "to the very borders of delirium" (119). Similarly unhealthy is the environment in which Charlotte lived which produced the "coarseness here and there in her works" (495) and which temporarily "defiled" her as if her hand had touched "pitch" (496). Yet, Gaskell is drawn to this aspect, hints at it through landscape imagery, and, in some other ways which I will look at later, disguises it in anecdote and transfers it to Branwell. All together the images of Charlotte's physical environment configure her inner landscape, revealing Gaskell's inclination to focus on the mapped and conventional territories, the "white light{s}" of order, nobility, and purity (the parsonage, school and church), but hinting at her concern about the darker borders of passion (the moors).

3. The Divided Plot Convention

A key passage in The Life indicates that Gaskell envisioned women's lives as divided and, although she sees the possibility of reconciliation, she, herself, can only devise a partial reconciliation in her reading of Charlotte's life:

Henceforward [after the publication of Jane Eyre] Charlotte Brontë's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents--her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character--not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. (334)

Gaskell recognizes the dilemma facing women who want a writing career, but she prioritizes the "regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother": "A woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice" (334). Indeed, Gaskell believed that women had "natural duties as wives & mothers" and when deprived of this are left with a sense of "purposelessness" (Letters 117).

Nancy Miller²⁰ and Alison Booth²¹ explore the model of the divided plot in women's fiction and biography. Miller begins with Freud's distinction between male and female modes of creativity which depicts women operating according to "erotic wishes" and men asserting "egoistic and ambitious wishes... alongside their erotic desires" (Miller 346). Booth adapts this to the novelistic and biographical convention: "For heroines, the plot of education or vocation must yield to the 'natural' demands of the plot of love and marriage, upon pain of failure and death" (Booth 90). Booth suggests that this plot is a "standard model of female biography" in which the female personality is depicted as split between (so-called) unwomanly ambition and womanly domestication.

Although, like Gaskell, Charlotte defended and acted upon Victorian ideals of

²⁰ Nancy Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 339-360.

²¹ Alison Booth, "Biographical Criticism and the 'Great' Woman of Letters: The Example of George Eliot and Virginia Woolf," Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism ed. William H. Epstein (Purdue University Press, 1991) 85-107. Booth looks at Woolf's biographical criticism of George Eliot and how both writers came to terms with this model of "irreconcilable erotic and ambitious plots for women" (91).

duty and self-sacrifice, she also thought women should actively pursue a career even if it was governessing. Charlotte believed women should have opportunities for education and a career, and she spoke against the consignment of the unmarried woman to a life of purposelessness. A letter from Charlotte to her editor, W.S. Williams, which Gaskell may not have seen,²² outlines Charlotte's position on women's duties. In this lengthy letter she advises Williams to permit his daughter to go out to work:

Most desirable then is it that all, both men and women, should have the power and the will to work for themselves--most advisable that both sons and daughters should early be inured to habits of independence and industry. (LFC II 220)

It is true, however, that in spite of this philosophy Charlotte placed more emphasis, in everyday life, on self-sacrifice than on independence, and, although she pursued a writing career, she felt it her duty to stay in Haworth with her father. After her return from Brussels she was urged by Mary Taylor (who was emigrating to New Zealand to pursue her ambitions) to leave home, but, as Mary told Gaskell, Charlotte replied, "I intend to stay" (Gaskell 275).

A letter about an article on the "Emancipation of Women" indicates that Charlotte believed that she and Gaskell thought or felt "exactly alike" (Gaskell 458). Gaskell quotes this letter, no doubt gratified that Charlotte placed such high value on "self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion" (458). Charlotte admits to admiring the article as the work of "a powerful, clear-headed woman" but feels that the writer lacks "affection" (458).²³ Although Gaskell and Brontë certainly agreed on some points, Brontë's novels (in style and ideology) and some of her correspondence reveal a stronger emphasis on power for women, and on an equality, rather than a compromise, of power and affection. Ironically, just as Harriet Taylor, the writer

²² see Shorter, Circle 25.

²³ At first Charlotte thought that this paper was written by a woman and, in fact, she was correct, for it was written by Harriet Taylor who married J.S. Mill later that year (Gaskell 614). However, the consensus at the time was that J.S. Mill was the author and Charlotte concludes her letter saying, "In short, J.S. Mill's head is, I dare say, very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart" (459).

of the article, was judged by Charlotte to lack affection, so, too, were Charlotte and her heroines perceived by the public and by Gaskell to be more powerful than affectionate, or, as it was phrased, more masculine than feminine. Although Charlotte's definition of "affection" was not drawn strictly upon this division of masculine and feminine,²⁴ Gaskell points out in a letter to George Smith how traditionally feminine Charlotte could be, such as when she requests his mother's "protection" during a dinner party.²⁵

[This] showed a nice feminine sense of confidence & pleasure in protection--chaperonage--whatever you like to call it; which is a piece of womanliness (as opposed to the common ideas of her being a 'strong-minded emancipated' woman) which I should like to bring out. (Letters 430)

Gaskell wanted to emphasize Charlotte's "womanliness" as is quite clear when she describes to Nussey the goal of her biography to make known "Charlotte Brontë--the friend, the daughter, the sister, the wife..." (Letters 370). The omission of "author" from her list indicates her intention to "bring-out" the plot of love rather than the plot of education (as Booth describes it).

Gaskell openly admits in The Life that she was unsettled by Charlotte's novels: "I do not deny for myself the existence of coarseness here and there in her works, otherwise so entirely noble" (495). The general criticism of coarseness was directed at a number of aspects in Charlotte's work: the Yorkshire roughness of character and locale; the boldness of her characters' declarations of passion, and her

²⁴ Charlotte's heroines express affection in a more passionate and less submissive manner than that acceptable in traditional Victorian society.

²⁵ Alison Kershaw in "The Business of a Woman's Life: Elizabeth Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë," BST 22:I (1990) comments on this episode in The Life: "...Gaskell emphasises the retiring and nervous aspects of [Charlotte's] nature--what she perceives to be a [here Kershaw quotes Gaskell] 'womanly seeking after protection on every occasion when there was no moral duty involved in asserting her independence'" (18). This is slightly misleading as Kershaw does not continue the passage in which Gaskell quotes Charlotte saying, "I like the surveillance; it seems to keep guard over me" (Gaskell 393). As my quotation illustrates Gaskell did want to emphasise, or "bring-out," this feminine side, but, by omitting that following line, Kershaw suggests that Gaskell is inventing a passive Charlotte whereas Charlotte herself employed in this instance, to use Kershaw's phrase, the "rhetoric of womanliness" (18). Kershaw, ironically, manipulates her material just as Gaskell does which points out, not only the complexity of Gaskell's portrait which resists simplification, but the difficulty of freeing oneself, novelist or scholar, from arguing for one side of the duality and the difficulty of freeing oneself from one's ideology.

often humorous attitude to church matters and religion (Allott 25). Gaskell's comments on The Professor, which she read in manuscript while writing The Life, illustrate her discomfort with Brontë's handling of religion and language and suggest Gaskell's standard of womanhood:

there are one or two remarkable portraits--the most charming woman she ever drew, and a glimpse of that woman as a mother--very lovely; otherwise little or no story; & disfigured by more coarseness,--& profanity in quoting texts of Scripture disagreeably than in any of her other works. (Letters 410)

Other Brontë heroines were not mothers nor were they "charming" and "lovely". In fact, Brontë was determined to create heroines who were interesting for more than their beauty and reportedly told her sisters that she would show them "a heroine as plain and as small as myself" (308). Not only were her heroines independent-spirited like Jane Eyre, but they could be unlikable like Lucy Snowe who was deliberately given a "cold name" (485). As Charlotte wrote to Williams, Lucy "is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength" (485). Gaskell wrote to a friend after reading Villette:

The difference between Miss Brontë and me is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness. I am sure she works off a great deal that is morbid into her writing, and out of her life.... (Letters 228)

Clearly, Gaskell wants to separate the author (naughty and morbid) from the woman. Uncomfortable with Brontë's "egoistic and ambitious" heroines who sought for equal power as much as they did love and marriage, Gaskell rejected a link between the spirit expressed in the novels and Charlotte's own spirit.

Although more intellectually conservative in her fiction than Brontë, Gaskell also challenged the traditional views of hero and heroine. Mrs Oliphant, in an article written in 1855 soon after Charlotte Brontë's death, describes Brontë, with some trepidation, as the creator of "the impetuous little spirit which dashed into our well-ordered world, broke its boundaries, and defied its principles--and the most alarming

revolution of modern times has followed the invasion of Jane Eyre".²⁶ Interestingly, Oliphant sees Gaskell as one of Brontë's followers in this war (to use her metaphor) against the "orthodox system" of a "true-love which consecrated all womankind" ("Modern Novelists" 557). Oliphant claims that Gaskell in North and South, while "sensible and considerate" and "perfect in all the 'properties' of her scene" (559), allows her heroine and hero to engage in "bitter altercations and mutual defiance" (560) which are all, she says, "a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Woman'" (557). Gaskell's characters, however, effect a compromise more easily than Brontë's, perhaps because Gaskell's heroines return to a "humble and devoted" (557) position.²⁷ Oliphant, much later, in 1897, was to write that Brontë had "inaugurated an entirely new kind of social revolution" in her fiction ("The Sisters Brontë" 26). Thus, while Charlotte and Gaskell agreed on the existence of a conflict in women's lives, they disagreed on ways of reconciling it. In Gaskell's novels the plot of marriage is still prioritized whereas for Brontë marriage is contentious, if not impossible as in Villette. Gaskell's quiet reconciliation of opposites is, I believe, reflected in her approach to Charlotte in The Life; she wins support for Charlotte's revolutionary author-self by over-determining, or "bring[ing] out" as she says, the traditional aspects of her character.

In "bring[ing] out" the feminine Gaskell did not entirely eliminate the "'strong-minded emancipated' woman" (Letters 430). While Gaskell distances herself from Brontë's novels, she slips in hints of the assertive and ambitious Charlotte through letters that develop "the purely intellectual side of her character" (Gaskell 338), and that showed Brontë "devoted to critical and literary subjects" (Gaskell 428). In introducing a final letter of this nature, a letter to Mr Dobell about his newly published poem, Gaskell senses that marriage will subsume Charlotte's creativity, that "we [will] lose all thought of the authoress in the timid and conscientious woman about to become a wife" (512). In that statement she implies that Charlotte in her

²⁶ Margaret Oliphant, "Modern Novelists--Great and Small," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (May 1855): 557.

²⁷ For example, Margaret Hale in Gaskell's North and South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), showing her independent spirit, rescues John Thornton from financial failure and exacts some organizational changes in the mill operation, but faces him in the end with downcast eyes, "glowing with beautiful shame" (436).

intellectual relationships exhibits a side that is the antithesis of the modest, self-sacrificing woman. In Charlotte's letters to Smith, Williams and particularly G.H. Lewes, and in her encounters with Thackeray, Gaskell points out, largely with admiration, this other side to Charlotte's personality, which if not the passionate, creative (and revolutionary, as Oliphant said) side exhibited in Charlotte's writing, exemplifies an educated, literary, "egoistic and ambitious" side.

Charlotte, herself, asked to be judged "as an author, not as a woman" (Gaskell 398). Jane Eyre, her first published novel, came out under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, and a central issue for the reviewers was the sex of the author. Many saw it as the work of a man; for example the reviewer in the Christian Remembrancer writes: "Throughout there is a masculine power, breadth and shrewdness, combined with masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression" (Allott 89). Charlotte was later to quarrel with G.H. Lewes over the issue of sex:

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. (Gaskell 386)

Charlotte did not deny her womanhood but was clearly attempting to re-define it as is evident in her novels (which all deal with power struggles between men and women) and in her correspondence with those in her literary circle such as W.S. Williams, Mrs Gaskell and G.H. Lewes. Writing to Mrs Gaskell in August 1850 she commented that until such time that the "evils...deep-rooted in the foundations of the social system" were rectified, it would be a struggle to ameliorate "our condition," that is, the "position of women" (Gaskell 421). Her way of dealing with some of these "evils" was through her books and through her arguments with influential critics such as Lewes.

Gaskell prints all but one of Charlotte's letters to Lewes. Her letters are intelligent and assertive, decidedly not passive or humble. In one, for example, she strongly argues against Lewes's disapproval of melodrama, romance and imagination (329). In his review and letters he criticizes aspects of Jane Eyre, and in one letter

she boldly questions whether he "will write up to [his] own principles" (336). She sees him "warning" (336) and "lectur[ing]" (337) her. Again she argues articulately and concludes with what might be interpreted as irony: "You must forgive me for not always being able to think as you do..." (338). At this point Gaskell "displace[s] the chronological order of letters" (338) and inserts a letter from Charlotte to W.S. Williams which concerns Lewes's second novel, Rose, Blanche, and Violet (1848). Gaskell's only comment is that this letter shows "the purely intellectual side of [Charlotte's] character" (338). However, this displacement allows Charlotte an immediate reply to all the points registered in the preceding letters. She assumes a master-critic's role (although to Williams and not to Lewes himself) and criticizes Lewes for didacticism, but also for "emotional scenes" (339) which violate his own principles, espoused so rigorously to her. This series of letters, underscored by the displaced letter, present a strong and self-confident author, a portrait, I believe, that contends with the commonly held view that Gaskell "created the myth of the novelist as tragic heroine."²⁸

Printing the next sequence of letters dealing with Shirley, Gaskell indicates in her own words what angered Charlotte about Lewes's review: "through the whole article the fact of the author's sex is never forgotten" (397). Lewes complained that Gaskell had misrepresented him and, for the third edition, Gaskell added a few words to indicate that he had not been "disrespectful towards women,"²⁹ but she did not omit the passage. Charlotte's answer to Lewes's review of Shirley (in which she criticized him for not treating her as "author"), shows an anger of which she is not ashamed: "I still feel angry, and think I do well to be angry" (398). This attitude, uncharacteristic of women of that era, was too much for Gaskell who agreed with Lewes that "'the tone of this letter is cavalier'" (398). Gaskell hurriedly adds in the next sentence that Charlotte's "health, too [my emphasis], was suffering at this time" (398), suggesting that her mental health was suffering as well.

²⁸ Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (1977; London: Virago, 1988) 106. See also Shelston's introduction to Gaskell's Life, p. 13, and Frank's comments in "The Brontë Biographies," p. 142-143.

²⁹ Mrs. Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë. Introduction and notes by Clement K. Shorter (1900; London: John Murray, 1934) 438. Alan Shelston does not point this out in his edition which indicates all the other changes from first to third editions.

I began this section by arguing that Gaskell adopts the divided plot model. Unable to deal with the 'masculine' and passionate author, she did, however, allow the "cavalier", the intellectually rebellious Charlotte, to reveal herself, and furthermore, on a few occasions, she contrived to emphasize this side of Charlotte. I would conclude from this that Gaskell's limitations came largely in her inability to deal with Charlotte's (or her heroines') sexual natures. In Charlotte's novels the plots of love and education are intertwined; in the sphere of power the personal becomes the political. Gaskell's compartmentalizing of Charlotte allows intellectual passion to surface, but not sexual (or intensely emotional) passion as it was revealed in the letters to Heger and in her books.

Unlike Gaskell, Sir Wemyss Reid, writing his biography twenty years later (1877), thought reconciliation of the divided plot of women's lives was not only less possible but, in some respects, less desirable. He divides Charlotte as Gaskell did, believing that "the woman is nobler and purer than the writer" (236), and while he recognizes her genius as a writer (228), he is determined to show that she was not ambitious, that she was fulfilled, not by her vocation, but by her marriage. His ideal woman is fulfilled by man, for when Charlotte marries Nicholls, "blossoms of gentleness and affection [peep] forth in nooks of her character which had hitherto been barren" (174). Indeed, in his opinion, Charlotte was entirely humble and unambitious about her writing:

But, from first to last, she seemed during her literary career to feel that in writing novels she had sinned against the conventional canons, and that she was in consequence looked upon not as a great woman who had taken a lofty place in the republic of letters, but as a social curiosity who had done something which made her for the time-being notorious. (185)

It is no coincidence that Reid classifies Shirley as Brontë's most "brilliant" novel-- "the brightest and healthiest" (99), for it ends in marriage, not a compromised marriage as in Jane Eyre, or a career as well as a marriage as in The Professor, or a career alone as in Villette, but, in fact, almost a fairy tale marriage. Reid idolizes Charlotte for keeping a "low estimate of herself" (187) and finds in "a thousand passages in her correspondence" (these being, however, "too tender or sacred for

quotation") that she was always ready "to forget her success as a writer" (185). However, while Charlotte could be humble and modest, the letters to Lewes and to Williams indicate that she could also be ambitious, assertive and determined.

Reid not only rejects notions of Charlotte's ambition, but, and this is the central point to his biography, he downplays any conflict in her life between the author and woman selves by denying that her life was "so joyless" (2) as Mrs Gaskell presented it. In the light of some of Reid's statements,³⁰ Gaskell's position on a possible reconciliation of the divisive demands on women is more feminist than is usually considered. Whereas Reid focuses on the love plot, viewing Charlotte as a "barren" character (174) until Nicholls appears, Gaskell acknowledges the toll exacted by the conflict between ambition and love. In fact, to present Charlotte as tragic is to honour her uncompromising attitude to the conflict, whereas to present her as not "in any degree morbid or melancholy" (Reid 3) is to reduce her to the "Angel in the House" paradigm.³¹

The plot of a divided personality was not, of course, an abstraction but was a very real concern for women. The different socialization of men and women is reflected in Charlotte's personality. That she was troubled by contradictory tensions in her personality, between the conventional domestic duties of home-life and her more radical desires to be educated, write, travel and establish a career (a school) is not a matter of controversy among her biographers. But how this tension is read varies greatly throughout the history of Brontë biography. Reid reflects the ideological assumptions about the place of women novelists whereas Gaskell begins to question these assumptions. She, and Reid more prescriptively, qualify Brontë's

³⁰ Reid tends to over-state his case for joyfulness and humbleness just as Gaskell over-determined Charlotte's suffering self and perhaps some of their differences are semantic. For example, Reid also writes that "[Charlotte's] career was clouded by sorrow and oppressed by anguish both mental and physical" and that "she was in the furnace of affliction," but he does not feel that these reflect "extreme depression of spirits" (3). Interestingly, however, in connection with the divided plot model, Reid suggests, much more overtly than Gaskell, Charlotte's passionate involvement with Heger: "...her spirit, if not her heart, [had] been captured and held captive in the Belgian city" (60). Thus, while both stress the "erotic" plots, the woman rather than the author, Reid hints at a passion that Gaskell could not reveal.

³¹ Elaine Showalter writes in *A Literature of Their Own*: "The middle class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the Home" (14).

authorial greatness, reclaiming, rather, a place for her in the sphere of domestic womanhood. Gaskell could not quite praise Brontë's ambitious desires as they revealed themselves in her so-called masculine novels.

II. CONVENTIONAL STRATEGIES

Three elements, as Altick points out, provided the foundation for Boswell's Life of Johnson (1791): the use of diaries, letters and conversation; the use of an "eyewitness"; and the dependence on "recollections of the many [other] persons" who had known Johnson (Altick 61). Though Boswell did not introduce these elements to the practice of biography, he expanded and perfected them, producing such an authentic, realistic, frank and detailed biography that few could imitate the total effect. John Aubrey's anecdotal portraits (collected together by 1693 but not published until 1813 under the title Brief Lives) were a precursor to Boswell's life, and William Mason had presented a life of Thomas Gray in 1774³² which employed the new method of almost exclusively using letters to reveal the subject. These three features became indispensable in Victorian biography and are obvious elements in Gaskell's biography, though not nearly so fully employed. Victorian biographers, however, disapproved of the candidness of Boswell's portrait and tailored his methods according to a more rigid standard of decency.

Aside from these general influences Gaskell was on friendly terms with two well-known biographers of her era, John Forster and Richard Monkton Milnes, who used letters and anecdotes although with much more concern for delicacy than Boswell and Johnson who believed that the subjects' flaws must be shown. John Forster³³ corresponded regularly with Gaskell, and she mentions Forster's Goldsmith in her conclusion to The Life. Many epithets used to describe Forster's Goldsmith could be applied to Gaskell's Life: its "dramatic scenes," "chatty" style, "authorial asides and confidences," and "huge freight of anecdotes" (Altick 214). Letters and

³² William Mason, The Poems of Mr Gray to which are prefixed memoirs of his life and writings (1774; London: Dodsley, York, Todd, 1775).

³³ John Forster was the biographer of Goldsmith (1848), Landor (1869), Dickens (1872-4), and (unfinished) Swift (1875). He is considered the first professional biographer (Nadel 67-68).

anecdotes were a part of a new emphasis on documentation, and Forster was tireless in his collection of material. In his 1871 edition of Goldsmith Forster gives "the first authority"³⁴ of every quotation he uses to the point that footnotes dominate the text. Yet even Forster, one of the most meticulous and accurate biographers of the period, re-arranged material, omitted aspects of personality considered undesirable and, in his later biographies, particularly that of Dickens who was a friend, put himself forward to the disadvantage of others of equal importance in Dickens's life. Milnes, a friend to whom Gaskell had confided private information about Charlotte and who visited while she was writing The Life (Uglow 395), may have directly influenced Gaskell. In his biography of Keats (1848) he chose to use the Mason method, allowing his subject to "become his own biographer" (Mason 5). Like other Victorian biographers he had no compunctions about altering letters, avoiding mention of lovers and omitting examples of coarseness of character.³⁵ Altick points out that although the extensive use of letters was considered part of a new approach to documenting and objectivity, there was no accompanying sense that alteration contradicted those aims:

Ironically, the same age that revered the document had no concern for the literal integrity of its text. No nineteenth-century biographer or editor reproduced with thorough fidelity what he found in his manuscripts. He felt himself wholly at liberty to excise, revise, divide, telescope, and otherwise manipulate his documents before sending them to press. (Altick 200)

Such methodologies would have influenced Gaskell as she made her own decisions about the shape of her biography. According to Angus Easson, Gaskell was specifically influenced by William Mason's method of using letters to let the subject speak (Easson 138); she writes in The Life, "...the letters speak for themselves, to those who know how to listen, far better than I can interpret their meaning into my poorer and weaker words" (Gaskell 328). Easson and Uglow point out that, on a

³⁴ John Forster, The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith (1848; London: Chapman and Hall, 1876) ix.

³⁵ William Henry Marquess in Lives of the Poets: The First Century of Keats Biography (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985) discusses Milnes's "editorial infidelities" and comments that "Milnes's omissions and alterations are so extensive that a thorough treatment of them would require an entire dissertation" (49).

sheet attached to the manuscript of The Life. Gaskell had written out notes from two articles on biography that she read in the Quarterly Review of 1856.³⁶ The writer of the article, "British Family Histories," specified that a good family history should embody "personal details" and "bits of local colour," and that these "particulars" show "family propensities,"³⁷ an idea that would have suited Gaskell's decision to emphasize the environment. Biographers are strongly urged to "get as many anecdotes as possible," and the Boswellian formula of a "tender tie between the biographer and hero" is also emphasized ("British Family Histories" 297, 300). As there were numerous biographies in the nineteenth century written by friends and relatives,³⁸ it was not unreasonable for Mr Brontë, when he wrote requesting Gaskell to undertake the life of his daughter, to say that she was "the best qualified" (LFC IV 190). She had at hand the three indispensable elements of good Victorian biography: access to Charlotte's letters; a facility for collecting and writing 'stories' or anecdotes; and first-hand knowledge of her subject, having "established a tender tie" with Charlotte.

1. The Letters

The primary source for The Life was the correspondence between Charlotte and Ellen Nussey. Charlotte met Ellen at Miss Wooler's school when she was fifteen, and they were close friends and correspondents until Charlotte's death. Gaskell speaks of seeing three hundred and fifty letters (Letters 372), and used about one hundred of these in The Life. In addition, as Clement Shorter indicates, Gaskell obtained twenty letters from George Smith, half-a-dozen from James Taylor, and a few others from W.S. Williams (Circle 9). Mary Taylor had written, on request, to Gaskell from New Zealand although all but one letter between Charlotte and Mary had been destroyed. Gaskell also obtained a few letters from Charlotte to G.H.

³⁶ Easson 150; Uglow 406.

³⁷ "British Family Histories," Quarterly Review XCVIII (1856): 297.

³⁸ For example: Lockhart's life of his father-in-law, Sir Walter Scott (1836-8), Forster's life of his friend, Charles Dickens (1872-74), Trollope's life of his writer-friend, Thackeray (1879), Froude's life of his friend, Carlyle (1882-4) and J.W. Cross's life of his wife, George Eliot (1885).

Lewes, Miss Wooler (her former teacher), and Laetitia Wheelright (an English schoolfriend at the Hegers' school). Overwhelmingly, then, The Life reflects the relationship between Charlotte and Ellen, and this was a relationship which did not reveal the diversity of Charlotte's personality. Specifically, Ellen was not a part of Charlotte's literary and intellectual sphere. Charlotte's letters to Ellen tend to be about the domestic matters that interested Ellen--the family, health, outings, and gossip about courtships and marriages. Charlotte does, however, look to Ellen for comfort when she is suffering from ill health or from depression and, even if the cause of her illness is not entirely divulged (as during the few years following Brussels), these letters reveal much about Charlotte's inner state. In a letter to W.S. Williams Charlotte characterizes Ellen as "good," "true," "faithful," but "without romance" and, she implies by comparison with Harriet Martineau, not "lofty or profound in intellect" (LFC III 63). The correspondence with Ellen brought forth the woman, not the author, a fortuitous circumstance that played into Gaskell's hands, for although Gaskell and Nussey disagreed on some matters (about the importance of religion in Charlotte's life and about the extent of Charlotte's depression or gloominess) they both responded to Charlotte's traditional values rather than the more radical tendencies expressed in her writing. Thus, the letters to Ellen are infused with the traditional values of duty and suffering, and Gaskell does little to assess them as versions of truth rather than as truth itself. It is not until much later in the history of biography that letters were seen as a sort of autobiographical fiction rather than as reliable documents.

However, Gaskell is not unaware of the inherent bias in letters. Clearly recognizing that style and subject matter alter according to the relationship, Gaskell comments on Charlotte's letters to Williams:

I like the tone of them very much; it is curious how much the spirit in which she wrote varies according to the correspondent to whom she was addressing, I imagine. I like the series of letters which you have sent better than any other excepting one [Miss Wooler's] that I have seen. The subjects too are very interesting. (Letters 375)

But, this could not be discussed openly. With Ellen Nussey still living and over-

looking the project Gaskell could not afford to offend her by showing such a preference for other letters. As Gaskell writes to Smith, "Miss Nussey evidently expects to see the extracts I have made from Miss B's correspondence with her" (Letters 421, 425). After the publication of The Life, Ellen complained that Gaskell's portrait of Charlotte was entirely too sombre, but an early letter to Ellen (13 March 1835) illustrates clearly that Charlotte wrote to Ellen in a more subdued style than she wrote to her other friend, Mary. After an exuberant paragraph discussing "Politics", Charlotte writes,

Now Ellen, laugh heartily at all this rodomontade, but you have brought it on yourself; don't you remember telling me to write such letters to you as I write to Mary Taylor? Here's a specimen; hereafter should follow a long disquisition on books, but I'll spare you that. (LCF I 126-127)

Although Gaskell quotes the passage about politics (153), she refrains from quoting the gentle gibe at Ellen, perhaps out of sensitiveness, or perhaps because the passage was edited (struck out) by Ellen herself before giving the letters to Gaskell. At any rate, if Charlotte's letters to Mary had not been destroyed a different and less sombre aspect of Charlotte's personality would have been revealed early on in The Life. So, although Gaskell seems aware of the aspects of different tone, style and personality expressed in the letters, she does not assess them in the biography. Other sides to Charlotte, the intellectual, the literary and the business woman, emerge when letters to other correspondents are introduced about mid-way through the biography, but the Brontë-Nussey correspondence shapes the biography to a large degree.

Although she could not directly assess Ellen's letters, Gaskell occasionally undermines Nussey's authority. For example, rather than using Ellen's version of the arrival at Roe Head School, Gaskell is drawn to Mary Taylor's account, sent in a long letter to Gaskell while she was writing the biography.³⁹ Mary is given the first

³⁹ Mary Taylor sent her letter to Gaskell from New Zealand 18 January 1856, and Gaskell used it in various parts of the biography. Ellen Nussey published a narrative about Charlotte in Scribner's Monthly in 1871 (LFC I 92), but, of course, Gaskell did not have this printed version from Nussey when she was writing The Life. However, as she interviewed and wrote her during the writing of the biography, one assumes that she received a fuller version of these first days at Roe Head than is indicated by the one line that she quotes.

words and her "valuable letter" is described as "distinct and graphic" (128-129). In contrast only one phrase is quoted from Ellen's first memory of Charlotte (129). Mary's use of dialogue (132) and her enthusiastic emphasis on Charlotte's extraordinary literary abilities and knowledge of politics must have pleased Gaskell's novelistic impulse (both in style and character) more than did Ellen Nussey's version which, if one can judge from her printed 1871 narrative, presents a more subdued Charlotte and places "high rectitude" before "great abilities" (LFC I 95).

After this section and before she begins using Charlotte's correspondence with Ellen, Gaskell prefaces her remarks with a subtle indication that she and Ellen may have disagreed on the nature of Charlotte's "hopelessness" (143):

...I thought, when I heard of the sorrowful years [Charlotte] had passed through, that it had been this pressure of grief which had crushed all buoyancy of expectation out of her. But it appears from the letters, that it must have been, so to speak, constitutional.... (143)

While Gaskell admits constitutional problems, she also argues that environment and circumstance were causes of Charlotte's despondency. Gaskell believed that some circumstances, such as the unhealthy situation of the Parsonage next to the graveyard (340), and the monotonous and "harassing" (304) domestic situation could be altered. In this respect she would seem to agree more with Mary Taylor who also believed that change and financial independence would have made Charlotte's life more bearable (Gaskell 275).

This slight, but significant, disagreement with Nussey along with a few reminders from Charlotte of the differences between her and Ellen combine to create an attitude of wariness towards Ellen. Gaskell, for example, notes that Charlotte had to assure the "sensitive" Ellen that neither Shakespeare nor dancing were objectionable (152), and, in another letter, Charlotte underscores their dissimilarity: "but I am not like you" (161). The degree to which Charlotte separated herself from Ellen, and the noting of this by Gaskell, affects the way of reading the next series of letters concerned with Charlotte's depression during her years of teaching at Roe Head (July 1835 to December 1837). A number of the letters are dramatically passionate and some biographers have speculated about a homosexual attachment with

Ellen. The intensity of these letters suggests a turmoil in Charlotte's life which may have to do with her loneliness at being away from home, an emerging and repressed sexuality, a frustration with or an indulgence in her writing or, as Ellen reads it, a religious crisis. From the context of the letters, it appears that Ellen has been urging Charlotte to turn to the Bible (161), and Charlotte assures her that "this very night I will pray as you wish me" (163). Mrs Gaskell comments twice that the despondency expressed reminds her "of some of Cowper's letters" (161), a remark that would tend to agree with Nussey's assessment of it as a religious crisis and one that was "constitutional" rather than the product of a harassing situation. However, there are a number of details that produce a different assessment, not least of which is that Cowper was a poet who even in his letters "wrote for effect" (Altick 331). The language that Charlotte uses in these letters is "high-flown," to borrow a phrase that Gaskell employs just a few pages on to describe the style Charlotte adopts in which to write to the poet Robert Southey. She wrote, says Gaskell, "from an excitement not unnatural in a girl who has worked herself up to the pitch of writing to a Poet Laureate," and she "used some high-flown expressions, which, probably, gave him the idea that she was a romantic young lady, unacquainted with the realities of life" (167). Although this first letter to Southey has not survived, his response and her second letter have. Southey's now famous remark to Charlotte that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be" (Gaskell 173) produced a seemingly subdued, dutiful response from Charlotte, at least so Southey thought. Today, however, it is possible to read some of Charlotte's remarks as cleverly ironic: "You kindly allow me to write poetry for its own sake, provided I leave undone nothing which I ought to do" (174). Gaskell ambiguously comments that Southey's response "[brought] out her character" (174). This probably suggests that Gaskell approvingly read Charlotte's response as conventionally feminine although she does refer to Charlotte's comment to her that the letter was "stringent." Even if not ironic, the letter showed Charlotte's ability to move from one mode of writing to another, and in these letters to Southey, and, I would argue, in her Cowper-like passionate letters to Ellen, there is an aspect of literary posturing of which Gaskell is partly aware.

It is clear that Charlotte is engaged in some of her Angrian writing at this

time, and just before citing Charlotte's first despondent letter to Ellen, Gaskell describes how Charlotte, in her lonely moods at Roe Head, would "'make out'" (160) stories which were so powerful they even frightened her. This juxtapositioning suggests that Gaskell read Charlotte's despondency as related to her artistic temperament. What I am suggesting is that Gaskell saw, perhaps imperfectly, another narrative than the one ostensibly revealed in the letters. In fact, it may have been her own particular literary identification with her subject that helped her to see alternatives. Although I do not wish to undermine the very real, physical nature of Charlotte's depression, there is in these early letters an adolescent Cowperian pose of the religious melancholic (and in the Southey letters a writer's posturing), and these letters become a testing ground for style and subject as Charlotte tries out her literary talents. The ambiguous line between Charlotte's identifying with and imitating Cowper is certainly not clarified by Gaskell, but she is able to suggest that Charlotte in these years was depressed, not merely in a religious sense as the letters alone, if taken literally, would suggest, but in a much more complex (and perhaps less severe and less "constitutional") way.

The question is whether or not Gaskell deliberately selected and condensed letters which distorted Charlotte's character. Nussey accused Gaskell of eliminating the "religious element" (LFC IV 254) from her portrait, and, perhaps rather contradictorily, believed that Gaskell had presented Charlotte as "morbid or melancholy" rather than "happy and high-spirited" (Reid 3). At Nussey's urging Wemyss Reid, selecting some different letters, attempted to re-define Charlotte in his new biography, Charlotte Brontë (1877). Reid printed about one hundred letters which Gaskell had not used, but it is doubtful that he significantly challenged the view that Charlotte led a sorrowful life.⁴⁰ He writes:

Not a few who have read Mrs. Gaskell's work labour under the belief that [a "morbid and melancholy" spirit] was the effect that Charlotte Brontë's trials had upon her. As a matter of fact, however, she was far too strong, brave, cheerful--one had almost said manly--to give away to any such selfish repinings....Indeed, of that self-pity which is so common a characteristic of the young, not a trace is to be found in her correspondence. (64)

⁴⁰ Refer to footnote 30.

Gaskell, however, would not have disagreed with most of those characteristics; she also presented Charlotte as "strong, brave" and unselfish, although not to any large degree as "cheerful." As Gaskell exaggerates Charlotte's physical and mental distress by eliminating the chattiness from the letters, Reid, equally, overplays the lightness by glossing over the darker moments. There is, though, the constant and explicit suggestion throughout the letters of Charlotte's own sense of grief which even Reid could not avoid. For example, Reid cannot gloss over the unhappiness of the post-Brussels period and quotes Charlotte's comment that, after her return from Brussels, she suffered "by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind" (59-60). Augustine Birrell, who wrote the third biography of Brontë (1887), did not consider that Reid's biography altered very much Gaskell's portrait:

...whether the author performs the task he somewhat unnecessarily laid upon himself of proving that Mrs. Gaskell's portrait requires re-touching, is a question which is best left open for the consideration of the judicious reader of both books. (Birrell 5)

One of the advantages of the Mason method is that, while Gaskell may not directly comment on the lighter moments, the letters, quoted so fully, inevitably reveal these other sides to her personality.

Gaskell was hardly an exception in selecting letters, editing them for their interesting and character-shaping content, and omitting letters that were too personal or indelicate. In fact, she seems not as guilty of such deeds as, for example, Lockhart who "constantly suppressed, rewrote, combined, and redistributed passages in Scott's letters," or as Forster who "misdated, dismembered, and silently altered documents" (Altick, 210). Much has been made of Gaskell's omission of all but a small portion from Charlotte's letters to Heger which she must have seen in Brussels when she visited him. Yet this concealment, to protect both Heger and Charlotte, was not uncommon in nineteenth-century biographical practice. Altick cites an example from Moore's *Byron* (1830), a biography, furthermore, which was written when accounts of love affairs were not as unacceptable as they were in Gaskell's day:

Few passages in the history of biographical writing are more calculated to make the modern scholar's flesh crawl than this bland admission of Moore's that he deleted one "Italian Love" from Byron's life and moved Byron's account of another back in time for the sake of artistic fitness. (Altick 203)

Froude's Carlyle, appearing in 1883, showed that private letters about personal relationships were still considered inappropriate for public perusal. Froude's use of the letters between Carlyle and his wife, Jane, even with Carlyle's approval, was considered outrageous because they exposed a difficult, even violent, marriage. Charles Whibley attempted to define "The Limits of Biography" in 1897, and his first rule was that the biographer must prove "that he is guiltless of indiscretion, that he has betrayed no secret which his hero (or his victim) would have chosen to keep."⁴¹

Gaskell was inhibited by such limits and suppressed most of the content of Charlotte's four extant letters to Heger,⁴² thus editing out expressions of intense loneliness and affection for him. She combined parts of the letters without reference to their dates and misplaced them chronologically without acknowledging it. From her own correspondence it seems clear that she had two reasons for doing so: she was personally uncomfortable about the emotional content of Charlotte's letters to Heger and, out of a sense of propriety, she felt a need to protect Charlotte, her family and the Hegers. When George Smith asked her to read The Professor, Charlotte's first rejected novel, Gaskell writes to Emily Shaen that she is perturbed about the prospect of publishing anything to do with Charlotte's experiences in Brussels:

I dreaded lest the Prof; should involve anything with M. Heger--and I had heard her say it related to her Brussels life,--& I thought if he were again brought before the public, what would he think of me? I believed him to be too good to publish those letters--but I felt that his friends might really with some justice urge him to do so.... (Letters 409)

Gaskell both "like[d] and respect[ed]" Heger (Letters 394) whom she interviewed in

⁴¹ Charles Whibley, "The Limits of Biography," The Nineteenth Century. 41 (March 1897): 434.

⁴² There are four extant letters: 24 July 1844, 24 October 1844, 8 January 1845, and 18 November 1845. A combination of the first two letters is inserted in the Gaskell text near the end of March 1845. A second excerpt largely from the first letter is inserted in the Gaskell text following a 23 July 1845 letter to Ellen Nussey.

Brussels, and the letter quoted above indicates that she felt that he had been "brought before the public," in *Villette* with some injustice. As Madame Heger had refused to see her, Gaskell was aware of the sensitiveness of the situation. Gaskell had good reason to fear that an attachment between Charlotte and Heger would be inferred; Reid, twenty years after Gaskell, makes the connection fairly directly in his biography: "her spirit, if not her heart, [had] been captured and held captive in the Belgian city" (Reid 60). Of course, Reid had not seen the letters as Gaskell had, and if he were able to make some transpositions from fiction to life, it seems likely that Gaskell was afraid that her readers would similarly transfer Lucy's passion to Charlotte.⁴³

Gaskell deliberately moves Charlotte's first letters of July and October 1844 ahead to 1845 so that the letters are placed in the context of Branwell's affair with Mrs Robinson and his dismissal as tutor to the Robinson's son. By displacing the Heger letters Gaskell covertly contrasts Branwell's affair with Charlotte's affection for Heger. It is ironic that Gaskell is so indiscreet in her emotional condemnation of Mrs Robinson and yet so secretive about Charlotte's attachment to Heger which appears to have been much more innocent. Gaskell's moralistic outbursts against "the wretched woman" (273) and Branwell's uncontrolled passion for her make the few passages that Gaskell quotes from Charlotte's letters to Heger seem very mild. By employing this contrast, then, Gaskell is able to distract the reader from any hint of emotionalism in Charlotte's letters, as, for example, in the following excerpt: "J'écrirais un livre et je le dédierais à mon maître de littérature, au seul maître que j'aie jamais eu--à vous, Monsieur!" (276).

Although ^{not home her} she did, Gaskell described "the wretched woman" as a "flourishing widow" (273) living in London which was enough to raise the threat of libel. Gaskell was forced to withdraw her biography, omit the offending passages, and re-publish an expurgated third edition. There are numerous explanations for Gaskell's loss of

⁴³ In a letter of 1 April 1843 to Ellen, Charlotte angrily dismisses the observation of "three or four people" that she had returned to Brussels because "the future épouse of Mademoiselle Brontë is on the Continent" (254). It is interesting that Gaskell includes this which presents an idea she obviously does not want to foster in her reader's minds. Presumably she feared that her readers would suspect some liaison as a result of reading *Villette* so she permits the arguments against it even when the argument itself has not been suggested in the biography.

control in writing about this episode: she implicitly believed Charlotte's version, who in turn believed Branwell, and thus saw him as the victim of a manipulating woman (LFC IV 218); she was attracted to instances of moral injustice; she was, perhaps, unconsciously transferring Charlotte's pain and emotionalism (evident in the suppressed letters) to Branwell's situation. It would not seem likely, given Mrs Gaskell's professed respect for Heger, that she was silently paralleling him to Mrs Robinson although later biographers do consider Heger responsible for an "emotional rapport that he encouraged with his pupils" (Fraser, 190). Branwell's display of passion was markedly in contrast with Charlotte's silent suffering and, although Gaskell could not openly express this contrast, her own moral anger and loss of control about Mrs Robinson serve to underscore Charlotte's forbearance concerning her own and, indeed, her brother's situation.

Gaskell achieves an intriguing juxtaposition by placing Charlotte's letter to Heger (24 July 1844) immediately before a letter of 2 April 1845 to Ellen Nussey concerning, among other things, "the stigma of husband-seeking" (277). Since Ellen had earlier (1 April 1843) suspected Charlotte of seeking a husband in Brussels and since Charlotte had intimated to Ellen (15 November 1843) that she knew why Madame Heger's affectionate attitude towards her had suddenly become distant,⁴⁴ Charlotte's advice to Ellen is particularly poignant. Charlotte philosophizes about Ellen's "scruples" of having acted in an overly friendly manner towards a single man:

...if women wish to escape the stigma of husband-seeking they must act and look like marble or clay--cold, expressionless, bloodless; for every appearance of feeling, of joy, sorrow, friendliness, antipathy, admiration, disgust, are alike construed by the world into the attempt to hook a husband. (278)

Charlotte urges Ellen: "be not afraid of showing yourself as you are, affectionate and good-hearted; do not too harshly repress sentiments and feelings excellent in themselves...do not condemn yourself to live only by halves..." (278). The

⁴⁴ In this letter of 15 November 1843 Gaskell omits the following sentences without marking the ellipsis: "I fancy I begin to perceive the reason of this mighty distance and reserve; it sometimes makes me laugh, and at other times nearly cry. When I am sure of it, I will tell it you" (LFC I 309).

juxtapositioning of Charlotte's letter to Heger and this letter to Ellen subtly comments on the purity of Charlotte's emotional attachment to Heger, and warns of the way in which the world (and, as Gaskell knew, Madame Heger) might misconstrue it.

Although Gaskell suppressed the overtly emotional content of Charlotte's letters to Heger, an undercurrent of emotion runs through the biography at this point that hints at Charlotte's passionate, even sexual nature. One passage in particular is startling in its imagery and tone. This occurs during the latter part of Charlotte's second year in Brussels, just before the beginning of the "grande vacances" (260). Charlotte is at a low point (it is just before she visits Ste Gudule to confess); she is, as Gaskell writes, involved in a "great internal struggle" (259) between the urge to go home and the duty to stay. Gaskell's extravagant description of Charlotte with "every fibre of her heart quiver[ing]" and lying "on the throne...like a panting, torn and suffering victim" (259) suggests an internal struggle of a much more intense and sexual nature than that which Gaskell has overtly stated. Significantly, it is when dealing with sexual matters that Gaskell's loss of restraint is apparent, such as in the above example, in the passages dealing with Branwell and Mrs Robinson, and when contending with the criticism of the reviewer of Jane Eyre, who, condemned the book for its depiction of "illegitimate romance" (Allott 107) and "violent tornados of passion" (Allott 108).

This chapter (XII) which is filled with the trauma of Charlotte's last year in Brussels, ends, not with her leaving Brussels (2 January 1844), but, intriguingly and incongruously, with the account of three incidents involving animals at Haworth. First, Gaskell quotes Charlotte's poignant remark to Nussey in her letter of 23 January 1844: "I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me. It grieved me so much to grieve him who has been so true, kind, and disinterested a friend" (266). Following directly on this fairly open statement of feeling for Heger is a three page diversion initiated by a postscript in a letter of 25 March 1844 to Ellen Nussey: "'Our poor little cat has been ill two days, and is just dead....Emily is sorry'" (267). With all the death, illness, and stress that has tested them in their lives Gaskell, strangely, chooses "these few words [to] relate to points in the characters of the two sisters" (267). I would argue that Gaskell is deliberately choosing an incident from the life through which she can illustrate, with propriety, Charlotte's passionate nature,

and, in fact, offer a corollary for the narrative concerning Heger and Charlotte which she is excluding. The reference to the death of the cat is safe ground on which to point out how, like Emily, Charlotte is "more than commonly" sensitive and tender, how she distrusts her "own capability of inspiring affection" (267), and how she notices "the least want of care or tenderness on the part of others" (267). In a parable-like fashion Gaskell points out three aspects of Charlotte's character which, I believe, covertly explain the nature of Charlotte's relationship with Heger: first, that it is in Charlotte's nature to be overly enthusiastic about anything, and Heger is no exception; secondly that Charlotte is blind to the reciprocation of feeling and therefore may not have recognized how her relationship with Heger was developing; and thirdly that (once the relationship is established in her mind or heart) Charlotte is unduly sensitive when tenderness is not returned (which may, in Gaskell's eyes, explain why Charlotte's letters were so unrestrained). Gaskell goes on to quote a passage from Shirley in which Shirley describes to Caroline how a lover might be tested to see if he is worthy of affection. If the lover shows an affection for animals, he will likewise show an affection to a loved one. Here Gaskell explicitly transfers her argument from love for animals to love between man and woman. In the passage which precedes this in the novel, Shirley points out the difference between "that faithful feeling--affection" and "passion....a mere fire of dry sticks."⁴⁵ Similarly, Gaskell differentiates between Charlotte's affectionate nature and Emily's passionate nature (268). She gives the example of Emily's cauterization, with a red-hot iron, of a rabid dog's bite to her arm and the example of her bare-fisted beating of her dog Keeper in order to punish him. Gaskell observes that Emily was drawn to such "wild, intractability" whereas "the helplessness of an animal was a passport to Charlotte's heart" (268). By extension, this example might have been included by Gaskell to suggest that Charlotte would be more likely to express affection rather than passion for Heger. Certainly Charlotte's words from her letter to Ellen just preceding these diversionary incidents about the cat and dogs suggest a parallel: "something in me, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken" (266). In all, Gaskell's juxtapositioning of letters, her intensity of language, her opportune use of

⁴⁵ Charlotte Brontë, Shirley (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 224-225.

Shirley to philosophize about the nature of love, and her anecdotal use of the animal incidents, create a clever subtext which masks a discussion of a romance which Gaskell could not overtly discuss. Subversively and slightly ambivalently she suggests both that there had been something significant going on between Heger and Charlotte (perhaps even having the unacknowledged intensity of sexual attraction), but also that it was tamed and controlled, and never, in fact, became more than admiration and affection.

2. Anecdotes

Gaskell, as I indicated above, had been encouraged by the articles she read in The Quarterly Review to think of anecdotes as indispensable to biography. The writer of "British Family Histories" believed that anecdotes allowed the biographer to build "a portrait ...which would put us in contact with the real person" rather than simply provide "an inventory" ("British Family Histories" 298). Anecdotes are "genuine traditions" preserving a history that "mere charters cannot embody," but he issues a warning:

While admitting the frequent admixture of fable we must be careful--to borrow a metaphor from the diggings--in washing the earth not to lose the particles of gold. ("British Family Histories" 299)

In collecting anecdotes from Charlotte, from her family and acquaintances, and from local history, Gaskell preserved a history that would otherwise have been lost. However, she was criticized for not "washing the earth" diligently enough. Although she was aware that Charlotte herself might not separate fact from fiction in her telling (Gaskell 98) and although, in her correspondence, she acknowledged an interest in hearing "the other side of an account" (Letters 883), she did not seek rigorously to corroborate all her stories. Yet, it is not entirely clear, even today, whether her anecdotes were untruthful or whether they were contested because they were indelicate. For example, a relative wrote to deny Gaskell's account of the ignominy suffered by the curate, Mr Redhead, at the hands of the Haworth parishioners, and Carus Wilson's relatives wrote refuting Gaskell's account of the

Clergyman Daughters' School, but these proved only to be other versions of the situation, not necessarily the truth. In her third edition of *The Life* Gaskell inserts a letter from a "Yorkshire gentleman" concerning the facts of the case of Mr Redhead:

"I am not surprised at your difficulty in authenticating matter of fact. I find this in recalling what I have heard, and the authority on which I have heard anything. As to the donkey tale [that "a man rode into the church upon an ass"], I believe you are right." (565)

Even after the Cowan Bridge controversy was debated in the newspapers, with Mr Nicholls adding his opinion, no conclusive assessment could be determined, and Shorter observed that "most people who know anything of the average private schools of half a century ago are satisfied that Charlotte Brontë's [and thus Gaskell's] description was substantially correct" (Circle 18).

Gaskell was not so easily exonerated for her exaggeration of Mr Brontë's eccentricities and for what Shorter described as a "singular recklessness" in believing the Brontë sisters' stories about Mrs Robinson's "complicity in Branwell's downfall" (Circle 19). Shorter ascribes Gaskell's shortcomings in this latter incident to a lack of "caution which a masculine biographer, less prone to take literally a man's accounts of his amours, would undoubtedly have displayed" (Circle 20). However, it still amounts to one version opposed to another, for Shorter takes a masculine biographer's word, that of Francis Leyland, for the truth. While it has been proved that Mr Robinson's will did not state that Mrs Robinson must never see Branwell again on penalty of forfeiting her inheritance, and while it seems that Branwell's pockets were not stuffed with love letters from Mrs Robinson when he died (both claims of Mrs Gaskell), there is now a consensus that Mrs Robinson was not an innocent victim in this affair, nor did Branwell simply fabricate it because of his opium addiction.⁴⁶

Gaskell, similarly, provides numerous anecdotes about Mr Brontë's eccentricities which drew criticism from people like Ellen Nussey. Although Gaskell

⁴⁶ Fraser thoroughly assesses Mrs Gaskell's speculations (231-236) and concludes that "there was some flirtation between Branwell and Mrs Robinson" (237). She points out that Gaskell had not simply taken Charlotte's version of the affair, but had "very good reason to believe in Mrs Robinson's guilt" (233) from another source, Lady Trevelyan.

tells George Smith at the beginning of this project that she will be hampered by the presence of living subjects and that she will have to "omit a good deal of detail as to [Charlotte's] home..." (Letters 349), she does not hesitate to narrate stories about Mr Brontë cutting up his wife's silk dress, burning his children's shoes, and firing pistols. At first Mr Brontë calmly accepted these stories of his eccentricities saying that the minor mistakes could be cleared up in a second edition. Primarily he was offended by the story that he had denied "flesh-meat" (87) to his children. Later, just before the third edition, he corrects Mrs Gaskell on the dress cutting episode, indicating, however, that it was Charlotte who got it wrong: "With respect to tearing my wife's silk gown, my dear little daughter must have been misinform'd."⁴⁷ As her letters show, Gaskell received stories from a number of sources: Charlotte herself, Miss Wooler, Ellen Nussey, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth (Letters 124), the "Haworth people" (Letters 467), and Mrs Brontë's nurse whom she cites in the biography (Gaskell 88). Furthermore, Mrs Gaskell had met and stayed with Mr Brontë and Charlotte in September 1853 and had been witness to some of his eccentricities including the pistol firing (Letters 246). Alan Shelston states that the controversy about the truth of these anecdotes "can, I suspect, be attributed to the disparity between Mrs Gaskell's fictional imagination and her responsibilities as a biographer" (Gaskell 26). Although it is likely that Gaskell saw the opportunity to stress the impact of a harassing environment on Charlotte, she had shown a sense of responsibility in suspecting the biases of both Mr Brontë and Charlotte, in attempting to corroborate stories and, as she wrote, in attempting to see the "other side of an account" (Letters 883). She was not unusual as a biographer in her tendency to assume the veracity of her subject's stories. Furthermore, the exaggeration in these anecdotes may be due to Charlotte's imagination as much as to Gaskell's. This does not exempt Gaskell from criticism, but does suggest that she was not simply inventing or fictionalizing. In general, her estimate of Mr Brontë's character is accepted

⁴⁷ Lock and Dixon 508. However, Gaskell indicates in a letter to George Smith (11 December 1856) that Mr. Brontë was not reliable, that he "dresses up facts in such clouds of vague writing, that it is of no use to apply to him" (Letters 424).

today.⁴⁸ Shorter analyses these anecdotes in his edition of Gaskell's Life and accepts the assessment of Wemyss Reid, "whose recollections of the Brontë traditions go farther back than those of any one else who has written on the subject," that "Mrs. Gaskell had abundant ground for her estimate" (Shorter, The Life 52). Interestingly, Mr Brontë describes himself as "eccentrick" and proudly adds: "Had I been numbered amongst the calm, sedate, concentric men of the world, I should not have been as I now am, and I should in all probability never have had such children as mine have been" (Lock and Dixon 508). If the anecdotes are not entirely and literally true, they point to the fact that Mr Brontë attracted myth-making and that his circle, including his children, described him in anecdotes as a means of dealing with his eccentricity, thus suggesting a truth-value to the anecdotes.

Gaskell frequently employs qualifying phrases such as "I suspect" (91), "Mrs Brontë's nurse told me" (88), "as far as I can gather" (80), or "I remember Miss Brontë once telling me" (61). However, in those episodes for which she is justly accused of exaggeration and some inaccuracy (Cowan Bridge, Mr Brontë's personality, the Mrs Robinson-Branwell affair) Gaskell sometimes forgets the anecdotal basis of her data. Thus, she libellously refers to "the errors which [Carus Wilson] certainly [my emphasis] committed" (99) even though she knows and states a few pages later that much of her information is based on Charlotte's own testimony and that "[Charlotte] saw only one side" (107). This statement about Carus Wilson, along with some other direct accusations involving Mr Brontë and Mrs Robinson, had to be removed for the third edition.

Samuel Johnson, writing about Aubrey's use of anecdote, commented that, while anecdote may not be strictly factual, "it ought not however be omitted because better evidence of a fact cannot easily be found...and it must be by preserving such relations that we may at least judge how much they are to be regarded" (Altick 56). Gaskell, herself, offers some hints about how these anecdotes should be regarded but, because of the vivid narrative quality of the anecdote itself, it seems likely that readers overlook her more philosophical warnings and qualifications. For example, following her five pages of anecdotal characterization of Mr Brontë, Gaskell

⁴⁸ The most recent biographer, Fraser (1988), writes that "there seems to be some basis of truth in the story [of the dress being cut up]" (22) and that Mr Brontë was "odd and anti-social" (30).

addresses the problem of the use of anecdote:

...I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole. The family with whom I have now to do shot their roots down deeper than I can penetrate. I cannot measure them, much less is it for me to judge them. I have named these instances of eccentricity in the father because I hold the knowledge of them to be necessary for a right understanding of the life of his daughter. (90)

Gaskell's language suggests a qualification about the notion of truth and certainty. She pursues "understanding" which is not always "consistent," and she suggests an implicit contrast between understanding and judging.⁴⁹ What she recognizes in dealing with Mr Brontë's character is that the subject's life cannot be packaged into one version. Anecdotes take their place as versions of the subject. With first-hand reports there is a double effect of belief and doubt, belief in the first-hand observation, doubt as to its unbiased or extended application. Gaskell's irresponsibility in the use of anecdote has been exaggerated, not only in the context of biographical practice in her own era, but certainly in the context of post-structuralism and new historicism with their emphasis on the figurality of all language. Joel Fineman, in "The History of the Anecdote," describes two features of the anecdote:

The anecdote...uniquely refers to the real...on the one hand...anecdote has something literary about it....On the other hand, it reminds us also that there is something about the anecdote that exceeds its literary status, and this excess is precisely that which gives the anecdote its pointed, referential access to the real....⁵⁰

This approach which puts emphasis on the anecdote as contextual, as cultural production, rather than as absolute truth extends Johnson's recognition of the

⁴⁹ This distinction is more clearly stated in her concluding remarks which have already been noted, but it should be pointed out that Gaskell, herself, does judge Carus Wilson (as in the example previously quoted) and Mrs Robinson.

⁵⁰ Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote," The New Historicism, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989) 56.

importance of anecdotes which, if they are not absolutely factual, at least say something about the person constructing them, allowing readers, as he writes, to "judge how much they are to be regarded" (Altick 56). Throughout Brontë's biographical history, biographers have read these anecdotes with differing emphases, but few have dismissed them. Particularly within the contemporary theoretical framework anecdote is invested with new force; as Nadel writes in "Biography and Theory," "anecdote, the ingredient of so many biographies we admire, is actually a fundamental element of biography's truth-value."⁵¹

3. The Roles of the Narrator

Gaskell occupies a privileged position as participant narrator, but she recognized early in the project that her original plan of "simply writ[ing] down [her] own personal recollections of [Charlotte]" (Letters 348) would not be adequate for a public record. In fact, she was aware of the need to adjust points of view in a biography that was to be about a "dear friend" (Gaskell 60). At the end of 1856 when she had nearly finished the biography she wrote to George Smith: "I suppose all biographers get interested in their subject to an extraordinary degree, even when there was no personal knowledge & regard to bind the parties together" (Letters 425). By using Charlotte's letters and recollections from others she was able to remove herself from the text to a remarkable degree. She and Charlotte, unlike Boswell and Johnson or Lockhart and Scott, knew each other for only five years, and her actual participation in the story does not occur until 1850. Even though Gaskell is a participant in the narrative when recording their five visits, she remains in the background, acting more as the observer than a participant. It is what Miss Brontë says that interests her, and Gaskell's own involvement is minimized to such remarks as, "I said I disliked Lucy Snowe" (507), designed to provoke comment from Charlotte.

In fact, Gaskell views Charlotte from several distances, not just the personal and intimate. She can also be interpretative and neutral. One memorable scene will

⁵¹ Ira B. Nadel, "Biography and Theory," Biography & Autobiography: Essays on Irish and Canadian History and Literature, ed. James Noonan (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993) 10.

delineate Gaskell's shifting narrative viewpoints.⁵² During Gaskell's visit to Haworth in 1853 Charlotte showed her Branwell's painting of the three sisters, and Gaskell uses this occasion to dramatize her own presence in Charlotte's life and to establish herself as biographer in the role of witness and interpreter. The following excerpt from this page-long scene will illustrate her subtle changes in points of view:

It is singular how strong a yearning the whole family had towards the art of drawing. Mr Brontë had been very solicitous to get them good instruction; the girls themselves loved everything connected with it....

I have seen an oil painting of [Branwell's]...I could only judge of the fidelity with which the other two were depicted, from the striking resemblance which Charlotte, upholding the great frame of canvas, and consequently standing right behind it, bore to her own representation....Emily's countenance struck me as full of power; Charlotte's of solicitude; Anne's of tenderness....I had some fond superstitious hope that the column divided their fates from hers, who stood apart in the canvas, as in life she survived. (155)

The beginning two lines illustrate a detached, omniscient presentation; Gaskell takes the role of the objective narrator who intends only to record. She then indicates her participation, and her position as an observer of the likeness between the real and the represented Charlotte. Finally, Gaskell offers an interpretation, reading below the surface of the painting to detect further meaning than simple likeness. This scene dramatizes Gaskell's awareness of how a portraitist (painter or biographer) presents the subject. As participant-biographer, Gaskell, like no other biographer of Charlotte, has the experience of the real object in her memory and can mentally judge the likeness, the "striking resemblance." As interpretative-biographer, like the painter, she reaches for some quality beneath the surface, suggested in shadows, light, and placements. With the first perspective Gaskell observes that she can be sure of some "fidelity"; with the second approach, she is aware of encroaching subjectivity, of "fond superstit[ion]." Gaskell goes on to say that it was decided that Branwell had the talent to attend the Royal Academy, and she slips into a novelistic omniscient point of view: "Poor misguided fellow! this craving to see and know London, and

⁵² Ira Bruce Nadel in *Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form* uses this scene in his introduction to comment on the "biographical process"(2), the act of comparing the real to the image. My emphasis, rather, is on Gaskell's shifting narrative points of view.

that stronger craving after fame, were never to be satisfied. He was to die at the end of a short and blighted life" (Gaskell 156). Although omniscient like the voice at the beginning of the scene, this voice is not detached but emotional as it over-views the life, suggests inner desires, and anticipates Branwell's end.

These various points of view have their advantages and disadvantages. As a participant narrator, a friend, she is criticized for identifying too strongly with her subject, but this relationship also permitted her to hear the voice, see the gestures, and experience the emotional responses of her subject. As the interpretative narrator and the novelistic omniscient narrator she provides a psychological depth, provides a unity and coherence to her subject's life that is expected by her reading audience, but at the expense of total objectivity. As the neutral narrator (the omniscient commentator) she imparts an authority, garnered by her research and knowledge of the letters. This shifting narration, while not perfect, allowed her checks and balances on what was ostensibly a subjective project. Overall Gaskell's narration was more personal than objective, and the subject she constructed was more unified⁵³ than diverse, but she was able through her shifting narration to impart the authority of information as well as hint at the complexities of her indecipherable subject. At the beginning of Chapter II she states her biographical intention to convey "a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë..." (60). "Right understanding" conveys the sense of a constantly adjusted sympathy, a play between distance and closeness, between representation and interpretation (or novelization).

III. CONCLUSION

I have attempted to unravel some of the myths surrounding Gaskell's biography: the myth that The Life is "the prime source of the fatal blurring of fiction and fact which has bedevilled Brontë studies" (BB 1); that the Brontë family are fictionalized; that The Life reads like a sentimental novel; and that it is nothing more than hagiography. Gaskell's letters about the process of writing biography,

⁵³ This is a relative comparison. Although I have spoken of the ways in which Gaskell herself subversively challenges the feminine model as it applies to Charlotte, and although Gaskell admits that she cannot harmonize or map a portrait, she does not deliberately explore contradictory aspects of Charlotte's character which conflict or coexist as do the later biographers from Gérin on.

specifically the first life of a "dear friend," show her conscious awareness of and attempt to deal with many of the major issues of biography. Sensitive to the problems of attachment to her subject, she not only took measures to counteract that, but observed, on two occasions, that partiality was not limited to a personal relationship with a subject, that "all biographers" develop an attachment (Letters 417, 425). She was aware of the importance of research, noting that she had "been everywhere where [Charlotte] ever lived" (Letters 394); she recognized Charlotte's complicity in recounting her own story; she admitted the subjectivity of her sources, evident in the anecdotes and in tones of various letters; and she was conscious of her own novelistic strategies, her design of bringing out particular aspects of Charlotte's character and her own use of "contrast" (Letters 428). Yet, she spoke of writing biography as "a good hard absorption into a subject out of oneself" (Letters 419). By exposing Gaskell's use of the biographical practices of her era, and suggesting that her novelistic strategies, although very striking, are not her only strategies, and, furthermore, that assumptions about the distorting properties of the novelistic approach (compared to other approaches) need questioning, I hope to have suggested a more self-conscious biographical process at work in the construction of The Life than has previously been acknowledged. Gaskell, I believe, did not invent a suffering, tragic, depressed, feminine Charlotte. The letters, testimonies, and research reveal this more conventionally Victorian side to Charlotte (or, as later biographers write, her ability to play this role). However, she was not only that and Gaskell, giving way to conventional demands for a unified and feminine subject, obeying rules of delicacy, and limited by her own ideological constraints, could not provide a complete portrait. In fact, to return to Gaskell's motif of the landscape as a significant shaper of personality, she could openly depict only the civilized and already mapped aspects of the four-dimensional character she set out to describe. She could not squarely face that fourth side of Charlotte's character, the creative, passionate and more revolutionary aspect represented by the wild moors. However, it was perhaps the unknown features of the territory she undertook to explore, both of her subject and the genre (biography as opposed to novels), that pushed Gaskell to construct a biography of a dual nature, that both conformed to and subverted traditional practices and that exhibited innovative novelistic strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

THE "RAINBOW"¹ YEARS

THE MODERN PERIOD: THE 1920s AND 1930s

I. THE TRANSITION PERIOD: LATE VICTORIAN TO THE MODERN PERIOD

Gaskell's vision of Charlotte prevailed, with only minor corrections and adjustments, until E.F. Benson's Charlotte Brontë appeared in 1932. For a short period after Gaskell's Life very little appeared on the Brontës. In 1877 Reid writes in his biography that "the disposition has been almost to ignore [the Brontës'] books" (201), but between the mid 1870s and 1900 numerous short biographies of Charlotte and her family appeared in periodicals and as essays in books or encyclopedias. Augustine Birrell's biography includes an excellent bibliography up to the year 1887 (compiled by John P. Anderson) listing more than twenty biographical essays, about half of which refer to Charlotte alone. Primarily, these writers distilled Gaskell's portrait, admiring Brontë in the context of the traditional Victorian values of suffering, purity of spirit, and duty. John Taylor's short biographical essay, "Charlotte Brontë: A Story of Sorrow, Heroism, and Victory," published in The Methodist Monthly in 1897 encapsulates, even in its title, the way in which Gaskell's vision was romanticized and popularized.²

Every ten to fifteen years during this period between Gaskell (1857) and Benson (1932) a book-length biography of Charlotte appeared that offered some new research or interpretation, but none which significantly altered Gaskell's view of Charlotte.³ T. Wemyss Reid's Charlotte Brontë (1877) was the second biography of

¹ Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," Collected Essays, vol 4 (1927; London: The Hogarth Press, 1967) 229. Woolf felt that the "new biography" would exhibit more "rainbow-like intangibility," that is, more about the inner personality, and would employ more "devices of fiction" (233).

² John Taylor, "Charlotte Brontë: A Story of Sorrow, Heroism, and Victory," The Methodist Monthly 6 (1897): 2-8.

³ At least six book-length biographies appeared: T. Wemyss Reid's Charlotte Brontë (1877); Algernon Swinburne's A Note on Charlotte Brontë (London: Chatto and Windus, 1877); Augustine Birrell's Charlotte Brontë (London: Walter Scott, 1887); Clement Shorter's Charlotte Brontë and Her

Charlotte, written "at the request of" Ellen Nussey (Reid vii) because Gaskell's portrait "was not one which was absolutely satisfactory to those who were the oldest and closest friends of Charlotte Brontë" (2). Reid's main objective, to lighten Gaskell's relatively dark portrait, was not substantially achieved, though he did convincingly establish Brussels (rather than Cowan Bridge and Branwell's dissipation) as a turning point in Charlotte's life, and hinted at a passionate attachment between her and Heger. As well, he praises Emily's genius which Gaskell had failed to appreciate. By this time, Emily's reputation was gaining on Charlotte's, and George Eliot's fame had eclipsed Charlotte's so Charlotte's supporters felt a need to reestablish her stature. Algernon Swinburne, responding to Reid, published a short monograph, A Note on Charlotte Brontë (1877), in which he eulogistically promotes Charlotte above George Eliot, and Emily above Charlotte. Because Swinburne's monograph is more a personal and literary essay than a biography, Augustine Birrell's Charlotte Brontë (1887) is usually considered the third biography of Charlotte. It is a slim volume which primarily summarizes the life, adding some new information about Mr Brontë's romance, in his first parish, with Mary Burder. There were, however, two biographies in the 1880s which did attempt to alter the Gaskell version by focusing on the other siblings. Mary Robinson's Emily Brontë (1883)⁴ presented Emily as the greater genius of the two sisters, and Francis Leyland's The Brontë Family (1886)⁵ paid special attention to Branwell, hinting at an unsympathetic aspect of Charlotte's character.

Clement Shorter, near the turn of the century, published a number of works which firmly fixed Charlotte's reputation and magnified Gaskell's tragic view. His first book, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle (1896), "is not a biography but a bundle of correspondence" (Circle 500) as he, himself, pointed out. With its correction of some details in Gaskell's biography, its additional letters, and references to the juvenilia, it provided a scholarly foundation for Brontë studies even though it was

Circle (1896); Frederika MacDonald's The Secret of Charlotte Brontë (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1914) and Maude Goldring's Charlotte Brontë: The Woman (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915).

⁴ Mary Robinson, Emily Brontë (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1883).

⁵ Francis A. Leyland, The Brontë Family with Special Reference to Branwell Brontë (1886; New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971).

poorly organized, had its biases, and was not particularly reliable in transcribing the letters. Shorter edited, with corrections and notes, Gaskell's Life in 1900 (the Haworth edition) and published a more complete and better organized two volume edition of Charlotte's correspondence in 1908, The Brontës: Life and Letters which is "still used by many as a basis for biographies" (BB 12). The sombreness of Gaskell's vision was reinforced by Shorter, and, perhaps, he is more responsible for casting Charlotte into the tragic heroine model than was Gaskell herself. Gaskell's mode of presentation allowed for some slippages through which other aspects of Charlotte's personality occasionally surfaced, but Shorter firmly stamped the romantic and tragic points of Gaskell's version on the reader's mind by summarizing her portrait in his own stark prose in the "Preliminary" to The Brontës: Life and Letters. Even though, like Gaskell, he provides letters exhibiting Charlotte's independent spirit, he dwells on the dark aspects of the life, and because his two volume work was the most scholarly treatment to date, his summary and endorsement of Gaskell's portrait of Charlotte took on an added authority. In fact, he answers those who want to adjust Gaskell's version:

...how can one say that the picture was too gloomy? Taken as a whole, the life of Charlotte Brontë was among the saddest in literature. At a miserable school, where she herself was unhappy, she saw her two elder sisters stricken down and carried home to die. In her home was the narrowest poverty....her shyness made...school-life...a prolonged tragedy....[Her positions as governess] were periods of torture to her sensitive nature. The ambition...to start a school...failed ignominiously....Brussels was for her a further disaster. (Circle 21; LL 15-16)

Shorter's intense language ("narrowest poverty," "prolonged tragedy," "torture") enhances, and I would argue, mythologizes Gaskell's romantic view of a tragic personality.

Although this quotation reveals Shorter's bias, his work was undertaken in the investigative and rational manner encouraged by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee during the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1882 Leslie Stephen announced that he had taken on the task of editing the Dictionary of National Biography. From 1885 to 1900 sixty-three volumes were published with Sidney Lee taking over the editor's

role in 1891. Stephen's policy was to print "the greatest possible amount of information in a thoroughly business-like form."⁶ This more rational approach to biography had been urged by Leslie Stephen in an article answering Swinburne's eulogistic monograph on Charlotte Brontë. In the Cornhill Magazine (1877) Stephen had written that "our literary...creed should rest upon a purely rational ground, and be exposed to logical tests" (Allott 413). He did not reject a sympathetic bond with the subject, but said that such "personal bias" needed to be "analyz[ed] coolly" (Allott 414). It was Leslie Stephen who wrote the entry for Charlotte Brontë in the Dictionary of National Biography which offered information in a straightforward style but, ironically, in an effort to correct Gaskell, showed a bias toward Branwell Brontë and Francis Leyland's portrait of him.

II. THE MODERN PERIOD

Three dominant features of biography emerged during the 1910s to the 1930s that altered the mode of Victorian biography: a concern with the psychological, particularly Freudian; an emphasis on the art of writing biography; and a Stracheyan detachment extending to antipathy in some cases. Before looking at the biographies of Rosamond Langbridge and E.F Benson which combine these strains, I would like to briefly comment on May Sinclair's impressionistic biographical essay and on Lucile Dooley's lengthy article, "Psychoanalysis of Charlotte Brontë, As A Type of the Woman of Genius."⁷

May Sinclair's biography, The Three Brontës (1912), although not devoted exclusively to Charlotte Brontë, deserves attention because it stands at a transitional point in the development of biographical strategies. Virginia Woolf, in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," pinpoints 1910 as the year in which "human character changed."⁸

⁶ Quoted in David Novarr, The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880-1970 (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1986) 1.

⁷ Lucile Dooley, "Psychoanalysis of Charlotte Brontë, As a Type of the Woman of Genius," The American Journal of Psychology XXXI (1920): 221-272.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Collected Essays, vol 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 320.

She distinguishes the Edwardians, the older generation of novelists who were concerned with presenting character externally through "the fabric of things" (332), from the Georgians, the new writers like Forster, Joyce and Strachey, who sought techniques to reveal the inner world, the "atmosphere" (324) of the character. Woolf describes this time as one in which conventional strategies were being violated: "Thus it is that we hear all round us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays, the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction" (334). Woolf specifies this change more directly in terms of biography in her article, "The New Biography," published in 1927, and Strachey incorporates the new strategies of psychological revelation, brevity, and artistic representation in Eminent Victorians⁹ in 1918. Even before Strachey, however, Edmund Gosse had introduced the term "psychology" in speaking about biography (Novarr 16), and in "Biography," written for the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1910, he states that the biographer is interested in "a soul in its adventures" (Novarr 17). It was in this climate that May Sinclair wrote her biographical essay, The Three Brontës, first published in 1912 and then republished with a new introduction in 1914 after Charlotte's letters to Heger were published by the Times in July 1913.

Sinclair had a considerable reputation as an active feminist, an essayist and a novelist. Hrisey Zegger in her recent book on Sinclair writes, "In the years between 1910 and 1920, before the emergence of Virginia Woolf as a major writer, May Sinclair was considered England's foremost woman novelist."¹⁰ Sinclair wrote twenty-four novels including The Three Sisters (1914) which is based on the Brontës and is considered one of her best. Zegger comments that "Sinclair's psychological novels, which reflect her knowledge of psychoanalytic writings and her espousal of the theories of the imagist group, are among the early expressions of the modernist tradition in the English novel" (10). Before Strachey's biographies and before the major biographical critics of the period, Waldo Dunn,¹¹ Virginia Woolf¹² and

⁹ Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (London: Penguin, 1948).

¹⁰ Hrisey Zegger, May Sinclair (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1976) 9.

¹¹ Waldo Dunn in English Biography (1916) ends his critical exploration of biography emphasizing its aesthetic properties: "[English biography] will be more unified, more coherent, more selective, exhibiting more completely the qualities of concentration, brevity, and self-effacement; in short, it is

André Maurois,¹³ had proclaimed the importance of style in biography, Sinclair recognized "the impossibility of keeping [the biographer's] imagination altogether out of [the biography]."¹⁴

May Sinclair, however, looks both forward and backward. She looks backward to Gaskell's vision of Charlotte as suffering, tragic and pure. Charlotte's life, Sinclair writes, gives the effect of "unity, of fitness, of profound and tragic harmony. It was Mrs. Gaskell's sense of this effect that made her work a masterpiece" (47). Like Gaskell, Sinclair stresses the importance of the environment: "it is the soul of the place that made their genius" (19). Her biography begins, Gaskell-like, with a description of the grey surroundings of moors and parsonage and the "hemmed in" (19) feeling created by the graveyard. Sinclair distils Gaskell's portrait of Charlotte down to a few basic impressions that have remained with her from her first childhood reading of Gaskell:

I had a very vague idea of Charlotte apart from Haworth and the moors, from the Parsonage and the tombstones, from Tabby and Martha and the little black cat that died, from the garden where she picked the currants, and the quiet rooms where she wrote her wonderful, wonderful books. (236)

She approves of and imitates Gaskell's pictorial abilities and her unified view of Charlotte which "eliminates the inessential and preserves the proportions" (237).

However, Sinclair goes further than Gaskell in exploring Charlotte's "inner life, tumultuous and profound in suffering" (166), noting, for example, that there was "something subservient" in Charlotte's nature (48) and that "the very heart of the

destined to be, far more than it has been in the past, a work of art" (286).

¹² Virginia Woolf, in "The New Biography" (1927), writes that the new biographer "chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist" (231).

¹³ André Maurois, Aspects of Biography (New York: Appleton, 1929). Maurois seeks a reconciliation of historical truth and poetic truth and quotes Woolf's passage about the "weld[ing]" of granite and rainbow (36-37). Although there are contradictions in his argument, he concludes that biography can blend "the scrupulosity of science and the enchantments of art, the perceptible truth of the novel and the learned falsehoods of history" (204).

¹⁴ May Sinclair, introduction, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1908) ix.

mystery that was Charlotte Brontë" (66) was "the perpetual insurgence of this secret, impassioned, maternal energy" (68). In emphasizing this maternal desire, Sinclair attempts to overthrow the views of the biographers, Reid and Birrell, and the critics, G.H. Lewes and Swinburne, that Charlotte disliked children, but this jars with her feminist view of Charlotte as "no window-gazing virgin on the look-out, in love already before the man has come" (141).¹⁵ Based particularly on one of Charlotte's dreams about carrying a crying child, Sinclair concludes that Charlotte was awkward with children because she desired them for herself (66-68). Eight years later, the psychologist Lucile Dooley stated in her "Psychoanalysis of Charlotte Brontë" that Sinclair came "very near to the psychoanalytical view of Charlotte Brontë's character," and that she intuitively perceived "the truth" (Dooley 221) about Charlotte's attitude towards children.

Sinclair does not divide the woman from the author and, in fact, praises Brontë for the very thing that dismayed Gaskell, for creating heroines like Jane Eyre who "sinned against the unwritten code that ordains that a woman may lie until she is purple in the face, but she must not, as a piece of gratuitous information, tell a man she loves him" (117). She applauds Brontë for being a "revolutionist," (32) for altering the view of the spinster, for exhibiting "supreme ambition" (35), for seeing "with the ironic eyes of the comic spirit" (31) and, through her fiction, for "giv[ing] to woman her right place in the world" (141). Nevertheless, Sinclair, like Gaskell, displaced Charlotte's sexual energy onto a more neutral plane. Passion is one of Sinclair's key words to describe Charlotte, but it is a spiritual and intellectual passion. As Gaskell had avoided direct discussion of this subject (subverting it by describing Charlotte's affection for animals), Sinclair speaks of it as "the divine, the beautiful, the utterly pure and radiant thing" (124). She differentiates between "animal passion" (123) evident in Fielding and Smollett and passion of a finer fibre (124) in Brontë's fiction. Similarly Sinclair describes Charlotte's attachment to Heger as a one of those "Platonic relations between English teachers and their French professors" (88).

¹⁵ According to Dooley this contradiction between the maternal urge and the disdain of husband-seeking is present in "neurotic women" in the "Madonna Complex" in which "women suffer from an intense longing for children and at the same time from as intense a loathing of the sex relation, and of men" (238). Sinclair simply notes these desires; she does not indicate, as Dooley does, that they manifest a "Complex".

However, after the 1913 publication in the Times of Charlotte's letters to Heger, Sinclair has to admit a stronger attachment, and writes a new introduction for the second edition of her biography. Sounding much like her Victorian predecessors, she protests that such publications of letters are "an outrage against perfect decency"¹⁶ and that, while she now has to admit "some passionate element," she still maintains it is "innocent and unconscious" (ii) and adds "nothing of value to our knowledge of Charlotte Brontë" (v).

Sinclair describes the role of the biographical narrator as an "impressionist" (234), one intent on creating an artistic impression through an enthusiastic, personal style. In that attempt she was quite different from Gaskell (except in the opening and closing chapters) who was self-effacing. Ruth Hoberman in Modernizing Lives notes that one of the characteristics of the period between the wars (1918-1939) was a new emphasis on the role of the biographer. Rather than moralizing as the Victorian biographer had done, the modern biographer interpreted, condensing material into a portrait or an image of the subject. Furthermore, the biographer was concerned with his or her own style of presentation. As Hoberman writes, "[Strachey] forced readers to recognize an artful authorial presence in biography" (Hoberman 6). The non-interventionist letter method was superseded by a more self-conscious impressionistic approach. Strachey in his preface to Eminent Victorians criticized the "slipshod style" the "tone of tedious panegyric" and the lack of "selection" and "design" in Victorian biography (Strachey 10). Sinclair, although not ironic and dispassionate like Strachey, created a strong and distinctive authorial presence in her biography by employing a personal tone and enthusiastic and pictorial prose.

Hoberman speculates that Strachey "had read some Freud by the time he completed Eminent Victorians" (Hoberman 43), but it is his Elizabeth and Essex (1928) that "unquestionably reveals the influence of Freudian analysis" (Hoberman 163). Although Freud himself had written a psychological biography of Leonardo da Vinci in 1910, Altick designates 1920 as the year in which psychoanalysts began to use literary lives as data, noting Lucile Dooley's "Psychoanalysis of Charlotte Brontë" published in that year (Altick 336). This was also the year, as Altick notes,

¹⁶ May Sinclair, The Three Brontës, 2nd ed. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1914), iv.

in which biographers began to write Freudian biographies (336). By 1920 Freud's views on the unconscious, on the prominence of the sex drive, and on the influence of childhood on adult development, specifically childhood desires playing themselves out in the Oedipal and Electra complexes, had fundamentally influenced ways of looking at personality. Dooley argues that Charlotte's "emotion...was derived from the psychical experiences of her early life" (222), particularly by a love-hate relationship with her father. Charlotte's love for her teacher, Heger, becomes an extension of this relationship and imitates infantile love in that it focuses on "the person who, like the parent, is inaccessible" (Dooley 223). Brontë's genius depends upon the transference of sexual energy from her unrequited love with Heger into her writing (256). Dooley views Charlotte as "an abnormally developed personality...the genius" who wrote from "the Unconscious" (222), the source of these immature emotions. Brontë's fiction, then, is the product of a neurosis, of "infantile emotions" that have been damned up (229), and *Villette*, for example, dramatizes her personal Elektra complex in the love triangle of Polly, her father, and her lover, Graham Bretton.

Dooley, employing the Freudian divided plot model (previously discussed in relation to Gaskell), ascribes to Charlotte a "dual nature": a masculine side which is "self-assertive," "egotistic," and "rebel[s] against restraint;" and a "passive, feminine, timid, self" (244). In Dooley's Freudian framework this becomes an irresolvable conflict in Charlotte's neurotic personality. Ambition for Gaskell and the Victorians is unfeminine and therefore improper, whereas for Dooley it is neurotic. On the other hand, duty, praised by the Victorians as a virtue, becomes, in psychoanalytical theory, an infantile bond.

Dooley's work is not a biography, but a psychoanalytical study using biography so the criticisms that can be levelled against psychoanalytical biography are less applicable. However, subsequent Brontë biographies influenced by the Freudian approach (Langbridge, Benson, Moglen), exhibit some of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Psychoanalytical theories opened up a whole new territory, the invisible, inner world of the subject. As well, the psychoanalytical approach focused on relationships, introducing a new perspective from which to view the individual. Material previously considered trivial, such as dreams, was treated

as symbolically significant (Moglen makes much of Charlotte's sea cave dream). Because the fiction is seen as a psychic product, it is often more integrated with the life in this type of biography, sometimes, of course, too literally. In Dooley's view, for example, fiction is simply the playing out of the inner life:

The effort to solve the problem of her love-life was the impetus of Charlotte Brontë's literary production....She was successful in her work in proportion to the extent to which her vehicle of expression corresponded to the play of her own inner life. Intensely subjective, plots and characters had to represent [my emphasis] her own drama. (270)

Reading the fiction as psychotherapy is one drawback of this approach. As well, the dominantly psychoanalytical biographer (Dooley and Moglen) tends to reduce the subject's behaviour to the unconscious and intuitive rather than considering other factors such as social and cultural determinants or other facets of psychological and mental being such as conscious and willful actions. Dooley depicts Charlotte's rebellion as entirely "subconscious" (237). Ignoring historical forces and focusing only on childhood as formative, Dooley casts duty, passion, and rebellion, for example, as personal neuroses rather than as, partially at least, socially constructed and open to change. Nevertheless, as John Maynard points out in his discussion of the history of Brontë psychological biographies and critical works, Dooley's "classic study" (which uses biographical materials) "has been repeatedly restated, with varying emphases," by Langbridge and Moglen as well as numerous literary critics.¹⁷

1. Rosamond Langbridge: Charlotte Brontë: A Psychological Study (1929)

Like Dooley, Langbridge is interested in "PERSONALITY: THE REAL CHARLOTTE," as she titles her seventh chapter (233). Unlike Dooley, though, she seldom refers to the literature and does not view Brontë as a "woman of genius" (Dooley 221). Rather she sees Charlotte as "repressed" (18), "censorious" (55), unforgiving (62), and "morbid" (120). Her intent is to reverse Mrs Gaskell's

¹⁷ John Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 238n.

"whitewashed image" of these characteristics as "martyrdoms" and to see them as "incurred through morbid inability for criticism and self-protection" (4). Like Dooley (but largely without Freudian clinical language and without the psychoanalysis of inner motivations), Langbridge emphasizes childhood trauma, particularly the effect of a tyrannical father, as an explanation for Brontë's "suppressed Personality" (255). Although here at the beginning of her biography she acknowledges the environmental and social determinants on character formation and blames the father's repressive parenting on Victorian values (5), she largely ignores this approach throughout the rest of the biography and blames Charlotte for her inability to rebel against these forces (254).

The combination of her popularized use of the "'new' psychology" and her stylistic "vigour" and "ruthlessness" caused the reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement to comment that she approached her subject with a "pioneer's intoxication." She was criticized, however, for having "so little experience of the equilibrium of truth," for paying little attention "to the aspects of the facts which she thinks vital" and for conducting her study with "the obsession of obsession-seeking."¹⁸ Anne Passel, in her annotated bibliography of the Brontës (1979), writes that Langbridge's "early psychological biography, though angry and inaccurate, was very influential at the time of publication."¹⁹ It would appear, however, that Langbridge's influence was largely popular and short-lived, a result primarily of her "fresh, infectious and sincere"²⁰ style and her Strachey-like method of attack upon the cult of the Brontës. There is only one reference to Langbridge among the major biographies of Charlotte Brontë, and that is in a footnote in Helene Moglen's Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived (1976). Moglen refers, without comment, to one of Langbridge's insights on Charlotte's personality, a remark typical of Langbridge's captivating, but over-simplifying, prose: "Very few people were ever to understand Charlotte Brontë, for it is seldom that such appealing weakness is

¹⁸ "Books on the Brontës," rev. of Charlotte Brontë: A Psychological Study, by Rosamond Langbridge, Times Literary Supplement 16 January, 1930: 41.

¹⁹ Anne Passel, Charlotte and Emily Brontë: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 89.

²⁰ Times Literary Supplement, 16 January, 1930: 41.

leashed to such appalling strength" (Langbridge 94; Moglen 206). Interestingly, Langbridge is not mentioned by E.F. Benson who, only three years later, attacks Charlotte for similar flaws--her censoriousness and bitterness.

Langbridge revolts against Victorian modes of biography--against delicacy, ponderousness, sombreness, eulogy, and the letter method that smothers narrative form. In so doing, Langbridge overtakes a witty style and the novelty of the "new psychology" at the expense of exactitude and research. Even from the beginning pages where she attempts to "briefly summaris[e]" (1) Charlotte's life, she passes off assumptions as facts or gets her facts wrong: Charlotte was not, as she claims, "born a weakly member of a weakly family of six" (1); it is not generally agreed that Heger was "the only man she ever loved" (2); Charlotte had not "witnessed" seven deaths in her family (2); and she did not marry at forty, but at thirty-eight. Similarly, Langbridge overstates the points of her psychological study of character formation. For example, she makes Mr Brontë responsible for "every agony" in Charlotte's life (5), and she expands Gaskell's three-sentence anecdote²¹ of Mr Brontë's burning of the children's boots to a three page incident, centring it out as the incident which "would influence the whole of Charlotte's childhood" and become a "symbol of her fate" (18).

The description of Charlotte as "a rebel who had never once rebelled" (243) while a persuasively clever claim, is typical of Langbridge's generalizations and assertiveness. Declaring her biography to be a "psychological study," Langbridge offers numerous statements about Charlotte and about personality in general which are often engagingly phrased but facile or inaccurate. Her conclusion that Charlotte "never learnt the wisdom of happiness," is prefaced by the personal judgement that "Life is, or should be, for people what it is for birds and flowers, one extended act of happiness" (259). Similarly assertive, Langbridge claims that "Not only [Charlotte's] life and character, but all her writings show the impress of deep Fear" (158) and that "Charlotte had nothing that she wanted in her life" (254). To prove

²¹ Even Gaskell gave this only an anecdotal reliability by ascribing it to "Mrs Brontë's nurse" (88) and omitted it from her third edition. Shorter in 1896 had dismissed it and other anecdotes about Mr. Brontë as "fabrications" (Circle 17) so, at least, Langbridge should have been aware of its questionability.

this "deep Fear" she cites two quite credible examples from Jane Eyre: Charlotte's wailing child dream; and the figure of Rochester's mad wife whom, however, she rather literally considers a symbol of Charlotte's "morbid dread of Mme. Heger's spying" (159), rather than of a psychological fear such as suppressed sexuality. It is questionable, however, to reduce "all" Charlotte's life and art to "Fear." Certainly Charlotte's fiction is generally seen as bold and revolutionary in its treatment of women's spirit of independence. In fact, Langbridge later speaks of Charlotte's "outspoken comments" (243) to her literary peers, and if this attitude is a result of "Fear" rather than self-assurance about art or defiance of traditional values, she does not make that clear. The cleverly phrased and concise portraits that Langbridge draws tend to over-simplify Charlotte's character, to do, in reverse, the whitewashing of which she accuses Gaskell.

Charlotte is not often seen as rebellious in her private life until the feminist revisionist biographies from 1975 on (Sinclair being an early exception), but her fiction, from early on, is almost unquestionably seen as rebellious by critics and biographers. Thus, to argue that Charlotte never "once" rebelled (243) and that her fiction was "all" the result of fear (158) requires Langbridge to be very selective, almost dismissive, in her discussion of Brontë's fiction. In fact, at the end of her biography Langbridge dissociates fiction and real life, claiming that art does not express real desires: "Art is a pretext for life; it can never be Real Life" (259). Inconsistently, however, Langbridge allows the fiction to reveal Charlotte's fears and bitterness, but not her rebelliousness or her happiness. Langbridge, for example, does not see Brontë as a rebel when she attacks the governess and class system in Jane Eyre, but depicts her as jealous and bitter. Langbridge selects Brontë's descriptions of Lady Ingram and her daughters to point out how Charlotte "reacted as a governess towards Society" (55). While these passages are almost universally found flawed by Brontë critics and while Langbridge employs some witty asides in commenting on Brontë's cliché descriptions of the ladies' "curled lips" (55) and fine shapes (as if, she comments, they were "blanc-manges" 58), she also betrays her own admiration for this social set when she writes that Charlotte could only "give out the atmosphere of cruelty which sad people feel in the company of happiness and prosperity" (62). Although Langbridge has earlier stated that Mr Brontë and the

coloured boots episode determined Charlotte's unhappy disposition, she now considers "governess-ship" to "set the crowning pinnacle on the formation of Charlotte's character" (62):

From this period of her early twenties onward her reaction towards the whole wide canvas of experience is only the natural development of the preceptress outlook upon life: repressed, repressive, snubbed and snubbing, stoutly dictatorial, she felt the cursed spite that ever she was born to set it right. The real rebellious and defiant, forthright and original Charlotte Brontë was now lost to us for ever. (62)

Langbridge's exaggerated claims and biased commentary erode her authority as a reliable interpreter. It is not clear what Langbridge means by rebelliousness, and how the more positive sense of this word is turned to the negative, how the "real rebellious" Charlotte becomes the "stoutly dictatorial." Langbridge seems unable to read this as conscientious rebelliousness because Charlotte, as a "preceptress," is wrong to criticize this class. In Langbridge's view when Charlotte expresses an opinion she becomes "snubbing" and "spite[ful]", her strengths are "appalling" (194), and her fiction is a "means of 'savaging' nearly everyone she knew upon the forked tongue of her bitterness" (191). In fact, Langbridge reverses Gaskell's attempt to draw-out the feminine and returns to the position promulgated by Lady Rigby in her condemnation of Brontë's coarseness.

Langbridge claims that Charlotte was unable to "judge Life fairly" (164), and that "much as tramps throw stones at rich men's cars...Charlotte's spiritual discomfort began to vent itself more and more in severe and superfluous criticism of other people's liberty" (164). Langbridge's arguments strikingly illustrate not only her own value system, but her determined bias against Brontë. Whereas Charlotte is criticised for noting "flaws" in Miss Martineau, Martineau is admired by Langbridge for "fearlessly pronounc[ing] her condemnation of Charlotte's 'virulent' attack on Roman Catholics" (165-166). What is "severe" (164), "less kindly" (166), "sour-grapes" (168) and "detestable" (169) in Charlotte is seen as fearless in Martineau. Without examining the context (and possible justification) for Charlotte's criticisms, Langbridge indicates her own sympathy for various Victorian critics by referring to "poor George Henry Lewes" (166) and "poor Mr. Chorley" (167).

Charlotte's criticism of Thackeray is described, in part, as the "foolish hole-picking of a narrow and provincial mind which criticises the offspring of a breeding, culture and opportunity which it had never known and could not, therefore, understand" (167). Langbridge acknowledges that at other times Charlotte pays homage to Thackeray's genius, but it is "hysterical homage," and the conflict of these two emotions (admiration and disapproval) is, in Langbridge's estimation, "the logical outcome of that desire for reformation of originality [as exhibited by Thackeray] which besets the Victorian spinster..." (169). While Langbridge claims Charlotte is not capable of judging fairly, Thackeray has "shrewd knowledge of humanity" (169), a statement offered as if it were indisputable. Such unsupported evaluations, ironically, illustrate Langbridge's own censoriousness and prejudice against Charlotte for criticising those prominent figures who appear to be favourites of Langbridge. Langbridge, who claims early on that Charlotte would have been healthier in mind and body if she had "attracted...the right man" in her youth (6), betrays her own bias in employing the term spinster in a derogatory manner, frequently casting Charlotte in the mold of "spinsterish complacency" that leads to "female callousness" (216), or in the role of the critic who "felt it her duty as a spinster to condemn" masculinity (195).

Writing in the shadow of Strachey, Langbridge adopts many of his techniques. Like Strachey's, her prose is assertive, captivating, provocative, and, at times, witty. Also like Strachey, she enters the minds of her subjects, and she is the first Brontë biographer to employ this technique so extensively, particularly in two long passages, one concerning the children's relationship with their father (14-17), the other Charlotte's relationship to the Hegers. The first is highly sarcastic as Langbridge attempts to undermine the view of "Dear, kind, good Papa!" (15). In the second passage, she attempts to reconstruct Charlotte's "tortured mind" as it magnifies Monsieur's "Passion" (118) and Madame's jealousy. Langbridge is the first biographer to treat Charlotte as an anti-heroine, and even in treating Charlotte's torture, Langbridge cannot resist sarcasm. Her attacks often display, not a dispassionate irony as is found in Strachey, but a hostility towards her subject, particularly evident in her descriptions of Charlotte as animal- or machine-like. As Hoberman writes, Strachey's strategies allowed him "a tremendously broad range of

possible attitudes toward his subjects, including sympathy" (49). Also, he partly deflects his ridicule onto institutions (church and government) whereas Langbridge's mockery is reserved for the individual. For example, she imagines Charlotte's developing infatuation with M. Heger:

Think what an honour it was, that, out of all his hundred pupils, she and Emily alone were chosen to compose a class all to themselves, for Monsieur to instruct! What marked preference she was shewn, when Monsieur presented Charlotte with a book of Essays! She had not heard of the Professor doing that to any other girl!... Her great gratitude made great the inspirer of this gratitude, his greatness magnified again the need for gratitude to him...[Langbridge's ellipsis]

There is no end to the system of great planets to be perceived by this telescopic sensibility. (112)

Her use of exclamation marks and ellipsis, her repetition and twisting of "great gratitude," the italics, and the final metaphor which mocks Charlotte's infatuation, all contrive to give this passage a sarcastic tone.

Entertainment seems to be the primary purpose of Langbridge's sarcasm. While Strachey employed wit and sarcasm to undermine the egocentric behaviour of his 'heroes', Charlotte, in this instance, neither sees herself, nor is portrayed by biographers, as heroic in her attachment to Heger. Although Langbridge explodes the sentimental pitying attitude towards Charlotte, she is unable to create a thoughtful, dispassionate alternate perspective from which to view Charlotte's attachment to Heger. She writes that "Women are grown-up children, and what they want to be there is" (112-113), and that even "Miss Edith Sitwell [could] make a really funny thing of Charlotte's love-affair..." (113). Moreover, such sarcasm does not accord with Langbridge's description of Charlotte's life as "intolerably sad" (1) or with her description of Charlotte, the rejected lover, as "forlorn and pitiable" (151). Ridicule is not a technique usually associated with a "psychological study," the project upon which Langbridge claims to be engaged. Although adopting Strachey's anti-heroizing design, she does not "lay bare the facts...dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions" as he urged in his preface to Eminent Victorians (Strachey 10).

However, Strachey, himself, could not always maintain the impartial position he advocated, and his work exhibits the subjective-objective tension which pre-

occupied biographers and theorists of the age as they attempted to reconcile the new emphasis on style with the historical model of biography. Strachey has been criticized for a lack of sympathy towards his subjects and for manipulating facts for stylistic effect. In "The Practice of Biography," written for Cornhill in 1953, Harold Nicolson claims that Strachey's "ironical titters" and exaggerations debase what he calls "pure" biography and, employed by his successors, become "offensive":

In the hands of his imitators the manner of Strachey deteriorated so rapidly that it became an irritating habit of superciliousness....

Irony is, in any case, a dangerous tincture and one that should be applied only with a sable brush; when daubed by vigorous arms it becomes wearisome and even offensive. It is not merely that the reader is irritated by a biographer who implies in chapter after chapter that he is himself more enlightened, sensitive, or sincere than the hero whom he is describing. It is also that biography, if taken seriously, is an exacting task and not one that can be carried through with a sneer.²²

Nicolson's remarks on Strachey's imitators are applicable, I believe, to Langbridge who places style above the "exacting task" of biography and whose rhetoric seems designed to convey her own presence and to serve as entertainment rather than to inform. Langbridge's more innovative talents, for example her novelistic display of her subject's mind, or her use of animal and mechanical imagery, are largely employed as sarcastic attacks upon her subjects rather than as a means of expanding understanding of the personality. Her numerous references to Charlotte as an animal are hostile rather than ironic like Strachey's:²³ Charlotte is a "dull grub" (254); the Brontë house is a "lair" and the Brontës "preferred to die like dogs" (177); Charlotte is a "pecked...decadent member of the fowl-run" (121); and a "horse kept so long from water that at last he cannot drink" (196). Charlotte is also described as "a

²² Harold Nicolson, "The Practice of Biography," Cornhill 166 (Summer, 1953), 475-76.

²³ Both Nadel and Hoberman discuss Strachey's use of animal imagery, specifically in Eminent Victorians where he refers to Florence Nightingale as an eagle, Manning as a petrel, Newman as a dove, and so forth. Nadel writes that animal imagery expresses Strachey's "determination to assert his own liberal humanism," in response to Darwin's questioning of humanness, by making humans participate in animal nature (Nadel 163). Hoberman believes that Strachey's technique displays a subtle use of irony by which he undermines his own use of the animal images by selecting such "absurdly conventional metaphors" (Hoberman 46).

child's toy musical-box" (230) upon which, on her death-bed, Nicholls attempts "a few more turns of that little crank" to hear "the old delightful tune... 'Home, Sweet Home'" (232). These images are created to destroy the "Saint Charlotte myth" (64), but without letters and other documents to support her arguments, the rhetoric is empty.

Writing in the period between Victorian and twentieth century scholarly biography, Langbridge displays the aggressive tone adopted by Strachey in his revolt against eulogistic Victorian biography. A reviewer compliments Langbridge on "the zealous fury with which her axe crashes through the tangle of veils and timid pretexts created by a generation of Brontë worshippers."²⁴ This language reflects Strachey's militant urging to biographers, in his preface to Eminent Victorians, to "shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses" (9). Woolf also marks this period as one in which all around is "the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction" ("The New Biography" 334). As one of the first de-bunkers of the Brontë myth, Langbridge serves a role in the historic development of Brontë biography, but her biography also serves to illustrate that the rhetoric of attack alone cannot sustain a credible alternate vision of a subject.

2. E.F. Benson: Charlotte Brontë

E.F. Benson's Charlotte Brontë, published in 1932, exhibits many of the tendencies discussed above: an emphasis on style, a concern with the inner world of the subject, and a determination to de-mythologize the subject. Benson, however, does less "crashing and destruction" than Langbridge; he quotes more accurately and more fully from the letters, recognizes some of Charlotte's strengths even though highlighting her flaws, and his style, overall, is more subdued. Marianne Moore, in a 1932 review of Benson's biography, writes that while this biography "represents a departure from the genial verisimilitude of other portraiture by him, [it] need not change one's regard for him nor estrange one from Charlotte Brontë,"²⁵ the two

²⁴ The Times Literary Supplement 16 Jan, 1930: 41.

²⁵ Marianne Moore, rev. of Charlotte Brontë, by E.F. Benson, The Criterion July 1932: 719.

effects, I believe, produced by Langbridge's biography.

The years between 1920 and the mid thirties were called, as Altick notes, "the biography boom" and "brightly written, studiously irreverent biographies by the hundreds competed with novels on the best-seller lists" (Altick 292). Hesketh Pearson, the biographer of Hazlitt (1934) and Shaw (1942), wrote Ventilations: Being Biographical Asides in 1930 emphasizing, as had Dunn, Woolf and Maurois, the "art" of the biographer. He declares, "It is the day of the biographer; he is the dramatist, the essayist, the romancist of the future."²⁶ This trend is noticeable in Benson, who like Langbridge, is praised more for his art than for his critical interpretation. One reviewer praised Benson's "indescribable charm," and his "humour"²⁷, another his "charming urbanity," his "witt[iness]" and his "irony."²⁸ There are occasions when Benson's wit is as sharp as Strachey's, and he exhibits a flair for the apt, "charming" phrase, as well as for Brontë-like metaphors. In conveying Charlotte's pronounced discomfort with strangers he wittily remarks,

It becomes easy to understand how her first impressions of strangers were always disagreeable, for they were, so to speak, the surgeons and nurses who conducted the operation; only the anaesthetist was lacking. (258)

Always descriptive, he notes the differences between Charlotte's stylistic approach in Jane Eyre and Shirley by imitating Charlotte's own metaphors:

...but whereas in Jane Eyre she took the live coal in the tongs from off the altar of its burning, in Shirley, donning the fatal vestments of the preacher, she ascended the pulpit and discoursed, with anathemas, on the world's sordid view of love. (240-241)

In another Brontë-like image, Benson describes Charlotte's response to her lionising

²⁶ Hesketh Pearson, Ventilations: Being Biographical Asides (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1930) 68.

²⁷ Helen Moran, rev. of Charlotte Brontë, by E.F. Benson, The London Mercury May 1932: 86-7.

²⁸ "Charlotte Brontë." rev. of Charlotte Brontë, by E.F. Benson, Times Literary Supplement 7 April 1932: 244.

in London in 1849: "But fame had come too late for her enjoyment; she had been through bitter waters and the salt still clung to her" (248). In these examples, the sense of his characterization (Charlotte's morbidity, didacticism, and bitterness) is neither lost in nor distorted by his rhetoric, as I argued was the case with Langbridge.

His humour is generally more witty, less sarcastic, than Langbridge's, and he avoids ridiculing death and unrequited love. Like Langbridge, he finds Charlotte censorious, opinionated and bitter, but, perhaps sensing the controversial nature of this perspective, he conveys these interpretations largely in matter-of-fact prose and employs supporting evidence. His wit, rather, is turned on Charlotte's pretentious "solemnity" (84) or on trivial concerns such as, when preparing for a London visit, Charlotte is described as "violently concerned with her frocks" (273).

Two examples of Benson's treatment of Charlotte's marriage will illustrate the nature, and the advantages and disadvantages, of his irony. Having determined to marry Nicholls, after he breaks down in tears at church, Charlotte, according to Benson, engineers "a work of consummate strategy" (296) to win her father's consent. Charlotte, however, accords her success to "Providence" and Benson gently undermines Charlotte's solemn piety:

But, without questioning the supremacy of the Divine decrees, we must observe that Providence had offered her that destiny a year and a half ago, and she had rejected it because she had no affection for her lover.... Providence, in fact, would not have had much chance without her firm co-operation. (296)

In another instance, however, Benson's wit is not so cleverly and accurately directed. After describing Charlotte's marriage as "a medicament for her bitterness" (300), Benson writes:

She fell in love with her husband recklessly, as a good Victorian wife should: his judgement was infallible, and she submitted everything to it. (301)

Benson's object of attack is ambiguous. Does he mock or approve of Victorian patriarchal marriage and recklessly falling in love? Margot Peters in discussing Benson's biography in "Biographies of Women" quotes these lines and comments that

Benson "gloats over this Victorian taming of the shrew."²⁹ Confusion arises over Benson's gibe because Charlotte did not marry recklessly, taking seven years to make up her mind (although perhaps Benson believes that the crucial incident that changed Charlotte's feelings, Nicholls' sobbing at the gate, was a reckless reason). Also, although she appeared to submit to Nicholls towards the end of her marriage, she had held considerable reservations about him and marriage even into the first few months of their life together, and the marriage was so short (nine months) as to make judgements about it difficult. Peters considers Benson's remark, and his attitude to Charlotte throughout the biography, as "almost entirely merciless" ("Biographies of Women" 207). Certainly Benson over-simplifies the marriage situation and judges Charlotte's behaviour by his own belief (male and Victorian) that marriage is a magical cure for "the pontifical certainty of the spinster":

...now she had what her nature had long subconsciously longed for as the medicament for her bitterness and her morbidity, and it was a perfectly new kind of woman who came back to Haworth with her husband in August. (300)

What rankles Peters is that Benson not only considers Charlotte a "shrew" and marriage a cure, but that his wit is hostile and gloating. Marianne Moore, in her review of the biography, is similarly uncomfortable with Benson's treatment of the marriage, and questions the confusion created when Benson moves from presenting Charlotte "in the narrow shaft of sunlight" to presenting her "satirically" (Moore 719). Benson's "charming" style, in their opinions, does not compensate for, but highlights, his biased value judgements.

Peters, whose 1975 biography of Charlotte Brontë will be discussed in Chapter Four, describes Benson's biography as "the most hostile full-length biography I know of" ("Biographies of Women" 207). Anne Passel in her Annotated Bibliography (1979) concurs that it is "written by one of Charlotte Brontë's bitterest condemners" (Passel 82). Benson's inclination for self-expression through wit and a skillful turn of phrase, and his harping on and dramatizing of a single strain in Charlotte's character, her "bleak censoriousness of others" (144), interfere with objectivity.

²⁹ Margot Peters, "Biographies of Women," biography 2 (1979): 207.

Although hostility may be too strong a description of his attitude, he walks a fine line between being critical, that is, intellectually antipathetic, and being prejudiced, or emotionally and personally disapproving. Marianne Moore, in closing off her review, borrows a phrase from yachting to ask how a reader is to respond to the contradictory "enjoyment" of his phraseology and the dissatisfaction with his ideas: "Is one to protest...or be rammed, or give room?" (Moore 719). The question is left unanswered but there is enough witty protest in her review to suggest that she has not been persuaded by all Benson's interpretations, that style cannot camouflage inaccuracies.

The biographical theorists, André Maurois and Hesketh Pearson, asked this question in a less metaphoric way. How does the biographer reconcile his or her artistic, self-expressive impulses with an historical approach? The difficulty in answering and achieving this is evident in Maurois's qualifying language:

I realize very clearly, believe me, the dangers inherent in this type of biography. In his desire for self-expression and self-exposition, in his sympathy with, or antipathy to, a character (for his strong feeling may be one of antipathy, as in Mr. Strachey), the biographer runs the risk of unwittingly defacing historical truth....but it does seem possible in certain rare cases, if the choice is fortunate and well suited to the author's temperament, that the biographer may be able to express some of his own feelings without misrepresenting those of his hero. (Maurois 131-132)

Benson's biography exhibits this attempted blend of self-expression and fact and although, paradoxically, he examines the dangers of subjectivity in his introduction, he does not recognize them as affecting his own work. In his introduction he states that Charlotte had an "angle" (vi) from which she viewed her world, and that Brontë material is encumbered by bias, by "a cloud of witnesses and...an array of the furious partisans of individual sisters" (xii). Yet, he does not acknowledge that his own subject position might also interfere with "truth". In fact, he claims to be one "who seeks, without sentimentality on the one hand or malice on the other, to get as near as may be to the truth about the immortal denizens of Haworth Parsonage" (xi). It is not until Moglen and Peters that Brontë biographers openly announce their self-identification with their subjects, although Gaskell had acknowledged, in her letters, a bonding with her subject, and Sinclair, in her impressionistic style, exhibits a

personal involvement when she declares, for example, "I have never been able to get away from it [Gaskell's story of Charlotte]" (Sinclair 237). While recognizing, in the abstract, the dangers complicating historical truth, Benson's biography is not one of those "rare cases" of which Maurois speaks where self-expression and dispassionate argument always blend. Benson whose style is appealing and whose historical attempt to accurately use and assess Charlotte's letters and other scholarly material is evident, also betrays an overly strong identification with Branwell and an antipathy for Charlotte which distorts his portrait. In fact, to use his own words, Benson becomes a "furious partisan" of the brother.

As an example of his antipathy for Charlotte he strongly criticizes her for her satiric portrait of the curates in Shirley, even though he, himself, employs similar strategies of irony and satire in his own treatment of her. He repeatedly attacks her in the course of one page, saying that she "wanted to hurt them" (237), that she "meant and hoped and desired that these truly Christian gentlemen should be hurt and indignant at her savage attack" (237), that she had "dipped in her unkindest ink" (236) and that she had employed "whips and...scorpions" (237) to attack. Furthermore, in reading Charlotte's letter to Mr Williams about her depiction of the curates, he is unable to detect any irony in Charlotte's account. When she writes, "the very curates, poor fellows! show no resentment....I quite expected to have had one good scene with [Mr. Donne]..." (LFC III 90), Benson interrupts the quotation to comment that "she dejectedly wrote to Mr. Williams" (237). He also does not find amusing, or believe that Charlotte would find amusing, Mary Taylor's remark to Ellen Nussey that "someone writes to know if it is true that Miss Brontë was jilted by a curate--or by three in succession, I forget which--pray ask her!" (LFC III 213). Benson's own indignation over Charlotte's satire is partly a result of his narrowly focused search for examples that will prove his thesis about Charlotte's censorious and bitter treatment of others, and partly a result, I believe, of personal bias because of his family's involvement with the Church of England. His father, Edward White Benson, was Archbishop of Canterbury for fourteen years, and a brother was a priest in the Catholic Arch-Diocese of Westminster.

Although primarily unsympathetic to Charlotte, Benson questions interesting "emotional thread[s]" (37) in her life that had not been so frankly discussed

previously. His approach, to see Charlotte from the inside out, leads him into a consideration of relationships, particularly sibling relationships, but also that of Ellen Nussey and Charlotte. Gaskell had gone beyond the traditional Victorian focus on the achievements of the subject to speak of Charlotte's nervous disposition, but Sinclair and Benson, benefitting from the 1920s and 30s emphasis on psychology and personality, focus considerably more on the interior. Perhaps Benson's own family life, with an authoritarian father, sibling competition, and a "manic depressive"³⁰ sister, and his own sexual ambivalence made him sensitive to Charlotte's family tensions and emotional difficulties. Although, as I will discuss later, Benson deals, in an obsessive manner, with Charlotte's bitterness and inability to bond with others, he initially approaches Charlotte's attachment to Ellen Nussey, in a sensitive and frank manner.

Benson is the first to suggest an underlying sexuality in Charlotte's early letters. Other biographers, notably May Sinclair, interpreted Charlotte's early passionate letters to Ellen in a spiritual way. Benson accuses Gaskell of suppressing this attachment because she was "slightly bewildered at it" (Benson 43), but she did not suppress the most controversial of these passages even though she did not comment on them. I have argued that Gaskell attempts to imply an adolescent creativity (Cowper-like) at work here, but Benson wants to focus strictly on their sexual nature and rejects any implication of a "trumped-up or insincere" (43) tone in them. Later, both Fraser and Winnifrith address the issue of the language in these letters. Fraser rejects the suggestion of a lesbian tendency (Fraser 107), but Winnifrith says there may be something "unnatural in the friendship" (Winnifrith 29). The Freudian biographers (Dooley and Moglen) read these letters as repressed heterosexual expressions of love.

Benson describes the friendship, in its first phase, as "one of those violent homosexual attachments which, so common are they among adolescents of either sex, must be considered normal rather than abnormal (37-38). He quotes such passionate

³⁰ Brian Masters, *The Life of E.F. Benson* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991) 7. As my project is to explore the factors influencing biographical representation, I believe it is legitimate, when the opportunity is available, to refer to aspects in the life of the biographer which may affect his or her perspective.

lines as "I am at this moment trembling all over with excitement, after reading your note..." (41), or "If I could always live with you, if your lips and mine could at the same time drink the same draught, from the same pure fountain of mercy..." (42). He then describes this relationship passing from normal "schoolgirl" passion, through a confusion of religious and personal emotionalism, to a preference for women (48). Although not physical, this relationship, he argues, is the most passionate of Charlotte's life: "Sexless though this passion for Ellen was, it was inspired by the authentic ecstasy of love" (44).

Benson is not as convincing in arguing that Charlotte consequently developed "a robust contempt for men in general" for "a considerable period of her life" (48). According to Benson, her attachment to Heger made her "merely abject" (44), although, I would argue that, as she greatly admired Heger, her abjectness was a result of unfulfilled love, not "contempt for men." It is also not clear how a letter he quotes, in which Charlotte objects to women being condemned for "husband-seeking" when they are only being "affectionate, and good-hearted" (47), expresses general "contempt for men." Benson declares that "similar volleys of disdain are exceedingly common in her letters" (48). However, the volley in this letter is clearly aimed at "the world" which construes "joy, sorrow, friendliness" as "the attempt to hook a husband" (47), not at men in particular. He also claims that her three refusals of marriage show her preference for women. This conclusion overlooks her own explanations in her letters of why she refused the three suitors. Benson conveniently neglects to consider at this point Charlotte's passionate accounts of heterosexual love in her juvenilia and her fiction, and ignores her later, friendly, even flirtatious, correspondence with George Smith. Although Benson's general conclusion, in my opinion, is suspect, he does bring to light the intensity of the relationship between Ellen and Charlotte. His exploration of relationships is an important addition to the process of biographical investigation. His limitation, however, is that, although he could write, "The long-continued ardour of this attachment [between Charlotte and Ellen]...is of great importance in arriving at any true view of Charlotte's inner nature..." (47), he not only saw the relationship in one dimension (intense passion), but he did not consider how such a relationship might distort the truth of the letters between them. Nevertheless, his depiction of Charlotte's capability for intense

emotion, his view of Charlotte as the "predominant partner" (38) in the relationship, and his discussion of her confusion of secular and religious emotion are insightful interpretations.

Although Benson speaks of Charlotte's "indomitable pluck," "iron determination" (190) and "magnificent fortitude" (224), these strengths are often conveyed, as they were by Langbridge, as "appalling strengths" (Langbridge 194). For example, Benson writes:

Even the death of her sisters, the loss, as she said, of the only two people in the world who understood her, had been as impotent to weaken essentially the iron confidence in which she met such bereavement, as the sufferings of her brother had been impotent, while he lived, to rouse her compassion. (224-225)

Charlotte's "ensoriousness" (192), "constitutional pessimism" (192), morbidity (248, 258, 260) and, particularly, her unsympathetic attitude to Branwell and Emily are keynotes in Benson's characterization. Benson produces a reverse image of Gaskell's portrait of Charlotte which he describes as "entirely tender and loving and patient" (ix). He determines that his view will exhibit "the vast deal of hardness and intolerance in her nature" (ix).

Even in the year of its publication Elizabeth Haldane in "The Brontës and Their Biographers" (1932) took Benson to task for his "unwarrantable" exaggerations.³¹ Benson's unflattering view of Charlotte gathers momentum as he describes her Brussels experience and her attitude to Branwell and Emily after that period. Benson does not simply describe Charlotte as bitter once or twice but saturates his text with the word or with a multitude of variations such as "hate" (114), "ensorious" (116), "ungraciousness" (87) and "hard and composed" (156). In building his portrait of the unsympathetic Charlotte he states that there is no evidence

³¹ Elizabeth Haldane, "The Brontës and Their Biographers," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 670 (1932): 763. This thirteen page article controverts eight major points in Benson's biography: that Branwell wrote, or helped write, *Wuthering Heights*; that Mrs. Gaskell's account of Mr. Brontë's eccentricities and the Brontës' childhood was seriously incorrect; that Charlotte's account of Cowan Bridge was fabricated; that Charlotte "repudiated" (756) her brother; that there was a "deep estrangement" (757) between Charlotte and Emily; that governessing was not a miserable occupation; that Charlotte should be denounced for condemning Branwell while she too was in love with a married person; and finally that Charlotte's courtship with Nicholls (after Mr. Brontë's refusal of the marriage) was sneaky and conspiratorial.

for a "bond of passionate devotion between the two sisters" (140), for not even in death did Emily "reach out a hand to [Charlotte]" (141). Unlike Emily and Anne who, in Benson's view, appear to be tranquil during Branwell's deterioration, Charlotte is in a nervous state and holds Branwell "in unmitigated hatred and contempt" (154):

No word of pity for her brother, no faintest indication of sympathy for the grievous pass into which his weakness and self-indulgence had already brought him oozed from her pen, but regularly and succinctly, month by month, she sent Ellen the stark bulletins of his deterioration. (154)

Making no allowance for any discrepancy between what Charlotte unburdened to Ellen in a letter and how she responded in person to Branwell, and reading all expressions negatively, even such a one as, "My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell" (154), Benson states that "one...bleeds for the unpitied brother more than for the pitiless sister" (181). In a letter to a friend, Branwell wrote that Charlotte's look at him on a certain occasion had "struck [him] a blow in the mouth" (182). Although Benson acknowledges the "half-tipsy, self-pitying sentimentality" of Branwell's letter (182), he claims, without further evidence, that "it is obvious" that it reveals an "underlying authenticity" (182). Furthermore, he writes that "Charlotte neither felt nor made pretence of feeling any personal grief" (213) when Branwell died; yet he admits that she was "taken ill and was confined to bed for a week immediately after Branwell's death" (215).

Adopting novelistic techniques, Benson uses interior monologue and invention in a dramatic scene to present Charlotte's alienation from both Emily and Branwell. Returning home drunk from the Black Bull, Branwell comes in to the dining room where Anne and Charlotte are writing:

...he came and sat close to Charlotte to warm himself, for it was a cold night....Charlotte had nothing to say to him; she did not even look up, but stiffened and drew a little away from him, for he kept coughing, and his breath was foully sweet with whisky. He would have liked to ask Charlotte what she was writing, but he was afraid of her, and she might say something biting in return....he soon left them....

Charlotte went upstairs, pausing before she entered the room...for she heard

Branwell's voice coming from Emily's room. It was strange that she could tolerate his disgusting presence. (166-167)

Here he invents Charlotte's thoughts and actions, and his novelistic style interferes with the historical mode. Such a scene dramatically implants, to use Haldane's word, an "unwarrantable" (Haldane 763) exaggeration of Charlotte's disgust and Emily's love. Benson, similarly, recreates the scene around Emily's death to present Charlotte in an unflattering light. The familiar anecdote about Charlotte's search for a sprig of heather to bring Emily on her deathbed is traditionally interpreted as an example of Charlotte's love for her sister. Benson unreasonably re-interprets this as a scene of revenge; Emily's inability to pick up the heather that Charlotte has brought her is not a result of her unconsciousness preceding death, but a deliberate and "ruthless" rejection of her sister who has been so unsympathetic to her (218).

Like Langbridge, Benson is uncomfortable with Charlotte's intellectualism, her confidence about her own writing, her opinions about other writers, and her critical views on political and social issues. Both these biographers adopt the divided plot model; women should be concerned with love and marriage, not ambition and a career. Charlotte's literary ambitions and intellectual conversations with other writers are considered "jagged egotist edges" (239) by Benson. Because Charlotte, in his view, is opinionated, censorious and driven with ambitious plans she is "the most sundered of them [the siblings] all" (158). In his terms, Charlotte's egotism is, largely, a result of unwholesomeness and immaturity (239). She displays, he claims, "childish rapture" over good reviews and "childish resentment" over bad reviews (238). However, he fails to report that Charlotte, herself, differentiates between the critic who is "incompetent, ignorant, flippant" and one who has "power" and "discernment," and that she recognizes that some "blame deserves consideration" (LFC III 33).

Biography of this modernist period sought to break with the dominant forms and perceptions of the nineteenth century. Readers, to use Marianne Moore's word, felt "rammed" by the ironic and satiric approaches and disturbed by the pessimistic attitudes to personality. Turning away from objective representation, the modernist biographers employed subjective novelistic strategies such as interior monologues and

investigated their subjects' unconscious motivations. Whether it was the ambiguous meanings created by irony or the over-emphasis of style at the expense of accuracy, the Stracheyan approach gave way in the late thirties and forties to a more business-like approach. Altick writes that, "In both Britain and America the book-length debunking of heroic reputations became a literary fad" (292). By pointing out examples of righteous solemnity and bitterness in Charlotte's personality, Benson offers an alternate reading to Gaskell's sympathetic view of Charlotte. However, he is less self-effacing than Gaskell, and his negative portrayal does not preclude the criticism of partisanship. Just as the "object of... devotion" can attract "cartloads of apocryphal rubbish" (xi) so, too, can the object of antipathy. However, he, like Langbridge (and more reliably than her), does introduce to Brontë biography a Stracheyan approach which creates a fracture in the over-enthusiastic industry of biographies that built the Gaskell version into, what he calls, the "Brontë-Saga" (x). As the debunking fad of the thirties turned into the corrective impulse of the forties, the next generation of biographers sought a more moderate ground between art and history. Virginia Woolf's essay, "The Art of Biography" (1939), modified her own earlier position, and ushered in a more conservative era. In spite of its title, this essay argued that the biographer was "a craftsman, not an artist,"³² and Woolf advocated more the sifting of facts than aesthetic experimentation. Benson's and Langbridge's aggressive styles gave way to the cautious, methodical approach adopted by the minor Brontë biographers of the forties and, then, by Margaret Lane in the fifties.

³² Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Biography," Collected Essays, vol 4 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966) 227.

CHAPTER THREE

THE "GRANITE"¹ YEARS PRACTICAL TO SCHOLARLY BIOGRAPHY

I. "BETWIXT AND BETWEEN": THE CRAFT OF BIOGRAPHY

In "The New Biography" (1927) Virginia Woolf described biography as an amalgamation of the "granite-like solidity" of fact and the "rainbow-like intangibility" of personality (229) although she emphasized the "rainbow-like" qualities, the artistic strategies employed to explore the inner life of the subject. The biographer, she states, "has become an artist" (231). Twelve years later, in "The Art of Biography," she emphasizes the other side, the craft of biography, its "granite-like" qualities. With her first sentence of the 1939 article, "Is biography an art?" (221), Woolf challenges the major trend of the previous two decades. Although she titles her essay, "The Art of Biography," she argues that biography is a "craft" (223):

And thus we come to the conclusion, that [the biographer] is a craftsman, not an artist; and his work is not a work of art, but something betwixt and between. (227)

Whereas in her first essay she wrote that "a little fiction mixed with fact can be made to transmit personality very effectively" ("The New Biography" 233), she now argues that the biographer does not have the same liberties as the novelist but is "bound by facts" ("The Art of Biography" 226). In spite of the fact that the conclusions of these two essays are similar, for in the first she argues for the "amalgamation" of granite and rainbow ("The New Biography" 235), and in the second she argues for "the creative fact...the fact that suggests and engenders" ("The Art of Biography" 228), the location of emphasis is different. This shift from "rainbow" to "granite" is indicative of a return to the principles asserted by Sidney Lee and Leslie Stephen at the turn of the century: a renewed emphasis on documents rather than on impressionistic and psychological interpretation. In fact, Woolf's theoretical shift is

¹ "The New Biography," 229, 235.

reflected practically in the difference between her 1928 experimental mock biography Orlando and her 1940 traditional Roger Fry: a biography which "gave the impression that Mrs. Woolf was far less adventuresome, far more conservative, the advocate of an age of sobriety in biography" (Novarr 94).

Harold Nicolson reflected a similar shift in emphasis in his 1953 essay, "The Practice of Biography." Although in The Development of English Biography he refers to the "art" of biography, admires Strachey and approves of the use of psychology in biography, he indicates the need for historical truth. In "The Practice of Biography" Nicolson retains his original divisions of pure and impure biography, tones down his previous discussion of the biographer's artistry and stresses that biography "must be 'history' in the sense that it must be accurate and depict a person in relation to his times" ("The Practice of Biography" 472). He argues that Strachey's followers had allowed style to contaminate biography resulting in "false history and false psychology" ("The Practice of Biography" 475). The language of this essay expresses an exaggerated fear about the state of biography. Whereas in 1927 he saw a future for "impure" biography and its literariness, here he sees "pure" biography "infected" ("The Practice of Biography" 473) by "perils and illnesses" (472), "poisons" and "temptations" (476). He lists the dangers to biography, the "pests and parasites that gnaw the leaves of purity" (477): an overly commemorative approach, a didactic thesis, a satirical attitude, the egotistic intrusion by the biographer, and the use of fictional devices. Nicolson calls for quiet after the storm (of Stracheyism), health after illness, opposing his own rhetoric of the fear of contamination with the rhetoric of calm. He advises "Modesty" ("The Practice of Biography" 476), "neutral tints" (478), "tact and skill" (479), subterfuges to avoid causing "offence" (479), "moderated ...selection and taste" and above all caution (480). Nicolson's final words are that "the intending biographer should be as cautious in his choice of subject as in the method he pursues" (480). Pure biography comforts by making the common reader aware that his life-journey is similar to that of "great men and women":

A pure biography should furnish its readers with information, encouragement and comfort. It should provide, if I may again quote Dr. Johnson, "the parallel circumstances and kindred images to which we readily conform our

minds." ("The Practice of Biography" 480)

In the 1940s and 50s biography became the great leveller, undercutting the tradition of greatness and heroism.

The Brontë biographers who published in these quiet years between Benson (1932) and Gérin (1967) adopt a cautious and common sense approach and emphasize the facts (even though few do original research). Interestingly, although there have always been biographies dealing with the Brontë family rather than one figure, all but one biography, during this period of thirty-five years (1932 to 1967), are devoted to the family unit. There are a number of possible explanations for this concentration on family biographies, probably the most obvious being that Emily becomes more prominent than Charlotte during this period, but since the large part of the source material involves letters between Charlotte and Ellen Nussey, it is difficult to write a factual biography without focusing on Charlotte as well. Emily's Wuthering Heights, from the time of Swinburne's monograph (1877) to the mid 1950s, was more esteemed than Charlotte's fiction. As Allott remarks, David Cecil did much to promote Emily in his Early Victorian Novelists in 1934, and "until the mid-1950s, critical studies of Charlotte are much fewer in number and generally less interesting" (Allott 48). Even Kathleen Tillotson, who in Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (1954) attempts to restore Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre to a position of prominence, notes that an "essential truth about the Brontës [is] "the literary interdependence of the family."² Possibly the family-oriented values of the Fifties and the spirit of moderation of this period suggest interaction rather than competition among family members. Benson had focused on sibling rivalry and a number of the biographers respond directly to his unfavourable view of Charlotte. Lawrence and E.M. Hanson published The Four Brontës in 1949, deliberately attempting to correct "the undue prominence [given] to one or more of the Brontë children at the expense of the others; and at the expense, also, of the truth about this family so far as it can now be known."³ Laura Hinkley, in The Brontës: Charlotte and Emily, argues that there is

² Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) 263.

³ Lawrence and E.M. Hanson, The Four Brontës (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949) vii.

no evidence to support the view that Charlotte is bitter towards Branwell and that Emily is tender.⁴ Although ostensibly about Charlotte and Emily, as the title indicates, Hinkley includes separate chapters on Branwell and on Anne and Part One includes four family-oriented chapters such as one called "Four Growing."

The biographers of this period strive for accuracy, avoid interiorizations of their subjects, seek a middle ground in interpretation and are frequently corrective. Pre-dating Nicolson by eight years, Hinkley employs the same language as Nicolson in depicting biography as "beset" by "perils" such as "the romantic appeal, and the dramatic rearrangement of facts," the subjectivity of the biographer, an overly didactic thesis and "the peril of accepting the wrong authority" (vii). The repetition of "peril" eight times in one paragraph suggests a paranoia about the effects of the previous two decades on biography. She, like Nicolson, chooses to move "along these perils with tedious caution" and claims that "every inference" is "barricaded with reasons" (vii). She attempts to discover biographical links between Charlotte's life and her mature fiction (in terms of life-models and connections with the early Angrian characters), and very judiciously protests that only a "germ from the real" (240) enters the fiction.

Phyllis Bentley, the most prolific and well-known writer on the Brontës during this time, published The Brontës⁵ in 1947. Primarily a novelist (author of twenty-eight novels), Bentley published a number of books and articles on the Brontës which appeal to a general audience, providing as Nicolson urged "information, encouragement and comfort" ("The Practice of Biography" 480). In The Brontës, a slim volume of one hundred and fifteen pages, Bentley sparingly outlines the major events of the Brontës' lives and only briefly touches on the work. Short as it is and devoid of original research, it is fair and astute; as Anne Passel remarks, it is "one of the most respected short critical biographies" (Passel 259).

Elsie Harrison's biography, The Clue to the Brontës⁶(1948), explains the

⁴ Laura L. Hinkley, The Brontës: Charlotte and Emily (1945; London: Hammond, Hammond, & Co. Ltd. 1947) 119.

⁵ Phyllis Bentley, The Brontës (London: Barker, 1947).

⁶ G. Elsie Harrison, The Clue to the Brontës (London: Methuen, 1948).

intricacies of the relationship of various evangelical sects in the Church of England, and shows the influence of Wesleyanism on the Brontë family. Harrison considers herself an "historian" (Harrison [i]), and the first sections of the book are helpful in untangling the period's confusing religious sectarianism. However, she obsessively sees the Brontës' lives solely in terms of religion, arguing, for example, that "Patrick Brontë and his children came of a people who were restless for a sight of their Redeemer and homesick for Heaven" (208) and that Anne, Branwell and Emily all wanted to hasten to their deaths to be with their dead sister Maria (178). Tom Winnifrith assesses this biography as being "useful" but "marred" by "fanciful" and overstated conclusions (BB 28). While not scholarly in the sense of seeking out original materials, her approach was historical rather than psychological or impressionistic. Nevertheless her colourful language and her didactic thesis would not find favour with Nicolson and Woolf and were out of keeping with the dominant tone of moderation adopted by the other Brontë biographers of this era.

Margaret Lane's biography, The Brontë Story: A Reconsideration of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë" appeared in 1953, the same year that Nicolson published "The Practice of Biography." Lane's biography has survived more successfully than the previously mentioned biographies of the Forties because it combines the dominant attributes of the era (moderation, common sense, accuracy) with a unique palimpsest or double-text approach that overlays extensive quotations from Gaskell's text with Lane's own text of corrections and interpretations. The fact that it was reissued in 1990⁷ attests to its durability, and other Brontë critics and biographers regard it with respect. Winnifrith, who is one of the most stringent critics of Brontë biographies, writes in his New Life that only two biographies have, to date (1988), rivalled Mrs Gaskell's: one is Gérin's 1967 biography and the other is Lane's which "is full of invaluable insights into Mrs Gaskell's difficulties" (2).

Lane's aim, as expressed in her "Foreword," reflects Nicolson's theories. She directs her biography to "the general reader" presenting material in a manner that, as

⁷ A new edition was published in 1990 by Smith Settle of Otley, West Yorkshire. A letter (30 April 1991) from Smith Settle in response to my query about the re-issuing of this biography, indicated that the book was considered marketable because of its "regional interest" and that sales have been "encouraging," attesting to its lasting popularity in spite of the publication of two new biographies in 1988.

Nicolson quoting Dr. Johnson remarked, would "readily conform" the reader's mind to the subject's ("The Practice of Biography" 480). Echoing Nicolson's "cautious" approach, she places her reader "comfortably"; she selects a "discreet" position; she corrects rather than commemorates; she is self-effacing, stating that her biography is only a "footnote"; and she emphasizes facts, indicating that she intends to "[put] her reader in possession of everything of importance that has come to light in the century since [Gaskell] wrote" (ix). Fannie Ratchford, a Brontë scholar, who reviewed Margaret Lane's biography, situates it in the Nicolson model of moderate, practical biography:

But it is not the formula itself that constitutes the excellency of the book so much as the good taste, critical judgement, and literary skill which work it out so effectively that Mrs. Gaskell herself might well have chosen Miss Lane for this collaboration.⁸

Finding a middle ground in interpretation by collaborating with Gaskell, Lane also chooses a mode of presentation that is, as Virginia Woolf remarked of this era's biography, "something betwixt and between" (227) the documentary and the fictional. Lane's dual purpose is to "footnote" (ix) the facts and "to let the story flow without interruption" (x). Lane distills the evidence for the reader rather than interrupting her story to provide the sources of quotations and other bibliographic information. For example, in arriving at her decision that Mrs Gaskell was, at least, partly correct about Carus Wilson, she implies that she has read "his little tracts and books written for children" which "are full of whippings and death-beds" (55), but she neither directs readers to the sources nor quotes from them. In this way, her work stands somewhere between story-telling and documenting.

The biographers of the Forties and Fifties reasserted the historical approach of the late Victorian period and de-emphasized style, self-expression, and the psychological exploration of the subject. However, the intervening experimental years had introduced an element of skepticism. Certainly the concept of 'fact' is more ambiguous than in the Victorian era. Although Woolf claimed that the

⁸ Fannie Ratchford, "A Family of Scribblers," rev. of *The Brontë Story*, by Margaret Lane, *Saturday Review of Literature* 20 June 1953: 22.

"biographer is bound by facts," biographical facts are not like "the facts of science....They are subject to changes of opinion; opinions change as the times change" ("The Art of Biography" 226). Lane, too, acknowledges that some facts are mutable, that "our conception of character has changed considerably since [Gaskell's] day (ix). Fact and interpretation become more blurred. Psychology offers 'facts' about the personality, and conflicting testimonies by witnesses offer versions of truths. Lane writes that "we ask questions and detect motives to which Mrs. Gaskell and her contemporaries would have been deaf and blind" (ix). For example, Lane asks: "But did [Gaskell], so far as we can ever be certain, speak the truth [about Carus Wilson and his Clergy Daughters' School]?" (54); is Carus Wilson a "neurotic obsessed with power" (55); "Was Branwell really Mrs. Robinson's lover, or did his infatuation for her, and his drink and opium-muddled grief, delude him into imagining it?" (169) Her answers are commonsensical and cautious, showing a comprehension of the personalities involved as well as the documentation. Even though Mr Wilson's motives may seem to be good, Lane comments,

He cannot, however, altogether convince a posterity which has been taught to look below the conscious surface, and to accept without flinching the possibility that there may be some very unprepossessing reasons for being righteous. (54-55)

She recognizes, to some degree, the indeterminacy of "truth"; time erases some biases and family constraints and creates a "safer distance" (170) from which to view character more objectively, but it, also, erases the benefits of first-hand knowledge of events, tones, gestures and conventions.⁹ Although distance may permit more candor and, indeed, more access to documents as, for example, in judging events like the relationship between Mrs Robinson and Branwell, it is also restrictive, for, as Lane writes, "at this distance, we can never know the truth" (168). The documents may refute Branwell's story that Mrs Robinson would be dis-inherited if she married

⁹ Interestingly, Lane, herself, misinterprets a piece of evidence because she fails to read correctly the tone of the writing. She cites a prospectus of the Clergy Daughters' School which lists a "Singing and Scourgemistress" under "Assistant Lecturers" and Ventriloquy as a subject to be taught. Lane bases, in part, her "estimate of the character of the place" (56) upon this prospectus. Apparently she did not detect the satiric tone of this prospectus and took it as fact (see Winnifrith, A New Life 22).

him, but there is no evidence that conclusively proves that the two did not have a relationship. Thus, Lane adopts a more hesitant tone than Gaskell. She frequently writes "We can never, perhaps, be sure" (170) or "We cannot be certain" (54), pointing out, for example, that Gaskell "faithfully drew one profile of a face which may have had other aspects" (54). Lane's methodology is neither a return to Victorian certitude, nor a match for the rigorous academic biographies of the sixties and today. She does, however, effectively devise a middle-ground strategy; her text collaborates with Gaskell's text, and her "safer distance" overlays Gaskell's closer distance to the subject.

Lane's collaborative project is, perhaps, more successful in producing an argument and a correction than in producing a "Life." Lane's intent to "[bring] the reader back at every point to [Gaskell's] incomparable text (ix)" produces a split focus (although not a competitive one). In fact, for the first chapter and a half the focus is displaced from Charlotte to Gaskell. Lane's beginning sentence introduces the reader to Gaskell's life "adventure," not Charlotte's: "When Mrs. Gaskell arrived in Haworth one afternoon in July in 1855, she was taking the first step in an adventure of twofold importance" (1). Also, in the act of deconstructing Gaskell's myths, Lane only partially succeeds in constructing her own myth (or version) of Charlotte. In seeking truth "in that interesting middle ground between two points of view" (33), the "two points of view" often take priority over a clear definition of that "middle ground," that space that Lane could call her own version.

Lane is an adjustor rather than a builder of myths and, in the end, the dominant features of Gaskell's version remain even though they are toned down or made more complex. For example, although Lane carefully looks at all the anecdotes about Mr Brontë and criticizes Gaskell for accepting only one version, that of the dismissed nurse (rather than appealing for information to Martha Brown, the regular servant), and though she writes that Mr Brontë was "a more sympathetic character than she [Gaskell] knew" (20), she concludes that Gaskell has "drawn a portrait which, for all its over-dramatic chiaroscuro, conveys an impression of mass and

outline which one feels is true" (20).¹⁰ Similarly she concurs with Gaskell, in broad outline, on other issues. Even though Lane is able to fill in the gaps of Gaskell's portrait with new information she maintains that "Mrs. Gaskell did not make the mistake of painting the Brontës' childhood in too sombre colours" (39), and states that Gaskell understood "with her usual perception" (271) that Charlotte's feelings for Nicholls were ambiguous, that the marriage was both happy and unhappy.

In one area, however, the significance of the early writings in the lives of the Brontës, Lane does more than add a footnote to Gaskell's biography. Here Lane comes closest to creating her own 'myth' about Charlotte's personality although she is indebted to Fannie Ratchford's work on the juvenilia, The Brontës' Web of Childhood, and, in fact, adopts and expands Ratchford's phrase, the "druglike Brontë dream",¹¹ to describe the Brontës' imaginary worlds of their early stories. Mrs Gaskell had only glanced at enough of these writings to convince her that "[Charlotte's] fancy and her language alike run riot, sometimes to the very borders of apparent delirium" (Gaskell 119; Lane 64). Although Lane defends Gaskell, stating that a consideration of these writings "would have taken [Gaskell] outside the scope of her biography" (65), she also states that, "it is certain that Mrs. Gaskell would have shrunk" from "the erotic Byronic landscape" of these writings (59). Hinkley and Bentley both used Ratchford's work before Lane did although they referred to the writing state as daydream-like rather than drug-like. Hinkley reads Charlotte's immersion in her writing as something "normal...but wider, deeper, more varied, inventive and persistent" (Hinkley 19) whereas Bentley, like Lane, sees "grave psychological dangers" in this activity (Bentley 24). Giving this phase the significance of a turning point in their lives, Lane writes that "all four children passed

¹⁰ Although Lane uses the phrase "one feels", she is not, I believe, an impressionist biographer such as Sinclair nor an unscholarly biographer like Langbridge. In this instance she has weighed Gaskell's evidence and compared it to Charlotte's own reports, to Mary Taylor's and to what she herself has discovered about Mr. Brontë's character from his early ambition that took him to Cambridge and from his own writings. At a later point in the biography, when discussing whether one of Emily's poems offers biographical information, she writes that there is "a ring of truth" to it, then quickly adds: "Yet this method of interpreting Emily's poems by their "feeling" is a dangerous one" (201). Although it may be dangerous, what Lane recognizes is that since much evidence and testimony are contradictory or ambiguous interpretations become subjective.

¹¹ Fannie E. Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood (1941; New York: Russell and Russell, 1964) 5.

their entire youth under its influence, and even in maturity remained addicted to it like a drug" (65). She quotes Ratchford who comments that this habit dominated Charlotte's life between 1829 and 1845, "'a period comprehending approximately one-third of Charlotte's life'" (65). Lane developed this view into a thesis about the Brontës' creativity in essays that she wrote for Brontë Society Transactions in 1952 which were later gathered together in a small book entitled The Drug-like Brontë Dream.¹²

Although Lane does not 'shrink' from discussing the early writings, and although she indicates that they influenced the mature work (65), I would argue that in configuring them as drug-like and addictive, and stating that the Brontës were frequently immersed in "trance-like states" (246), she overstates their debilitating force. A glance at Charlotte's activities at the time indicates clearly that she was engaged in life, first as an ambitious pupil, then a governess at Roe Head, and later as a pupil in Brussels. Although at one point Lane, employing a more naturalistic metaphor, describes Charlotte's daydreams as "a forcing-ground [a hot-house] for the imagination"(66), she immediately follows this with a quotation from Bertrand Russell who points out that "when throughout a long life there is no means of relating them to reality [daydreams] easily become unwholesome and even dangerous to sanity" (66). Lane contends that for the Brontës this fantasy world "became a substitute for life" (65). Branwell did not escape this dream world, Lane writes, and though Charlotte did later, it was not before "it had conferred its curious bloom on many areas of her mind" (66). Lane describes the juvenilia as "light, brilliant and interesting" but also "lurid" and says that "there are shapes which in a sense justify the puritanical uneasiness over her work which was betrayed by some of Charlotte Brontë's contemporaries" (59). Lane's repetitions of this "secret world" as "drug-like" (65, 66, 102, 109) or 'addictive' (65, 85, 103) reinforce rather than alleviate Gaskell's uneasiness about this "erotic" (109) period. Lane portrays Charlotte "throbbing" (109) and "trembling" (102), words suggestive of hysteria or insanity, and refers to Charlotte being on the "verge" (109) of a trance, of Branwell being

¹² The four essays in The Drug-like Brontë Dream (John Murray, 1980) were originally given as addresses and published in Brontë Society Transactions in 1952. Lane's conclusion is that all four Brontës "were involved in a profound turning away from, or refusal of, ordinary life...and that they became addicted to their day-dream world as completely as an addict to his drug" (19).

"lunatic" (105), and of both Emily and Charlotte stepping across "the frontier" (102) into a "violent Byronic world" (109). This emotionally charged language reflects, in my opinion, Lane's social and moral context more than it does Brontë's. More recent critics interpret these years in Brontë's life as more self-consciously experimental. Thirty years later, in 1983, Christine Alexander, who has succeeded Ratchford as the authority on the juvenilia, comments that the writings "provide evidence of Charlotte's apprenticeship in writing, of her early awareness of her role as an author and of the formation of her visual imagination."¹³ Though there are examples of an "ambiguous moral tone" (Alexander 229) and an indulgence in "stories of love and sexual passion" (228), Alexander sees these as a working out of emotional needs and ambitions that were denied the Victorian woman. The major biographers to follow Lane, while admitting the "hypnotic attraction" of the dream world as Alexander called it (246), point to Charlotte's ability to live a divided life (Gérin) or, as Christine Alexander does, indicate a stronger connection between the outside world and the inside world. Lane's phraseology is not continued by other biographers.

Similarly, Lane is bothered by another extreme emotional state of mind, that experienced by Charlotte when she visits the Catholic confessional during her last year in Brussels. According to Lane, "Mrs. Gaskell wisely left...alone" the account of the visit because it has a "not altogether agreeable flavour" (156). Although Lane does not repress such material as Gaskell did, she is not entirely comfortable with it. She, in fact, "winc[es]" (162) when reading Charlotte's letters to Heger and sees Villette as a "purg[ing]" (164) of unrequited love. I would argue that in those areas where Charlotte displays intense emotion Lane finds a comfortable way to defuse the erotic content by suggesting that Charlotte is out of touch with reality. Lane, in fact, looks backward to the Romantic poets (that is the Victorian attitude to the Romantics) for an explanation of the Brontës' genius: "Coleridge through opium, Wordsworth in his moments of mystical experience, Blake--have reached levels of intuition and expression with which ordinary life and consciousness have nothing to do" (66). Taking up that "discreet position behind Mrs. Gaskell's shoulder" (as she indicates in her Foreword), Lane finds an image in the drug-like dream phrase that turns

¹³ Christine Alexander, The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 246.

creativity into an unhealthy unconscious activity, just as Gaskell justified the lurid writings with the suggestion that Charlotte unavoidably absorbed and reflected the coarse environment in which she lived. In contrast to Lane's concern with the Brontës' "obsessive daydream" (66) May Sinclair, taking a more modern view, writes that although "their fire [of creativity] consumed them...yet they were not, they could not have been, the sedentary unwholesome little creatures they might seem to be," for they "were kept hard at work" (Sinclair 26). Sinclair sees them, not drugged, but full of "vitality and energy...[and] the lust of literature" (26). Gaskell cannot understand Charlotte's creative world, and Lane, while she acknowledges it, reads it as a world separate from Charlotte's conscious, real world; in one Charlotte exists in a trance-like state, and in the other she functions as a normal woman with domestic, familial and professional duties. Although Lane's version explores more aspects of personality than Gaskell's, including some of Charlotte's flaws such as "an element of acerbity in [her] nature" (172), Lane is still more comfortable with the feminine than with the (so-called) masculine elements.

Margaret Crompton's Passionate Search: A Life of Charlotte Brontë,¹⁴ published two years after Lane's biography, is the only one during these years of moderation (the forties and fifties) to suggest, by title, an exclusive focus on Charlotte. However, like the other biographers of this period, she accentuates Charlotte's relation to her family and friends. Each chapter suggests a thematic organization around a particular relationship, "Charlotte and Branwell" or "Charlotte and Her Sisters" (although she actually proceeds in a traditionally chronological and narrative manner). Again, like the other biographers of this period, she addresses a general audience, assimilates information rather than conducts original research (Harrison being the exception among this group), seeks the middle ground in controversial areas, normalizes the portrait of Charlotte by presenting a harmonized self, and employs cautious, matter-of-fact language. In fact, the trend among these biographers is to normalize Charlotte, to bring to light, without heightening them, various emotional experiences (death, love, family relationships, the creative impulse). Lane, as I have indicated, was an exception in establishing her drug-like

¹⁴ Margaret Crompton, Passionate Search: A Life of Charlotte Brontë (New York: David McKay Company, 1955).

dream thesis about Charlotte's earlier years, although her portrait, in other respects, shows the moderating tendency. Gaskell, who attempted to conventionalize Charlotte, also presented her in that role as larger-than-life, a woman of extraordinary loyalty, courage and talent (although not entirely capable of being "mapped"). The biographers of the forties and fifties attempt to portray a harmonized but a happier and, particularly, a more ordinary personality. Lane, for example, writes:

All their family were, on the contrary, singularly well equipped for being happy at home, and the girls found it not at all impossible to combine their own kind of intellectual life with housework.... (129)

Although these biographers recognize both worlds of the divided plot model (love and intellectual desires), in Lane's terms they have little relationship to one another and in Crompton's terms "some sort of compromise" (239) is necessary.

Reflecting the 1940s and 1950s ideology of peaceful rebuilding (of nations and lives), and a search for domestic and individual harmony, Crompton depicts Charlotte as one who learns to compromise her ideals, and to "[come] to terms with reality" (231). There are numerous descriptions throughout the biography of Charlotte's happiness or enthusiasm including times in Brussels, her visits to London and her marriage. In fact, Crompton's portrayal of Charlotte's death focuses, not on the anguish of death and the early termination of genius, but on Charlotte's achievement of domestic happiness:

Perhaps it was the ideal moment to die. She was completely happy, surrounded by love and tenderness, and with no qualms about a future which might have brought disillusion....

Her lifelong search was over. It is thought that these were her last words--'so happy'. Her father, her husband and Martha Brown were standing at her bedside when, early on the morning of Saturday, March 31, 1855, she died. (241-242)

Crompton seems to suggest here that Charlotte has finally been successful in her lifelong search, a success, however, characterized by moderation--domestic happiness rather than either literary or emotional passion. Death is preferable to a future that might have resulted in disharmony, in rebellion from her husband in order to satisfy

creative urges. Although ostensibly exploring Charlotte's passionate sensibility, Crompton, time and again, through her moderating language, draws Charlotte in very ordinary dimensions. For example, her statement that Charlotte has an imagination "like blotting-paper" (28) is more suggestive of Charlotte's ordinariness than her passionate nature. Within one short paragraph Charlotte's literary relationships are described banally: Lewes's correspondence with her is "meat and drink" (154); she is "eternally grateful" to Mr Williams; and although to Ellen Charlotte is "a closed book" other correspondents are "worthy of [Charlotte's] mettle" (154). In muting the tones in which she describes Charlotte's relationships, Crompton understates the striking aspects of Charlotte's personality. Even Gaskell, as I have previously discussed, comments on Charlotte's assertive, "cavalier" (398) correspondence with Lewes.

Like Lane, Crompton regards Charlotte's passionate nature with some suspicion and uneasiness. As pointed out above she envisions the "ideal moment" as one of domestic happiness although she admits a few pages earlier that Nicholls was not "Charlotte's soul-mate" (239). Crompton believes that Charlotte's passions, dreams, and ambitions are unachievable. In answer to the frequently asked question of whether or not Charlotte "would have rebelled at being swamped under a load of parochial activities" Crompton responds, "Probably there would have been some sort of compromise. For where, after all, in life is there perfection? (239)

Crompton's matter-of-fact approach and language do not reflect Charlotte's intensely passionate sensibility and each of her relationships is only vaguely differentiated. Crompton declares that Charlotte searched for "a complete and all-satisfying intimacy" (168) with Branwell, Emily, M. Heger and Emily, and that the "tragedy" was that these people "failed her" because such passion "could not exist except in her imagination" (168). Yet, Charlotte did not demand the same kind or degree of affection from each of these people. Crompton uses the term, passionate, to encompass "companionship" or "affinity" for Branwell (18), a "friendship" for Ellen (42), as well as a "passionate feeling" (rather than "passionate love") for Heger (114), and a "hot-blooded devotion" to Emily (168). However, as Charlotte also expresses "a passion for politics" (20), for drawing (25), people (51) and the sea (62), the word, itself, loses discriminating exactness and power. At one point happiness

is described as 'complete' (242) and at another point, it is a compensatory reward for accepting reality (231). All in all, the sense of a passionate search is muted by Crompton's mechanical repetition of the phrase, and by her avoidance of a discussion of the novels and the history of their production which would illuminate a more aggressive side of her personality.

The middle ground (in interpretation, documentation, style, and appeal) was the typical space sought by Brontë biographers of the forties and fifties. The same moderate terms used to describe Crompton's biography can be applied to most of these biographies (Harrison's biography being the exception): "it shows an excellent sense of proportion; and is eminently lucid and readable."¹⁵ These terms suggest competence, a rational approach and restraint, but unremarkableness. The reaction against the subjective, psychological and experimental biographies of the twenties and thirties resulted in these practical and sober biographies of the forties and fifties. Margaret Crompton's biography is, perhaps, the one that faded the most quickly as the reviewer in the New Statesman prophesied:

It would be ungenerous to resent Miss Crompton's tour of the overcrowded museum [that is, her biographical exploration of Brontë territory]. She has scrawled nothing profane in the visitors' book, made no offensive suggestion, left no defacing mark (or indeed any mark) behind by which her visit might be remembered. ¹⁶

Biographical criticism itself left little mark. Although as Novarr notes the dominant mood in biography from the late thirties to the mid-fifties was historical, that mood was formulated in the late thirties and, for fifteen years, "dominated ...almost by default, for publication in the area of the criticism of biography was negligible" (97). The discrediting of biography by literary critics also curtailed movement in the genre. In 1942 in the Theory of Literature René Wellek and Austin Warren commented that

¹⁵ F.B. Pinion, A Brontë Companion (London: Macmillan, 1975), 357. He describes the Hansons' work as "a model of lucid compression" (354); Margaret Lane's provides "an excellent introduction to the Brontës....[evincing] good judgement" (355); Phyllis Bentley's work is also "lucidly compressed" and "shows a just sense of proportion" (363). Hinkley and Harrison are somewhat more distinguished by writing, respectively, "pungently" (363) and with "style and wit" (353).

¹⁶ Irving Wardle, "The Road to Haworth," rev. of Passionate Search, by Margaret Crompton. The New Statesman Vol 50 (1955): 762.

biography had no "specifically critical importance" in the study of literature, and that as a genre it is historical and not "specifically literary."¹⁷ They grudgingly allowed that biographical study had some uses: "Biography accumulates the materials for...questions of literary history [such as] the tradition in which the poet was placed, the influences by which he was shaped, the materials on which he drew" (Wellek and Warren 79-80). Winifred Gérin, the next biographer of Charlotte Brontë, brings to the forefront of her study the cultural context that influenced Brontë's writing career. She undertakes a broader and more scholarly study although she does not relinquish the traditional emphasis on the author as genius, nor does she forfeit a concern for biographical style. The "betwixt and between" phase which initially stagnated biography eventually resulted in Gérin's energetic and combined literary and historical approach which has left a very definite mark on Brontë biography.

II. WINIFRED GÉRIN: CHARLOTTE BRONTË: THE EVOLUTION OF GENIUS

Winifred Gérin is known as the Brontë biographer. She has published biographies of all the literary children: Anne (1959), Branwell (1961), Charlotte (1967), and Emily (1971). In addition, Gérin's husband, John Lock, co-authored with W.T. Dixon A Man of Sorrow, a biography of the Rev. Patrick Brontë. In her career as a professional biographer Gérin also wrote a short novelistic biography of Fanny Burney (1961), an historical biography of Horatia Nelson (1970), and two more literary biographies, one on Elizabeth Gaskell (1976) and the other on Anne Thackeray Ritchie (1981).¹⁸

Gérin, like her predecessors of the fifties, explores the space "betwixt and

¹⁷ René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd ed. (1942; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 80, 76.

¹⁸ Winifred Gérin published the following biographies listed in chronological order: Anne Brontë (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1959); Branwell Brontë (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961); The Young Fanny Burney (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961); Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Horatia Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Emily Brontë: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Anne Thackeray Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

between" fact and fiction, but rather than compromising through moderation and caution, she attempts to take advantage of the two extremes. Such an approach was explored by two major biographical theorists of this period, Leon Edel and Paul Murray Kendall.¹⁹ Kendall in The Art of Biography²⁰ notes that what he calls "Superbiography" is particularly representative of contemporary biography. Situated in the middle of his scale of eight types,²¹ "superbiography ... seeks to be both ultimately literary and ultimately scientific" (127). However, he disapproves of this type of biography, in which category he places Leon Edel's Henry James, because the biographer becomes too obtrusive, manipulating chronology and character like an omniscient narrator in a novel. Kendall's ideal biography for which he "can find no convenient term" (147) is characterized by a "heightened perception" growing out of a "liaison with the subject self-consciously cultivated by the biographer as the primum mobile of his enterprise" (148). Adopting many of the same principles as Kendall, such as the bond between biographer and subject and an emphasis on form, Leon Edel in Literary Biography²² describes his ideal biography as the narrative-pictorial or novelistic (83) which "strike[s] a middle course between the long, documented life and the portrait" (89). This approach, which he chooses for his four volume biography of Henry James, "borrow[s] from the methods of the novelist without, however, being fiction," "melt[s] down and refine[s]" documents (87), and "constantly characterizes and comments and analyzes" (89).

Edel and Kendall both emphasize the importance of a sympathetic relationship between the subject and the biographer, a major feature of G erin's biography of Charlotte Bront . In corresponding with her editor during the process of writing her

¹⁹ Although there were other important biographical works after the mid-fifties by such critics as John Garraty, Iris Origo, James L. Clifford, and Mark Schorer, Novarr considers Edel's Literary Biography "the most influential study in the post-World War II years" (117).

²⁰ Paul Murray Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1965).

²¹ Kendall designates eight types of biography: the novel-as biography, fictionalized biography, interpretative biography, superbiography, scholarly biography, research biography, the life-and-times biography and the compilation (126-127).

²² Leon Edel, Literary Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957). Edel designates only three categories for biographies: the chronicle, the pictorial or portrait and the narrative-pictorial or novelistic (83).

biography, Gérin employs language very similar to that used by Edel and Kendall. Edel writes that the biographer "must be warm, yet aloof, involved, yet uninvolved" (7), and Kendall writes that "Brooding over the materials warms them into being, transforms them from subject matter to the subject himself" (148). Both insist that the biographer "must work from feeling" (Kendall 148), although Kendall criticizes Edel for going too far in "seek[ing] imaginatively [through novelistic techniques and psychology] to get inside the skin of the subject" (Kendall 141). Kendall, then, in emphasizing interpretation of character and a necessary bond between biographer and subject, wants more than the strictly scholarly biography, but Edel goes further than Kendall in looking back to Woolf and Strachey for ways to express the inner world through psychoanalysis and novelistic strategies. Kendall's prefers more detachment; the biographer may express himself but "by indirection" (Novarr 149). This difference in emphasis is signified by Kendall's reference to biography as a "craft" (153), and Edel's reference to it as "process" (6).

In Literary Biography Edel attempts to combine the three attributes of biography, fact, interpretation and art, into one definition:

From our mid-century perspective, I would say that the discussion need not be whether biography is a science or an art or even a craft capable of being learned by any serious, intelligent person. It is a process: scientific when it asks the sciences to elucidate whatever they can about the human being and his personality; an art when it uses language to capture human experiences; and requiring all the craftsmanship an individual can command in mastering and disciplining himself to deal with material as rich and varied and mercurial as the mind of man. (6-7)

Edel insists on research (the biographer's table is "piled high with documents" 40); encourages the "critical reading of the works" (41) of the subject; uses science, by which he means psychoanalysis, as a means of understanding the personality of the subject; and shapes his material artistically, believing that "biography can violate chronology without doing violence to truth" (99) and that the biographer can be present in his work, "as omniscient narrator" (83). He writes that, if pressed, he will admit that "much more art than science is involved in the process, since biography deals with emotions as well as with the intellect, and literary biography with those

emotions which give the impulse to literary creation" (7).

Edel is specifically concerned with critical literary biography and therefore includes a section on "Criticism" in which he discusses the biographer's role in interpreting the subject's art. He challenges the "biographical fallacy" arguing that it is only the "inexperienced biographer" (52) who reads the life from the art in a literal way. The biographical critic should not read the subject's work to locate actual locations or persons but to grapple with the author's themes and with his emotional and mental "predilection[s]" (53). Edel writes that "a work cannot be re-dissolved into a life, [but] it can offer us something of the...texture of that life" (55). Walter Jackson Bate's John Keats, which appeared the same year as Gérin's Charlotte Brontë, is a superior example of a critical biography. Contending that too frequently literary criticism and biography have been separated, Bate specifically sets out to show how "organically related" are Keats's "development of his technical craftsmanship" with "the steady growth of qualities both of mind and character."²³ Gérin's subtitle, The Evolution of Genius, signifies her interest, like that of Bate, in "the story of...development" (Bate vii) of her subject, although she is neither as skillful nor as detailed as Bate in analyzing patterns and images in the art which would inform and reflect a development in the mind and character of her subject.

Kendall notes that a significant "characteristic of modern life-writing [is] the wide range of biographical activity" (126). Another type of biography which emerges during this period to exert a great impact upon biographical standards of research is the "academic" biography.²⁴ Not all are as unwieldy and uninspired as Kendall suggests by his term "Behemoth biography" although both Altick and Nadel argue, as well, that the academic biography, characterized by meticulous documentation, is "unadventurous and conservative in approach" (Nadel 113), and that "the essence of a human being is missing from the very pages that in theory are dedicated to setting it forth" (Altick 412). Kendall points out that the "professor-biographer," particularly

²³ Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) vii.

²⁴ In his list of academic biographies of this period Nadel includes Gordon Haight's George Eliot (1968), Mark Schorer's Sinclair Lewis (1961), Herschel Baker's Hazlitt (1962), Arthur and Barbara Gelb's O'Neill (1962), William Riley Parker's Milton (1966), W. Stallman's Stephen Crane (1968) and Carlos Baker's Hemingway (1969) (Nadel 113).

in the United States, has been pressed, "dangerous[ly]" to "worship information as a thing-in-itself, to acknowledge the supremacy of facts and therefore to regard the accumulation of facts, no matter what kind, as the highest good" (119-120). None of these critics dismisses the advantages of the new emphasis on research, and Kendall admits that "both the force of science and the force of literature have turned out to be Janus-headed, malign and beneficial" (117); nevertheless they fear the loss of "artistic satisfaction" (Altick 412). Although not minimizing its contribution to scholarship, Nadel cites Gordon Haight's George Eliot: A Biography (1968) as an example of the academic biography which avoids interpretation of personality and analysis of the author's work. Such academic, or "source" biographies as Altick refers to them (412), are a dominant form during this period and G erin's biography shows the influence of this scholarly approach.

In combining fact, craft and art G erin's biography reflects Edel's multi-faceted approach, although it is not as rigorous in documentation, as psychoanalytical, as artistically innovative or as critical of the literature. G erin was not an academic like Haight, Bate and Edel, and, furthermore, her biography is aimed at a more general audience than theirs. On a smaller scale, however, she attempts to bring to life-writing both the skills of a researcher and the empathy of a romanticist, to be both "involved yet uninvolved" (Edel 7).

G erin indicates her multi-faceted approach to biography in her "Introduction":

This familiarity with Charlotte Bront e's background, this wider study of her unpublished works, has allowed, I hope, a closer, more continuous examination of her life than any since Mrs. Gaskell published the first biography. (xvi)

Her "familiarity" suggests an identification with the subject; her "wider study" shows a concern for literary criticism (although primarily of the juvenilia) and for "facts" and "influences" (xiv-xv); and her "continuous examination" implies a thematic shaping of her material into the key theme of Charlotte's "evolution" (G erin's subtitle) or development. These approaches do not always sit easily with one another, and G erin's critics have been uncomfortable with her diverse strategies. Although G erin's biography is generally considered "the definitive" work on Charlotte (at least

up to Fraser's biography in 1988), as Katherine Frank notes in her article on "The Brontë Biographies" G erin has been unable to fully satisfy either "romantic" or "scholarly" traditions with "her attempted fusion":

The "cult" blames her dullness and conservatism, and also the excessive topographical detail and extraneous historical background that clutter all her lives....

And yet the Bront  "industry" of academe is not satisfied either.... detractors condemn the superficiality and scantiness of G erin's critical insights. (Frank 149-150).

Frank does not mention another major difficulty that academic critics have with G erin's work, her romantic identification with the subject reflected in her emotional rhetoric. The difficulties of producing this "fusion," and, indeed, the wisdom in attempting it, are underlined by the mixed reviews it received.

Charlotte Bront  evoked, more than any other Bront  biography, a disparity of responses from reviewers,²⁵ indicating a critical uncertainty about G erin's strategies. Inga-Stina Ewbank notes approvingly that G erin "works from a loving identification with her subject" (106) whereas the reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement congratulates her for the opposite: "she keeps her distance; she has not allowed herself to become too much involved emotionally with her subject" (675). P.N. Furbank (the biographer of E.M. Forster), expecting a more psychoanalytical approach, is critical of G erin's lack of "romancing" and feels that the biography is "somehow--too reasonable," that G erin should have investigated "behind Patrick Bront 's door" (86). Barbara Hardy comments that "the juxtaposition of fact and fiction [is] wisely avoided" (241) by G erin, but another critic says, "one can see just how closely, in creating her heroines, Charlotte was portraying herself, or her view of herself" (Eimerl 48). Most critics agree that G erin's biography exhibits "tremendous factual researches" (Hardy 240) and "accuracy" (Ewbank 108) although

²⁵ The reviewers cited here are listed in order of my reference to them: Inga-Stina Ewbank, rev. of Charlotte Bront . The Evolution of Genius, by Winifred G erin, Review of English Studies 20 (1969): 106-8; "To Love and Be Loved," rev. of Charlotte Bront . The Evolution of Genius, TLS 27 July, 1967: 675; P.N. Furbank, "Behind Patrick Bront 's door," rev. of Charlotte Bront , by Winifred G erin, Listener 78 (1967): 86; Barbara Hardy, rev. of Charlotte Bront : The Evolution of Genius, by Winifred G erin, Nineteenth-Century Fiction 23 (1968-69): 240-3; Sarel Eimerl, "Story by Cinderella," rev. of Charlotte Bront  by Winifred G erin, Reporter 22 Feb. 1968: 48-52.

Tom Winnifrith in The Brontës and Their Background attacks Gérin for unscholarliness. Questioning Gérin's reliability he points out, for example, that, although she did "give us a new text" of Charlotte's first letter to Ellen Nussey, "neither text nor date is correct" (BB 6) because she did not always consult originals. Furthermore, Winnifrith comments that "it is instinct rather than evidence" (BB 5) which leads Gérin to turn hypotheses into certainty. Yet, Ewbank writes that Gérin "keeps a tight rein on speculation" (106).

The fact that scholars have praised Gérin's biography indicates to Winnifrith "that we do not have any proper standards in Brontë scholarship" (BB 5). Certainly these comments indicate the very different expectations that scholars (let alone general readers) have of biography, for many of these reviewers are academic Victorianists (Ewbank, Hardy, Winnifrith) or professional biographers (Furbank). Winnifrith's standard is that of documentary biography, whereas Furbank, for example, argues from the standard of psychological biography. These mixed reviews are indicative of the erosion of the notion of definitiveness in biography and of a challenge to the concept of a "proper" balance of fact, form and interpretation. As well, they reveal Gérin's shifting methodology, at times involved and at other times detached. As the critic from The Times writes (quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition): "[Winifred Gérin] is a scholarly and exact biographer. Yet her book holds the reader as closely as a novel".²⁶ Gérin's agenda was to attempt such a "fusion," an approach, that, even if unsettling to literary critics, was reflective of the theoretical positions of the most influential biographical critics of the era.

1. "In Search of Facts" (xiv)

Winifred Gérin had already published Anne Brontë in 1959 and Branwell Brontë in 1961 when she wrote to Oxford University Press in June 1964 looking for a publisher for her new biography of Charlotte. Her previous publisher, Nelson, had altered their publishing policy, and now preferred more commercial, popular publications than Gérin's scholarly works. As is evident from her letter to Oxford

²⁶ "Working the Brontë Mine," rev. of Charlotte Brontë by Winifred Gérin, The Times 20 Jly. 1967: 13.

University Press, she considers her new biography a suitable publication for "a University Press [rather] than a commercial firm" because of "the specialisation...its length, and necessarily full Notes, Appendices, etc":

In writing Charlotte I have had not only the usual access to the MSS in Haworth, the British Museum and (through photostat copies) with those in the USA, the valuable help of direct descendants of people whose influence was paramount in her life, viz: the Heger family in Brussels, where I spent some time tracing most interesting data concerning her sojourn there; the Gaskell family; the descendants of her publishers, Smith, Elder; the collaterals of her close friends the Taylors, so that the material for this book--I can fairly claim is new and not a mere re-statement of previous biographies.²⁷

It is evident that scholarship is one of the rationales for her biography. Gérin undertook extensive original research and by 1964 when she wrote this letter she had spent nearly ten years collecting Brontë materials. Her list of "Sources of Evidence" and her "Bibliography of General Works Consulted" (600-607) is an impressive record of unpublished and published materials. Much more diligently and extensively than any previous biographer, Gérin obtained information from official documents (birth, death, and marriage records); school records; catalogues of the sale of the house contents of the Parsonage and Ponden Hall (a near-by manor house whose library furnished many books for the Brontës); topographical records; juvenilia and diary manuscripts of all the Brontë children; and newspapers of the period, including those from Brussels. Gérin, in fact, emphasizes the Brussels period and does considerable research in Brussels, as indicated by her separate bibliography of twenty-five items on the Heger family and Monsieur Heger's reputation as a teacher (606-607). She considers that Charlotte's letters to M. Heger "still remain the greatest single contribution to our knowledge of Charlotte Brontë" (xiv) because they reveal Charlotte's capacity for intense feeling and the development of her "philosophy of suffering" (288).

Gérin is meticulous in recording factual details about Brontë locations. She

²⁷ Unpublished correspondence held in the archives of the Oxford University Press and consulted by kind permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of the Press. Letter in Charlotte Brontë file, 17 June 1964. Hereafter referred to as OUP.

describes extensively, for example, the exterior and the interior of Roe Head and provides the history of ownership through a search of title deeds (58). Few physical details escape her attention, from the two-foot thickness of the walls of the Cowan Bridge school and the cost of alterations (£2,333.17s.9d.) to the school (3), to descriptions of the Belgian countryside, the Pensionnat and its surrounding streets and buildings (188). A documentary biographer would be content with the information conveyed by these details, but Gérin justifies her fact-gathering, arguing that "true details...however pedestrian they may sound, are essential in recapturing the atmosphere..." (7).

Gérin is the first biographer to explore the cultural environment of the Brontës in any great detail. She records the books in Mr Brontë's library (24), the newspapers and magazines to which they had access (23) and, in particular detail, the engravings of John Martin which appeared in the annuals during the 1820s and 1830s. For example, Charlotte copied Martin's "Sadak in search of the Waters of Oblivion" which appeared in The Keepsake of 1828 (43). According to Gérin, Martin supplied twenty-seven illustrations between 1826 and 1837 and many of these, if not copied by the children, were described in detailed notes. Gérin, whose aim is to show Charlotte's "creative development" (43), indicates the decisive influence of Martin upon Charlotte's "visual power" (42), her sense of "structural reality" (46) and her creation of passionate characters such as Rochester (53). Again, using records of the Brontë library, she locates the roots of the juvenilia in such sources as Byron (47), The Arabian Nights (45), Blackwood's (47), Moore's Life of Byron (51), and William Finden, an engraver who illustrated the works of Byron (49). Later on in the biography, Gérin notes Charlotte's interaction with various significant literary figures--writers, publishers, and patrons--and often provides brief biographical sketches such as the one on Harriet Martineau (408-410). Although information about Charlotte's circle of friends constitutes a "wider examination," to use her word, than has been previously done, these sketches are often quite perfunctory, adding details about the figure's family, salary, and activities, but only minimal details about the literary career and influence. Except for quoting Charlotte's first letter to Martineau in which she remarks that "'Deerbrook' ranks with the writings that have really done him [Curren Bell] good" (399), Gérin does not elaborate on Martineau's

cultural influence on Charlotte.

There are occasions, however, when Gérin employs a more impressionistic than documentary approach. For example in treating the issue of religion, Gérin emotionally dramatizes, rather than gives evidence of, the oppressive religious atmosphere instilled, she believes, by Aunt Branwell upon the young children:

The children's early religious training was in the hands of their aunt....By its deep impress on hypersensitive imaginations it shocked, it frightened, it allured....Their response was to [drive] all thought of it underground. There it lay coiled, a black Cocytus, from which they withdrew their shuddering gaze. (33)

This subject had been treated more historically and moderately in her earlier biography, Anne Brontë (1959), where she provided historical background, indicated contradictions in Aunt Branwell's own religious practices (like her love of luxury), and described more fully aspects of the Methodist Magazine, the journal subscribed to by Aunt Branwell. Rather than repeat or expand this "data" (35) in Charlotte Brontë, Gérin simply footnotes a reference to her first biography. Tom Winnifrieth who details "the influence of religion on the Brontës" (BB 28) in two chapters in The Brontës and Their Background comments that Gérin seems "unable to unravel the complexities of Victorian religious sects" (29). Her lack of understanding along with her reluctance to repeat or expand the "data" results in an overly emotional portrait of Aunt Branwell, making her responsible for Charlotte's feelings of hopelessness. It is doubtful that the effect on the children was as devastating as Gérin's rhetoric suggests. Rather than documenting the complexities of the religious issue, Gérin is more intent on creating a close and sympathetic relationship with her subject through the imitation of Charlotte's own style of writing and on developing her theme of the "division of soul" (35). Her point is that Charlotte's conscience, thus dominated by a repressive religious belief and, indeed, "victim" (35) to it all her life, was always suspicious of the delight she found in her creative urges. In this instance, Gérin's attempt at creating emotional closeness with her subject interferes with the aim of a "wider study" that she had proposed.

In her "Introduction" Gérin states that "the one reliable source of truth upon

Charlotte Brontë are the letters of Charlotte herself..." (xiv), but in her initial discussion of them in Chapter V she writes that "it is well to recognize at once that the correspondence of Charlotte Brontë and Ellen Nussey, invaluable as it is to any study of the former's life, is a deceptive document which leaves the essentials unsaid" (75). Gérin provides a valuable assessment of Ellen's home and personality, one that certainly influences our reading of the correspondence. She points out, convincingly, that Ellen offered her friendship at a particularly vulnerable point in Charlotte's adolescence and that the friendship was based almost solely on a religious, moral need in Charlotte rather than on any literary or intellectual needs. As is commonly known, Charlotte kept her writing ambitions secret from Ellen as long as she could, and even corrected proofs for *Jane Eyre* while visiting Ellen without mentioning to her that the manuscript was a novel soon to be published. Gérin concludes: "Long after the secret was out and she had become a famous novelist, to Ellen her true self remained unknown" (75). Gérin is aware, then, that even with a so-called "source of truth", the biographer can be close to the facts "of the outer circumstances of Charlotte's life" (75) but far removed from the truth of her subject's inner life.

Charlotte's letter to Ellen of 21 July 1832 in which she describes the "monotonous course" (81) of her life prompts another cautionary note from Gérin. She points out that Charlotte is not telling "the whole truth" (81). Charlotte, she says, has an ability "to live upon two planes" (81). While she may be describing a boring existence to Ellen, she was involved in a creative "world of fantasy" (80), was writing poetry, and was enjoying the companionship of her sisters and brother. For Gérin, then, the 'facts' about Charlotte's mental state at the time can only guardedly be assumed from her letters to Ellen.

This is a valuable insight, and one that certainly must qualify the assertion in her "Introduction" that the letters are "the one reliable source of truth" (xiv).²⁸ Unfortunately Gérin does not explore this area with any thoroughness although in one

²⁸ Winnifrith has reservations about Gérin's accuracy on a different level noting, for example, that her dating of letters between 1836 and 1838 is uncertain, that she does not consistently use either the Shakespeare Head Life and Letters or Shorter, and that she does not seem to have checked with originals very thoroughly (BB 221, note 16). Without minimizing the importance of textual accuracy, it is interesting to note that Winnifrith does not question, as Gérin does here, the inherent deceptiveness or unreliability of the content of letters due to the relationship between the correspondent and the respondent.

crucial area, Charlotte's letters to Heger, she again briefly indicates her reservations about the reliability of letters. Although Charlotte's letters to Heger still "defy interpretation" (284) most biographers read them as unmitigated revelations of passion. However, Gérin suggests that definitive interpretation is compromised by the fact that the letters are "couched in a language which, being foreign, might say more than it was meant to say" (261). Charlotte's letters might appear "crystal clear as the language of passion" (261) to the Hegers,²⁹ but, in Gérin's view, they were only an expression of intense friendship on Charlotte's part. Gérin's intent here is not to explore the issue of unreliability of interpretation, but to argue for a different reading, a non-sexual interpretation of Charlotte's attraction. That Heger himself inspired intense, one might say exaggerated or theatrical, responses both in person and in letter is testified to by Frederika MacDonald, a former pupil of his and a biographer of Charlotte,³⁰ and there is evidence that he wrote warmly to other students. Gérin cites two of his letters to another pupil, Meta Mossman, in which he describes the "affection" she has "inspired in him" (262) and their "communication between two distant hearts" (263). Thus, Gérin interprets Charlotte's letters more metaphysically than sexually or passionately: Charlotte was capable of a "degree of feeling...in excess of the conventional limit" and "what she now asked of her friend [Heger] was a transcendental, God-like love, present though unseen, felt though intangible, enfolding though removed" (285). Gérin is not lead to this interpretation by "prudery," as Moglen claims, although "sentimentality" (Moglen 67) may have influenced her view.³¹ Yet, in suggesting that the French language of the letters compromises interpretation, that Heger, himself, evoked an intense correspondence

²⁹ As Gérin indicates, however, even the Hegers did not respond in the same way; M. Heger tore up the letters, and casually wrote notes on one, whereas Madame recovered the letters and pieced them together (264).

³⁰ Frederika MacDonald, The Secret of Charlotte Brontë (London: T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1914) 82, 214.

³¹ I would argue that Gérin's preference for Emily causes her to blur Charlotte and Emily in this instance and to see Charlotte responding more as Emily might. Evidence for Gérin's preference comes from two sources: a letter in the archives at OUP (23 June 1965) in which she says that "readers, who greatly liked my books on Anne and Branwell, thought I had not enough sympathy with Charlotte, and doubted my capacity for dealing fairly with her life"; interview (21 July 1992) with John Lock, former husband of Gérin, who states that Gérin's favourite of all the Brontës was Emily.

and, more significantly, suggesting that with these letters Charlotte "for the first time...spoke with eloquence; more, she spoke with authority which entirely reversed their [hers and the Hegers'] roles" (261), Gérin is opening the way to a rich area of exploration. In fact, Fraser in her biography (1988) investigates more thoroughly (Fraser 212, 214) how the rhetoric of the letters could be misleading about the intensity of the relationship.

However, in another situation of intense emotion, that involving Branwell's deterioration, Gérin does not consider that Charlotte wrote anything but the truth to Ellen. Gérin refers to Charlotte's statements, such as "Branwell offers no prospect of hope" and "I wish I could say one word in his favour, but I cannot, therefore I will hold my tongue" (298) as examples of "bitterest scorn" (296) and "condemnation" (298). Like Benson, Gérin is harshly critical of Charlotte's treatment of Branwell during the two and a half years of his decline. She writes, "Not once in any preserved statement of hers did she express doubt of the justice of the accusations made, or faith in Branwell's repentance or ability to reform, or incline to sympathize with his sufferings" (296). It is true that Charlotte did not express in the letters much sympathy for Branwell (although it seems equally true that Branwell was guilty and that he made little, if any, attempt to reform). However, Gérin does not consider that the emotion she does express might be misleading even though she has previously indicated that Charlotte's excessive "degree of feeling roused for any object" (283) may mislead readers of the Heger letters. Possibly these letters to Ellen express frustrations and disillusionments that were not otherwise verbalized at home. Perhaps, too, aware of Ellen's moral and pious standards, Charlotte consciously or unconsciously condemned Branwell more fervently to her than to others for his weakness of spirit and his dissipation through drugs and alcohol.

Gérin is unusually firm in reading these letters as un pitying and scornful. She states that Charlotte's condemnation "never lightened throughout the two and a half years of Branwell's decline" and that it was "immediate, certain and complete" (296). Because Gérin has earlier urged reading the letters with critical distance, it is surprising not to discover here, at a moment of significant character analysis, some moderation. Fraser who writes that Charlotte found Branwell disgusting and "could not find it in her to pity him" (263) also writes that "It was Charlotte, always closest

to him and the practical organiser of the home, who took the brunt of his behaviour..." (236). Lane, likewise attempts to read the letters more in the context of the dreadful burden he had become, suggesting that Charlotte said the words "that the others left unsaid" (172). Admitting "an element of acerbity" in Charlotte's nature, she believes she has "been much blamed for her evident lack of sympathy" (172). Such different interpretations indicate that the context of the event, the expectations of the letter recipient, the tone of the letters, and the potential masking of true emotions, create pitfalls to any exact reading of letters.

In her "search of facts" Gérin, with some success, has fulfilled her aim of a "wider" and a "closer" study. Nevertheless, the above discussion has shown, I believe, that facts alone (costs, physical locations) do not convey a "Life", and that there are few absolutely "reliable source[s] of truth" which are not compromised by the nature of the source itself (in this case, the letters) and by inevitable interpretation by the biographer.

2. The Relationship of the Biographer to the Subject

In spite of her emphasis on "intensive research" (OUP 17 June 1964) Gérin believes, like Edel and Kendall, that her personal affinity with her subject legitimately and constructively informs her reading of the letters and her understanding of her subject. Kendall claims that the type of biography most representative of modern life-writing "springs from a simulated life-relationship" (Kendall 147), and this simulation is decidedly aided by an immersion in the subject's "locale" (150):

The biographer opens himself to all that places and things will tell him, in his struggle to visualize, and to sense, his man in being.

Deepest of all, the particular kind of biographer of whom I am speaking, cherishes, I believe, a conviction--call it a romantic quirk, if you will--that where the subject has trod he must tread, what the subject has seen he must see, because he thus achieves an indefinable but unmistakable kinship with his man. (151)

Gérin's "Introduction" echoes those beliefs: "Above all, it seems to me, the biographer of Charlotte Brontë should know the horizons that swept around her home;

the tremendous skies and illimitable moors that enlarged her vision and experience" (xvi). Gérin had moved to Haworth in 1955, bought a house overlooking the Parsonage, and had immersed herself in the Brontë environment. For example, she bought a Yorkshire dresser made in 1801, a significant date for her, because of the opening of Wuthering Heights: "1801--I have just returned from a visit to my landlord...."³² In the Preface to her first biography, Anne Brontë, Gérin wrote of the importance of surrounding herself with Brontë "relics": "By such close contacts has something of the spirit of that family and of this place been able, I like to think, to enter into the composition of this book" (Anne Brontë viii). In appealing to Oxford University Press to publish her biography she concludes her argument with reference to her particular affinity for her subject:

My closeness to the Yorkshire scene (and also for that matter of Brussels where I have frequently spent long periods) has brought the reality of CB's life and work all the more vividly alive for me" (OUP 17 June 1964).

Gérin puts a great deal of emphasis on portraying a location and its atmosphere, and in her "Sources of Evidence" includes a list of locations she visited, headed by the note that topographical and local information was "derived on the spot" (601). Gérin stretches the boundaries of "Evidence" to include what her own eyes saw when she visited a place. In some instances, then, she inserts herself into the text as a witness who has reliable information and, at the same time, superimposes the present onto the past.

For example, when describing Roe Head Gérin equates what she sees with what Charlotte saw and, furthermore, suggests how Charlotte would have felt about such experience:

The view, with which Charlotte would become so familiar, held beauties for her eyes despite the chimneys and the smoke. There were river-vapours rising in the valley, and the exposed highway upon which from so far off could be seen the country drays, the curricles, and the riders as they passed to and fro between Huddersfield and Leeds. In contrast to the nobility of the

³² Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, ed. William M. Sale (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963) 13.

unchanging moors about her home, there was a stirring and restless energy infusing the Roe Head scene that opened her mind to worlds unsuspected in her reading. (58)

Besides the factual detail provided here, the reader senses Gérin's presence integrating past and present, identifying with Charlotte as she views the river-vapours, and then stepping back, in the last line, to an omniscient position.

Another recent Brontë biographer, Edward Chitham, writing on Emily Brontë disagrees with this approach and indicates clearly where he places such research: "There is a third category, between fact and theory. This includes places, objects and people we know Emily must have seen, but of which we have no independent record."³³ He carefully qualifies his own place descriptions by saying that Emily 'must have seen', or 'would have seen', whereas Gérin often eliminates this distancing mechanism. While it may be safer to announce such authorial reconstruction of a scene, most readers of Gérin's passage would recognize it as the biographer's composition. Strictly speaking, of course, this is not fact, for there is no way of knowing exactly what Charlotte saw or what she felt. Gérin's approach, though based on fact and research, is more "romantic" (as Kendall referred to it) than Chitham's documentary approach, and she builds the close relationship between biographer and the subject through the re-construction of the subject's physical environment.

From having lived in Charlotte's locale, and read so carefully her letters and her fiction, Gérin argues that her closeness to her subject gives her a sense of Charlotte's inner nature. As Edel pointed out the fiction can offer a "texture" (55) of the subject's life, and Gérin, in her long letter of 23 June 1965 to her editor at Oxford University Press, protested that she knew the "texture" of Charlotte's thought:

Another point where we obviously disagree is where I describe something subjectively, and you have replaced it with an objective equivalent. This does not always convey the truth, as far as CB is concerned...I have described the return home after Cowan Bridge, as she experienced it--not as an established fact. I have far more closeness to CB's reactions to things, through having read her unpublished MS of 20 odd years of childhood and youth, than of the

³³ Edward Chitham, A Life of Emily Brontë (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 2.

objective aspect of her circumstances; it is as she responded to them, that I must speak; and this I must honestly convey, even if it appears biased (OUP 23 June 1965)

In the Cowan Bridge episode referred to in her letter G erin argues that she can determine with some authority how Charlotte felt about the "radical changes" (18) in the home caused by the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth. This 'truthful' view of Charlotte's return home from Cowan Bridge is partially gleaned from a reading of an early manuscript in which a character, Jane Moore, describes her horror at having to kiss the dead corpse of her sister. G erin believes that Charlotte based this story on her own emotional experience: "In the fragment of a story written in her teens Charlotte reverted to the experience that awaited her on her return from Cowan Bridge: the death and burial of Elizabeth" (17). Using the details of the story, G erin attempts to recreate for the reader the emotional effect upon Charlotte of the deaths of her sisters, Maria and Elizabeth. Fiction and life are not absolutely equated, however, for G erin distinguishes between the "childish and volatile heart" (17) of the character and the "maturity and intensity" of Charlotte's feelings. Continuing her attempt to recreate the emotional atmosphere, G erin imitates Charlotte's childhood voice momentarily: "He was no longer the same keen companionable Papa she had known before..."(19). Thus, to convey the inner world of her subject, her "reactions to things," G erin moves away from the "objective equivalent" that her editor requested and employs interior dialogue and evidence from the fiction.

Although in the above passage G erin has moved into subjective interpretation, she has not absolutely dissolved life and art. The use of fiction as autobiographical fact is the most contentious issue in Bront e biography, and to confuse fiction with fact has been, in Winnifrith's opinion, the greatest failing of all Bront e biographers. Edel, on the other hand, believes that good biography challenges these boundaries and that fictional images can be analyzed to reveal the subject's mental patterns. G erin is not so psychoanalytical nor so sophisticated as Edel in analyzing "recurrent images" in the fiction, but, for example, she does suggest that the unravelling of the plot of *Villette* suggests Charlotte's own release from "the delusions of adolescence" (508). The solving of the mystery of the ghostly nun, the substitution of Paul Emanuel for Graham Bretton as the love interest in the third volume, and the unhappy ending all

suggest that Charlotte has come to terms with romantic and unattainable love in her own life (namely George Smith and M. Heger), and indicates her acceptance of "the lesson of real life" (510). However, G erin does erase the boundaries between fact and fiction when she states, too definitively, that Charlotte could only write Lucy's story one way since "Lucy's life was [Charlotte's] and Lucy's feelings" (509).

Similar serious confusions occur in the Cowan Bridge episode when G erin equates rather than relates Charlotte to one of her characters. For example, when describing the hardships endured by Charlotte and her sisters at Cowan Bridge, she writes, "as Charlotte recorded, the children 'set out cold...arrived at church colder...'" (9). However, this is a line from Jane Eyre and G erin adds a sentence of her own and then a few more from Jane Eyre before providing the footnote for the source which might easily be overlooked. G erin breaks her documentary contract with the reader by suggesting that this is a "record" and that Charlotte, not Jane Eyre, experienced it. G erin's implicit assumption is that Jane Eyre, a fiction, has the same authority as any other document. Throughout this section G erin writes that "Charlotte recorded" (8) or "she recalled" (8) followed by a quotation from Jane Eyre, only noted as such in a footnote. Although G erin, at one point, corroborates the details of dress and routine described in Jane Eyre with those recorded in the actual school's records, G erin too easily allows the reader to assume that Jane Eyre's account is Charlotte's.

Fiction, I believe, can be useful as a biographical source, but I would argue that the biographer should create a clearly designated and appropriate distance from it for the reader. Some of G erin's examples are compelling and intuitive but need to be contextualized as speculation rather than fact. Ruth Hoberman in Modernizing Lives writes that novelistic biographers "tend to use the subject's own writing as a way of getting at thoughts and emotions....The method works best...when the tone is not so judgemental and the analysis more tentative" (Hoberman 91). In fact, in G erin's case the problem is compounded by the fact that she is not strictly speaking a novelistic biographer, although she does use novelistic strategies at times. A more consistent novelistic biographer would have defined for the reader his or her more speculative relationship with the evidence whereas G erin blurs the boundaries by straddling both fact and fiction. Because G erin's biography is filled with factual

documentation, the expectation about evidence on reading a phrase such as "Charlotte Brontë recorded" is similar to that of reading the "school registers record" (15); however, the first statement is a subjective autobiographical reading of Jane Eyre, the second, an actual school record. Although in actuality the latter may be no more reliable than the former, theoretically it is, and such differentiation of materials is part of the contract the biographer establishes with the reader.

3. The Expressivist Approach³³

As well as developing an empathy for the subject through familiarity with the locale and the fiction, Gérin believes that the biographer must transmit this "warmth" through style. Gérin's editor, however, objected to this expressivist approach. Singling out her emotional climax and claims for Villette, he wrote,

...they seem to me to raise prominently the main issue in our discussion of your book--the fact that great sympathy for your subject has been transmuted during the course of writing into what will certainly be seen as a sensational approach. (OUP 15 July 1965)

What she called necessary "warmth" (OUP 23 June 1965), he referred to as a "rhetorical" or "sensational approach." She was concerned that her book would "lose its warmth" and that her "sympathy with Charlotte" would be jeopardized if her "Brontë expressions" and "passages expressing feeling" were eliminated (OUP 23 June 1965). She insisted that certain "Brontë expressions" should stay in the text because they "convey the person and the period so much better than modern terms can do" (OUP 23 June 1965). In this letter Gérin successfully argued that her phrase "recollected rapture" (24) used to describe Branwell's "remembrances of reading 'Blackwood's'" (OUP 23 June 1965) should be kept in the text because it conveyed the feeling of the era. In this instance she attempts to step into Branwell's world: "Few boys remembering their school-days in later life could write with such a

³³ Hoberman uses the term "expressivist biography" (84) to indicate the presence of the narrator in the biography, including self-expression, "attention-getting style" (84), and empathy with the subject.

recollected rapture of their lessons" (24). This phrase, I believe, does suggest the past-ness of the era. However, in my opinion, there are occasions when Gérin employs Brontë expressions at an inappropriate time, and draws attention to a past-ness when she means to reflect her own position and era as a biographer in the 1960s. For example, Gérin employs antiquated language and rhythms in the following: "On the morrow invention would proceed apace. Thus, by day and by night the ceaseless plot was spun" (32); "The proximity of the sea being once ocularly demonstrated..."(156); and "in the presence of the man who had come to engage her troth...(469). I would argue that in these examples, Gérin has mis-appropriated a Victorian style and has disarranged the relationship between the reader and the biographer.

Gérin also generates "warmth" and identification with her subject through her use of Brontë image patterns. For example, she develops an extended metaphor around Charlotte's expression, "The Burning Clime," a reference to the fantastical world of Angria:

...Charlotte began to realize that the...excitement and heat of the phantasmal world of her childhood--the 'Burning clime' as she called it--was a serious threat...Bravely she determined to combat its power, as if aware that the flame if unchecked would overpower her. Every influence of her formative years had fanned it, and try as she might there remained a furnace smouldering inside her, perpetually ready to leap into flame. Something of the vibration of intense heat that is visible to the naked eye in a scorching summer day would always palpitate from the pages of Charlotte Brontë. (40)

Having absorbed the fire imagery of Jane Eyre and Villette, the juvenilia, and the letters, Gérin uses it to convey Charlotte's interior. With such language she transmits her view of Charlotte as a much more explosive or rebellious personality than that depicted by Gaskell. She consistently keeps this pattern before the reader, applying to Charlotte such words as "flame" (296), "kindling" (173), and "conflagration" (240). In most instances, Gérin is cautious in her autobiographical reading of the fictional patterns and does not "re-dissolve", to use Edel's word, the work into the life. Thus, although not impeccably as an example above ("Lucy's life was [Charlotte's]") has illustrated, Gérin maintains some distance between the subject and

her creations, presenting Charlotte as similar to, but not the same as, Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe. Both fictional characters have "soul[s] made of fire"³⁴ and Charlotte, in her letters, admits to being possessed by a "fiery imagination that at times eats [her] up" (Gérin 99). Gérin's Brontë-like language aims at interpreting Charlotte through her own images and symbols which, I believe, as a speculative strategy has its place when employed sensitively and cautiously. To convey the "highly charged atmosphere in which [the Brontës] grew up" (40), Gérin employs a corresponding highly charged rhetoric. However, the danger in appropriating the author's style is that the biographer may over-step the fine line between revealing the subject and revealing the biographer. In the above example, by over-elaborating to the point that "burning" is echoed five or six times in three sentences, and by seeking to define "the vibration of intense heat" in her own terms, Gérin draws attention to herself rather than to Charlotte and the passage sounds almost parodic.

Gérin adopts other Brontë-like images such as those of storms, battle, exile or imprisonment, tyranny, the bitter or poisoned cup of life, and flight. These seem to work most successfully when they are used to evoke a feeling or a mood, rather than when they are over-worked into a lengthy explanation of character. In a more subtle example, commenting on the trauma of three deaths within eight months in the Brontë family, Gérin employs storm imagery reminiscent of Charlotte's own style: "The storm had not passed, only receded; already the crack of its return was in her ears" (379). In this unobtrusive reference to Anne's imminent death, Gérin keeps her distance, expressing sympathy, looking inward at her subject's mood, but restraining her analysis. Flight is a major pattern in Gérin's biography with Charlotte taking "flight" from Haworth or, mentally, fleeing reality to find release in her writing. Gérin titles one chapter "First Flight" and another, borrowing the phrase from one of Charlotte's letter to Ellen, "The Wish for Wings." Brontë herself employs patterns of flight in her fiction; Jane Eyre is a prime example with her "drear flight and homeless wandering" and her "panting to return" (*Jane Eyre* 282). Although Gérin does not explore the connections between Brontë's use of the flight-return pattern in her fiction and Charlotte's life-pattern, her "strong wish for wings" (174) alternating

³⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 229.

with her "wish to go home" (237), G erin's adopted rhetoric, when held in control, enhances the feeling for and understanding of Charlotte's inner world.

However, G erin's "sensational" rhetoric and narrative obtrusiveness increase as she nears the end of her biography, and her dramatization of Charlotte's death troubled her editor. Pointing out that Charlotte herself had noted how the equinox strained her nerves and body, G erin associates Charlotte's illness and death with "an almost psychic response to the elements" (565). G erin does not ignore the purely physical explanations, consumption and pregnancy, although these lose centrality because of the prominence of the psychic explanation. G erin's style, largely restrained and documentary, as she leads into the death scene, abruptly changes into an emotional, dramatic mode:

The March gales had come in, and to those who know the district their gathering force is a phenomenon not to be underrated. Their mounting fury rocks the sky and shudders in the hollows of the hills; every object in their path is swept aside; the waterfalls are tossed into the air, the rocky boulders hurled into the beck, the solitary trees on the bare hillsides are tattered and torn. In the narrow village streets the windows rattle in their frames, the wooden shutters crash, the chimneys roar, and the very key-holes are a vent for eerie cries. To stand between the front and back doors of the old houses in Haworth at such a time is to hear banshee voices shrieking in the gale.

Well did Charlotte know these voices....

Such a summons she heard now. (564-565)

More than a merging with her subject, this is a usurping. G erin, as one of "those who know the district," appropriates the experience as her own. Inga-Stina Ewbank describes G erin's style as an imitation of Bront e's "slightly hysterical breathlessness" (Ewbank 107), and this passage, with its hyperbolic writing, is an example. G erin moves from the "warm" approach to the "sensational approach" and loses sight of the facts in her dramatization. The notion of Charlotte responding psychically to the "summons" of "banshee voices" overshadows the physical nature of her death (recorded on the death certificate as "'Phisis'", that is, tuberculosis 566), and

compromises the authority of Gérin's biography.³⁵

Furthermore, the passion with which Gérin describes Charlotte's death as a spiritual "uniting" with her sisters and brothers, "of whose lives her own was an integral part; bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, soul of their soul" (566) tends to transform Charlotte into a spiritual Emily (and the situation into a Heathcliff-Cathy re-unification in the grave). Charlotte had used these lines from Genesis at the end of Jane Eyre to suggest an Edenic but earthly love between Rochester and Jane: "No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" (Jane Eyre 397). Charlotte's last words, spoken to her husband, (as reported by Gaskell) are evocative of the earthly love that she sought and found, perhaps, in Arthur Nicholls: "Oh, I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us--we have been so happy" (564). However, Gérin not only understates these lines (placing them in a one-sentence paragraph with no comment), but employs the lines from Genesis to emphasize, not Charlotte's earthly love, but her spiritual unification with her siblings. Gérin, earlier in the biography, wrote personally and defensively about Emily's death, employing rhetoric that anticipates that used to describe Charlotte's death:

...if anyone doubts how Emily felt about the liberation of death, the longing of the imprisoned spirit to cast its chains, and of the lonely soul for reunion with the universal fount from which it came, they had better re-read the death of Heathcliff. (378)

This blurring of life with fiction, and Charlotte with Emily, the use of emotional rhetoric, and the underexposure of the evidence surrounding Charlotte's death result in a distorted interpretation and a loss of the sense of her subject's unique identity.³⁶

Her editor argued that "the reader should be moved certainly, but by facts

³⁵ Fraser points out that debate continues about the cause of Brontë's death and that opinions range from tuberculosis, tuberculosis complicated by her pregnancy, pregnancy itself, hyperemesis gravidarum (a psycho-physical rejection of the foetus), or as John Maynard argues, "a wasting disease" (Fraser 483).

³⁶ Refer to note 31 for another example of Gérin's blurring of Charlotte and Emily.

rather than by rhetoric. The rhetorical approach...is not appropriate to biography..." (OUP 15 July 1965). Although the editor was using "rhetoric" in a pejorative sense to refer to G erin's "sensational approach," the implication is not only that fact can speak independently of language, but that any "warmth" (and figurative language) is inappropriate to biography. G erin won the argument to retain these passages describing Charlotte's death, but they have proved to be what the editor predicted-- "weak points (most open to attack, most open to rejection)...."³⁷ Nevertheless, I would argue, as G erin did, against the general dictum that facts alone should move us, and that rhetoric is "not appropriate to biography." Recent theories challenge the separation of fact and rhetoric, and, furthermore, the new directions in biography (psychoanalytical influence, self-involvement of the biographer, and the emphasis on form) indicate that the aestheticization of the genre is firmly in place. As Nadel writes: "Every biography manifests its inherently literary resources through its style, tone and point of view and seemingly contradicts the nature of its pure historiography" (10). G erin's expressivist approach is designed to direct the reader, not only to facts, but to feelings about the subject.

4. Structure: "cohesion; homogeneity; development"

G erin attempted to devise an organic structure for her biography that reflects her theme of "the evolution of genius". She is the first of the biographers studied here, with the exception of Gaskell in her first two chapters, to unify theme and form so tightly and so deliberately. The language G erin uses to describe Charlotte's development and achievement implies not only G erin's own world view of life as cohesive, homogeneous, linear, and progressive, but describes the way in which she has structured her biography:

[Charlotte] was gradually moving towards a complete realization of the truth of her particular destiny, and instantly transmuting it into another truth--the

³⁷ G erin's style is criticized by some of the critics noted above. Barbara Hardy notes a "lack of delicacy..., a crudity of speculation and apparently arbitrary flow of sympathy" (241) and Inga-Stina Ewbank comments that her tone is "infected by Charlotte Bront e's," a "fondness for a kind of eighteenth century poetic diction" and a "hysterical breathlessness" (107).

truth of art. The latter could not be achieved before the other had been realized; and it took Charlotte all her life until the completion of *Villette* to accept the decrees of common existence. Only then were her evolution as an artist fully achieved and the delusions of adolescence set aside. (508)

Correspondingly, the biography is structured to move "gradually" through alternating chapters which reflect conflicting impulses in Charlotte's character until it achieves a climactic ("complete") unification of the opposite threads in her life. Gérin's aim is to "present [Charlotte] whole" (xiv), and, although she means specifically in this context to present all facets of Charlotte's life, not neglecting as others have Charlotte's art, her juvenilia or her Brussels years, wholeness describes Gérin's philosophic world view and aesthetic aim as well. Her view that completion, truth, and full achievement are attainable by her subject is reflected in her own attempt to provide structural closure, although, as I shall show, this presents some problems. Thus, at the conclusion, Charlotte has evolved "fully" (508), her "own life is presented whole at last" (512), her dream and real worlds are "fused" (512) and, in death, she is "unit[ed]" with her sisters and brother (566).

As Gérin stated to her editor, "the whole book has been planned with an attempt at cohesion; homogeneity; development" (OUP 23 June 1965). Her intention, as indicated in her introduction, is to examine her subject's life as a "continuous" (xvi) flow. She locates "firsts" (1, 341, 169); "milestone[s]" (92), "turning points" (111, 218, 277), "tests" (76), "lessons,"³⁸ and, eventually, the moment when everything is "fused" (512). Gérin quite consciously presents Charlotte's life as a maturation process and some, though not all, of the chapter headings illustrate an upward movement towards apotheosis. This structural and thematic vision is consistent with critical approaches to fiction of the 1950s and 60s. Critics expected "unity, integrity, wholeness" in a work, looked for the "key design," and explored the tension between "innocence and experience" of the divided self as it journeyed

³⁸ "Lessons" is the central trope and is used primarily to refer to "the lesson of real life" (510), or "the lessons of experience" (54). Some other notable references are found on pp 16, 76, 166, 510.

toward selfhood which was discovered in a moment of "epiphany."³⁹

Gérin's "key design" is announced by her beginning which, significantly, is not Charlotte's birth, the Brontë genealogy or the landscape of Haworth, the common beginning points in Brontë biography, but Charlotte's experience at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. Whereas Gaskell ended her first chapter with the recording of the inscriptions on the tombstones, drawing attention to the departed body, Gérin begins with the words recorded in the school register, focusing on the mind of her subject whose uniqueness is already detected by the age of eight:

"READS tolerably -- Writes indifferently -- Ciphers a little and works neatly-- Knows nothing of Grammar, Geography, History or Accomplishments -- Altogether clever of her age but knows nothing systematically--." (1)

The tropes of lessons and learning dominate this biography, and Gérin sets out to plot a narrative of "evolution", to show how the child who reads and writes "indifferently" develops into the "genius" writer. Yet conflict is already inherent in the headmistress's assessment, for Charlotte possesses a kind of knowledge different from that expected by society. As Gérin observes, "it was not from the lessons learnt from the text-books in use at the Clergy Daughters' School that [Charlotte] emerged enlightened" (16), but from the lessons learned from experience.

Gérin emphasizes the "two planes" (30, 81) of Charlotte's life, which are described variously as "Ideal Life" versus "Reality" (54), the dream world versus the real world (27, 30), the creative world versus the religious world (35), the destructive opposed to creative principles (308), and duty versus creativity (100, 103). Throughout the biography Gérin plots the course of "the conflict of the two elements warring within [Charlotte] to tear her soul" (35). The warring elements are eventually resolved and Charlotte's personality is unified. Gaskell, Benson and other biographers saw Charlotte as a divided self and certainly there is evidence in Charlotte's letters of her own perception of a tension in her life between "duty" and

³⁹ Marjorie Perloff, "Modernist Studies," *Redrawing the Boundaries*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association, 1992) 157-158. Perloff discusses the rhetoric used in criticism from the 1940s to the 1960s.

pleasure (either the inner world of the creative imagination or the external world of friendship, love, travel, freedom). But Gérin quite consciously plots this divided self narrative as an alternating and progressive course towards unification.⁴⁰ Chapters circumscribe segments of time, each devoted to one of "the hard lessons to learn of the difference between unbounded feeling and limited experience" (54). Thus, Chapter II, "Slave of the Lamp," announces Charlotte's attraction to the magical world presented by The Arabian Nights, and Chapter III, "The Voice of Conscience," establishes the opposite world, her religious and domestic environment. Chapter IV, "'The Burning Clime,'" which describes Charlotte's immersion in the creative world of Angria is followed by Chapter V, "The Pursuit of Knowledge," which is concerned with her formal education at Roe Head. Chapter VI, "The 'Web of Sunny Air,'" taken from a line of Charlotte's poetry, suggests the mood of that productive and happy period with the family, and it is followed by Chapter VII, "The Drudge's Life," focusing on her unhappy time as a teacher at Roe Head. The movement upward is noted by Chapter X, "First Flight," and this progression is developed in chapters with titles such as "The Wish for Wings," "Resurgam," "Crossing the Abyss," and finally "Equinox" with its sense of equalization (of opposites) and completion. In terms of both her art and her identity Charlotte's life moves upward towards wholeness (only Charlotte's marriage poses difficulties for Gérin). There are twenty-seven chapters in the biography and with a sense of symmetry Gérin positions the two years at Brussels (in her view, the major turning point in Charlotte's life) at the mid-way point, Chapters XIII and XIV.

Whereas Gaskell saw a division between the person and the author, Gérin, with her aims of "cohesion" and "homogeneity", attempts to reconcile all oppositions. She plots Charlotte's literary achievements as a linear progression, from "The Achievement of Jane Eyre" through "Recognition" and "The Miracle of Shirley", to "Writing Villette." Structurally the biography reaches its climax at the end of Chapter XXV, "Writing Villette." Here Gérin arrives at her destination, thematically and structurally. She has shown Charlotte's development from the child who could

⁴⁰ As will be discussed in the following chapter, Moglen also plots Charlotte's life as a progressive movement towards wholeness, but she argues that although Charlotte succeeds in fiction, she fails in life to "bring to birth the self she had conceived" (Moglen 241).

only "write indifferently" (1) to the writer of Villette where "never before had her powers of vision and evocation been so consistently, so royally displayed" (512). The unification of the self is completed by the writing of Villette:

...the drama of [Charlotte's] own life [was] presented whole at last....What she had been, and what she would never be, were revealed here eloquently for ever; the rest of her life could pass in silence. (512)

This statement, however, presents problems, for while Charlotte's writing career has ended and been "fully achieved" (508), "the rest" of Charlotte's life--two years and four months--does not "pass in silence." Short as that time is, it is filled with the drama of a proposal, a rejection, an intense conflict with her father, a marriage, and a pregnancy, hardly matters of "silence." Having posited the completion of Charlotte's evolution, G erin is faced with the technical problem of maintaining the flow, the "continuous examination" of a life (xvi).⁴¹ Furthermore, after Villette, G erin gives examples of changes that were occurring in Charlotte's personality (she was "acquiring a sense of humour" 557) and indicates that the potential for creativity was still evident ("one trembles to think of the masterpieces unborn" 553), thus violating her own thesis that Charlotte's life was complete with the writing of Villette.

Even more disruptive to her theme and structure of wholeness, G erin envisions a second epiphanic moment, Charlotte's death, which is represented not as anti-climactic to the first moment of aesthetic completion but as a closure of competing order. G erin describes Charlotte's death in language that suggests "yet another liberation" (565). Not only does G erin, in my opinion, confuse Charlotte with Emily as previously discussed, but death becomes another accomplishment in the journey to self completion:

⁴¹ On another occasion G erin falls prey to her imposed structure and metaphors, in this case the metaphors of lessons and masters. Attempting to continue the metaphor that Charlotte's love for Heger was "the lesson of her greatest experience in life," G erin refers to Villette as "the last great devoir Mlle Charlotte accomplished at the instigation of her Master" (509). The notion that Villette is a "devoir" argues against her conviction that it represents the culmination of all Charlotte's skills and experience. A devoir does not suggest the stature of a complex work of fiction and Charlotte, referred to as "Mlle" Charlotte, is reduced to the status of student or, at best, an assistant, under her master, Heger.

The little girl who had set out to find the Celestial City and had had to abandon course, vowed that next time she would not fail to find it. That time had come now. Despite the loving hands stretched out to hold her, the adventurous spirit leapt to get away. (566)

Thus, the wholeness achieved at the completion of Villette is superseded by another experience of wholeness. Structurally this second ending fails because Gérin has falsely prepared readers for "silence" following the writing of Villette and for a downward movement in plot, not for change, more conflict and another completion. Furthermore, the two endings are philosophical contradictions in that in the first Charlotte is in control of her own destiny (having totally fulfilled herself through her own creative impulses) and in the second she is seen as a victim of circumstance (Nicholls taking her on a wintery walk, her pregnancy, improper medical care), but as one made whole by an act of God (death).

Particularly near the end of the biography, Gérin's structure of "cohesion; homogeneity; development" seems too rigid to encompass all the aspects of Charlotte's personality that Gérin wishes to include. Her second ending suggests a mystical and fatalistic aspect to Charlotte's character not previously developed. Similarly, she contradicts her climactic conclusion that Villette is a fusion of reality and fantasy (512) by quoting, first, George Eliot who describes Villette as "preternatural in its power" and, then, Charlotte herself who comments that "when authors write best...an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master... dictating certain words... rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas...(512)." This upsets the balance or fusion of passion and reason that Gérin has argued for, placing more emphasis on Charlotte's imaginative nature than on her "accept[ance] of the decrees of common existence" (508). The image of Charlotte as the mature artist and woman pulls against the vision of Charlotte as one possessed by her imaginary world. The problem is that theoretically and structurally, Gérin wants to reconcile opposites while, at some points, her own intuitive response and language undermine such a reconciliation. Her assertive and personal statement about Villette which ends the chapter contradicts her arguments for fusion and for the impact of "the lesson of real life" (510) upon the fiction. Gérin writes that it was by this controlling "influence," which comes from within, "and not otherwise. we may be

sure [my emphasis], that Villette was written" (512).

Gérin criticizes Mrs Gaskell for "her writer's belief in--or wish for--a fairy-tale foundation to the Curren Bell story" (415), but Gérin, too, has a belief in a certain "foundation" to the Curren Bell story, namely that each successive novel is more successful than the last and that Charlotte will arrive at some point of self-integration or self-understanding. Gérin's vision is profoundly influenced by the modernist aesthetic of the progression from innocence to experience, just as Gaskell's vision was influenced by the Victorian sensibility toward duty and suffering. Gérin believes that her more scholarly aim "to present [Charlotte] whole" (xiv) saves her from bias (from Gaskell's "novelist's tendency to romance about ordinary things" 416⁴²), but, as I have attempted to show, such concepts of wholeness, unity, cohesion and development, are also elements of a myth, a version of Charlotte's life-story. As Edel points out the "understanding" of the subject arrived at by the biographer is a contingent truth:

...a biographer can set forth the data he has gathered and studied only in the light of his own understanding; and his understanding is inevitably a variable, greater or less depending upon his capacities as well as upon his data....And the book that will emerge will be his vision, his arrangement, his picture. (Edel 9-10)

Wholeness and completion are, after all, Gérin's "arrangement" of the facts.

III. CONCLUSION: "STRADDLING THE RAINBOW AND THE STONE"

In 1965 Kendall wrote that biography had reached its "most sustained pitch of excellence...yet" (153). Gérin, and the biographers of the seventies, moved beyond the compromising attitudes of the fifties, and into a broader approach, attempting to keep alive and improve both the artistic spirit of the 1920s and the traditional historical approaches of the past. In spite of many difficulties, biography, according to Kendall, was "straddling the rainbow and the stone" (Kendall 153). Without being

⁴² It is ironic that Gérin should criticize Gaskell for romanticizing, the very fault for which her own editor and some critics have criticized her.

either strictly novelistic or documentary, Gérin attempts to do both. She combines narrative (with its attendant rhetoric), interpretation and scholarship. As she states in her introduction her strategies include "familiarity" with her subject, and a "wider...closer and more continuous examination" (xvi). This goal was overly ambitious in the view of Gérin's critics, and, in my view, Gérin was not entirely successful in perfecting or amalgamating her strategies. However, biography, as Kendall noted, is "a craft of the impossible" (Kendall 153), and the conflict between granite (fact) and rainbow (novelistic and interpretative strategies) continues to challenge biographers. After the "granite-like" approach taken by Gérin, no major biographer of Charlotte Brontë ignores scholarship and research and, in fact, the next generation broadens the parameters of Gérin's cultural emphasis to include social and political contexts. Like Gérin as well, the next biographers, Margot Peters and Helene Moglen, are concerned with intangible elements such as personality, the relationship of biographer and subject, and the form of biography, and they continue to experiment with ways "to straddl[e] the rainbow and the stone."

CHAPTER FOUR

"WE SEE OURSELVES"¹

FEMINIST BIOGRAPHY OF THE 1970s

I. CRITICAL CONTEXTS: FEMINIST CRITICISM OF THE 1970s

Within the rapidly growing context of feminist criticism during the 1970s two feminist biographies of Charlotte Brontë appeared which focused on gender as a determining factor in the life: Margot Peters's Unquiet Soul in 1975 and Helene Moglen's Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived in 1976. During this period women's work was re-discovered and revisioned. Feminist critics (and biographers) attempted to explore women's writing from a new perspective: the situation of women in social, cultural and sexual roles. By this time, as Catherine Stimpson indicates, there were as many feminisms as there were contemporary critical methods: "By the mid-1970s, feminist criticism was an international movement with a wide, conflicting range of theoretical concerns."² Also recognizing the varied interests of feminist criticism, Elaine Showalter formulated a theoretical framework for discussing women's writing by devising "four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural."³ As she points out these modes overlap one another, but each indicates a specific emphasis. Moglen's and Peters's biographies are modelled, respectively, on the psychoanalytic and the cultural modes. Peters, in fact, characterizes these differences as a "basic schism"⁴ that occurred between the psychologically oriented feminists and the social or cultural historians. In her article, "Biographies of Women" (1979), Peters uses her own biography and Moglen's as representative of

¹ Moglen 14.

² Catherine R. Stimpson, "Feminist Criticism," Redrawing the Boundaries, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992). Stimpson mentions a range of feminist theoretical affinities: "liberal humanism and its belief in authenticity and autonomy of character; neo-Marxist theories of ideology; cultural studies and its explorations of culture and social relations; deconstruction ...; revisionary psychoanalysis ...; semiotics ...; reader-response theory ...; structuralism ...; or ... poststructuralism... (264).

³ Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 249.

⁴ Margot Peters, "Biographies of Women," biography 2 (1979): 211.

two different strains of feminism emerging during this period:

The large biography--it is my own--sees Charlotte Brontë's life (and the lives of all women) as shaped by the fact of her being female, but sees female behavior in turn shaped by cultural influences. This theory accepts traditional historical determinants of race, milieu, and time, but adds to them the notion of gender....The other biography--it is Helene Moglen's Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived (1976)--begins inside, with the psyche, and then proceeds to explore Charlotte's consciousness in terms of a feminine psychology which is less influenced by external cultural factors than it is typical of the feminine mind itself. ("Biographies of Women" 211)

Peters recreates with detailed care Charlotte's female milieu, both the domestic scene and the women's cultural climate. She also points out how Charlotte rebelled against the dominant male society:

Many [of Charlotte's problems] were created by her position as a woman in a society which oppressed women and as a writer in a society that thought "female authors" neither legitimate artists nor ornaments of their sex. (xiv-xv)

Her biographical approach, like other feminist literary and historical approaches of the seventies, is what the social historian Gerda Lerner called a "woman-centered inquiry" which focuses on "values, institutions, relationships, and methods of communication" specific to women.⁵ Although social and cultural contexts are the dominant focus of Peters's biography, she does not ignore Charlotte's "internal conflicts" or "ambivalent drives" (Peters xiv), some of which were psychologically unique to Charlotte and some which were socially determined.

Moglen's emphasis is on the psyche, but she is not as unmindful of historical and cultural forces as Peters claims in the comment quoted above. Moglen adopts the Freudian psychoanalytical approach and seeks to explain gender difference more in terms of psychosexual concepts than in terms of historical or cultural determinants. Using the theories of Freud and his followers, Moglen explores aspects of masochism, guilt and the oedipal complex in Charlotte's life. Moglen's sources

⁵ "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," 260-261. Showalter quotes Gerda Lerner's "The Challenge of Women's History" (1979).

indicate that her primary interest is the psychosexual study of women. She cites a range of materials from Carolyn Heilbrun's Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (1973) which argues for androgyny as a way of freeing sexual identity from rigid male-imposed definitions, to Dr Irving Bieber's "The Meaning of Masochism" which describes this psychological state as "adaptational" (41). Moglen's stance wavers between Heilbrun's more political psychological approach (where sexuality is socially determined) and Freud's emphasis on instinctual drives. For example, she accepts that masochism in women is influenced by social forces (40-41), whereas in looking at relationships, such as that between Rochester and Jane or between Charlotte and her brother and father, she employs a Freudian perspective, believing that Jane's and Charlotte's equality is achieved through an act of "symbolic emasculation" (142) or a rising from the ashes of "Branwell's disintegration" (75). Moglen is aware of the debate about Freudian theories of, for example, female masochism, but distances herself from it. She mentions the work of Karen Horney ("The Problem of Female Masochism" 1973) and the work of Helene Deutsch (The Psychology of Women 1973) but writes, in a footnote, that she has "no desire to further the debate about the nature and sources [whether societal or instinctual] of female masochism" and will refer to "general patterns of psychosexual interaction" (40-41).

The link between Gérin and the biographers of the seventies is their common project of emphasizing the subject's search for selfhood. Feminist biographers, however, establish gender as the major determinant in the subject's life. Gérin, as pointed out in Chapter Three, is concerned with the artist's conflict between the dream world and the real world. In Gérin's vision the real world is not framed in relation to feminist concerns such as the economic or intellectual oppression of women, and the dream world is not examined in the psychoanalytical terms of repression. In Gérin's view Charlotte is an artist figure, largely undifferentiated by gender. While Gérin does not ignore Charlotte's own statements in her letters and her fiction about women's issues, she does not set them in the context of a feminist struggle. Peters, sociologically, and Moglen, psychoanalytically, are more concerned with Charlotte's struggle to express her 'feminist' self.

Peters and Moglen more self-consciously than previous biographers announce their ideological position and their personal identification with their subject's

struggles. Peters writes, "Today we are more apt to sympathize with Charlotte's rage" (xv), and Moglen, even more subjectively, declares, "I have pursued my own shadow through the beckoning recesses of another's mind, hoping to discover its substance at the journey's end" (15).⁶ In the early phases of feminist criticism, as Elaine Showalter comments,

the raw intensity of feeling and the insistence on the relationship of literature to personal experience...often expressed itself in an autobiographical or even confessional criticism shocking to those trained in the impersonal conventions of most academic critical writing.⁷

The personal voice employed by Peters and Moglen was criticized by some academic reviewers. Alan Shelston admired Peters's "militant sympathy" for Charlotte (rather than the usual "reverential" treatment), but he disapproved of her "embarrassingly effusive" prose.⁸ Katherine Frank commented that Moglen's biography is "essentially a work of autobiography because Moglen has created Charlotte in her own image, and this angers precisely because both Charlotte and feminist criticism deserve much better" (Frank 152). Peters and Moglen are rebel biographers and, in opening new spaces, they were accused of making mistakes and of being excessive. In the next decade, the eighties, feminist positions became more mainstream, with the effect that both the emotional excesses and the feminist polemics for which Moglen and Peters were criticized were reduced.

II. THE CULTURAL MODEL: MARGOT PETERS'S UNQUIET SOUL: A BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË (1975)

Katherine Frank describes Margot Peters as "the true descendent of Mrs

⁶ Frank in "The Brontë Biographies" comments on this statement: "the ambiguous syntax here betrays the fundamental confusion of the entire work. Presumably Moglen sought Charlotte's substance, but she exhibits only her own" (152).

⁷ Showalter, "Introduction," New Feminist Criticism 4.

⁸ Alan Shelston, "Biography and the Brontës," Critical Quarterly 18 (1976): 67-68.

Gaskell, retaining her predecessor's affection and understanding for her subject while using the insights to be gained from reassessing Charlotte's life from a modern point of view" (Frank 152). Peters's biography, like Gaskell's *Life*, displays a paradoxical interplay of traditional (scholarly) and novelistic strategies.⁹ In both biographies, the novelistic impulse appears to overshadow the scholarly. Although separated by over one hundred years, similar criticisms concerning emotional excesses and factual errors have been levied against both these biographers. I have argued that such judgements, in part, have created a myth about the unreliability of Gaskell's biography and, furthermore, have devalued what she was attempting to achieve. In fact, as Alan Shelston remarks in a review of Brontë biographies including that of Peters, "Mrs Gaskell herself, whom modern biographers are often quick to criticise, could well have instructed some of her detractors on the proper use of evidence" (Shelston 67). His implication, and I would agree, is that Gaskell's work is more reliable than Peters's. Nevertheless, Peters was at the forefront of a significant change in the way in which Brontë was perceived.

The emotional excesses of both Gaskell and Peters can be explained, in part, by their reclamation projects. Both biographers undertake to reclaim and to canonize their subject by overturning strongly held popular views. As female biographers of a female subject, their biographies, at times, take on the tones of political missions. Mrs Gaskell attempts to restore Charlotte's femininity, and Peters attempts to revision Charlotte as a feminist, reclaiming the rebellious side repressed by Gaskell. Both, however, attempt to define Brontë's genius in the approved terms of female creativity for their eras. And, as Showalter comments the working out of a new vision is frequently accompanied by experimental forms and overstatement. Peters adopts a number of novelistic strategies that convey a "raw intensity of feeling" and a personal identification with her subject (Showalter, "Introduction" 4).

⁹ Although there are also links with Gérin, her multi-faceted approach (which I discussed as expressivist and scholarly) is both more research oriented and less novelistic than Gaskell's and Peters's approaches.

1. Feminist social and cultural biography

Margot Peters is the first academic to write a full-length biography of Charlotte Brontë.¹⁰ Peters's emphasis, however, is not on undertaking primary research, but on re-interpreting materials already available. Although she has a comprehensive grasp of the Brontë material and her bibliography includes a sizable list of secondary materials about historical and social issues in Victorian England, her work is not archival. Her intent, as she states in her preface, is to explore how the facts (as they are known) "fall into a new pattern" when seen from a feminist "angle" (xv), in her case a cultural and sociological feminist position.

Peters is the first biographer to emphasize so forcefully Brontë's rage and rebellion against Victorian patriarchal social and literary forces. She portrays Charlotte as a rebel whose "life and art were both an eloquent protest against the cruel and frustrating limitations imposed upon women and a triumph over them" (xv). In Peters's opinion Charlotte's experiences at Cowan Bridge initiated her spirit of rebellion:

Charlotte raged not only against her own physical and mental suffering at Cowan Bridge. Her charge against the institution was far more severe, for quite literally she blamed Mr. Wilson's school for the deaths of Elizabeth and Maria. (11)

Although Peters notes that Cowan Bridge "robbed Charlotte of childish spirits and confidence," she stresses that it instilled in Charlotte a "capacity for intense resentment and hatred" (16). Whereas Peters reads Charlotte's rage and hatred into this episode, Gaskell reads destruction of her health and a quashing of her "bright"

¹⁰ Peters' first academic book was Charlotte Brontë: Style in the Novel (University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), and she has written various reviews and articles on the Brontës and on biography: "Charlotte Brontë: A Critico-Bibliographic Survey 1945-1974: Part I," The British Studies Monitor VI (1976): 10-36; "Charlotte Brontë: A Critico-Bibliographic Survey 1945-1974: Part II," The British Studies Monitor VII (1977): 57-70; "Biographies of Women" (1979); and "Group Biography," New Directions in Biography, edited with a foreword by Anthony M. Friedson (The University Press of Hawaii, 1981). Unquiet Soul was her first biography (1975). She has since written the following: Bernard Shaw and the Actresses (New York: Garden City, Doubleday, 1980); Mrs. Pat: the biography of Mrs. Patrick Campbell (London: Bodley Head, 1984); The House of Barrymore (A.A. Knopf, 1990).

spirit (Gaskell 108), and Gérin reads stoicism (Gérin 16). Charlotte, in Peters's view, is a more actively frustrated personality than that perceived by earlier biographers.

Reinforcing her theme of the "unquiet soul," Peters repeatedly employs the word, "rage", and dramatizes Charlotte's rebellion with references to her "cry of despair" (76), her "cravings and hatreds" which "fused in the white heat [of]...love" (192), her "blast of passion" (289), her soul of "fire" (294), her "chok[ing] and crush[ing]" of emotions (331) and her "belong[ing] to storm and what was wild and intense" (334). Gaskell, as I argued, over-determined Charlotte's femininity in accordance with the values of her era ; Peters over-determines her rebelliousness within the framework of feminist theories. In Peters's perception Charlotte does not beg Miss Wooler to allow Anne to be sent home when she becomes ill; instead Charlotte "flew to Miss Wooler....lost her temper, and lashed out heatedly" (61). In talking with George Henry Lewes at dinner, Charlotte does not simply register disapproval of his comparison of the two of them as having "written naughty books," but, as Peters writes, "Charlotte went off like a rocket" and delivered him a "dressing-down" (289). When Thackeray comes to call, Charlotte "lashed into him" for referring to her as "Jane Eyre" (327). Likewise, Peters highlights (although without any detailed analysis) the rebellious tone in Brontë's novels: the "'piercing cry for relief' [from an unjust social system] that rings through all Charlotte's fiction" (277) and the "violent energy" of rebellion that is released in all her novels (313).

Peters attempts to describe the Victorian social, cultural and historical environment that aroused Charlotte's anger and rebellion. Peters is more successful in rendering this world using novelistic strategies (which will be discussed in the following section) than in employing documentary and analytical strategies. For example, when Robert Southey writes to Charlotte that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life" (54), Peters sweepingly notes that his "archconservative" comments were the norm of that era:

But not one man in ten thousand would have contested in the year 1836 the belief that a woman's 'proper duties' did not extend to the sphere of creative effort. Not one man in ten thousand would have written the words Charlotte craved to hear: "Write. You have talent, promise. Let nothing stand in the

way of its development!" (55)

Peters's tendency is to dramatize rather than substantiate her claims. In another instance, she employs the novelistic strategy of allegory rather than documented evidence to indicate the limited career options open to women in Victorian society. When Charlotte becomes unhappy teaching at Roe Head, and, in a letter, writes, "Am I forced to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage?" Peters comments,

Society had a clear answer to her question: "Of course. Apart from marriage you have this choice--governess, seamstress, dependent in your father's house. Choose your servitude." (51)

A few pages later, Peters describes the governess situation in Victorian England, and, again, her urge is to impart information anecdotally rather than in a scholarly fashion. She begins dramatically with the question: "What was a governess?" (67). In her two-page portrait of the governess Peters makes some assertions that sound correct such as pointing out that the governess usually came from a good middle-class family and that she was frustrated by her "difficult position" as neither servant nor "employer's equal" (68). However, she does not document her sources for this information and further erodes her authority with sweeping assertions: "[the governess] was valued much less than the cook, the groom, or the butler since her services were less tangible" (69); and "if [the governess] was ugly, the master and his children disliked her; if she was handsome, the mistress of the house was her enemy" (68). More anecdotally she writes, "the English are notorious...for their aloofness to children" and since children are "second-class citizens" so are their teachers (69). Peters offers only two documentations about the status of the governess: a five verse poem published in Punch in 1890 about a governess named Miss Harker who "toiled in chains" and was let go when she asked for a holiday (68); and a reference to "government blue books" (72) which, she claims, provide evidence that the female house servant "worked the hardest and longest for the poorest wages, without, in addition, the freedom of the factory worker" (72-73). Although Charlotte was not a housemaid, Peters concludes that she often worked housemaid's hours.

Yet, Peters does not indicate either the wages or the hours (nor whether statistics are available on governesses), or whether she, herself, consulted the blue books or gathered this information from some of the sources cited in her bibliography on "Victorian England" (443-444). This methodology is typical of Peters's approach; she endeavors to recreate the scene, using dramatic and emotional statements, rather than to present and analyze historical information.

Similarly, Peters generalizes about Brontë's relationships with males. As a result of her experiences at Cowan Bridge under the authoritarian rule of Mr Carus Wilson, Charlotte developed, according to Peters, "a hostility" to males and authority figures "that was to play a key role in her art and life" (16). Her view of an "oppressive masculine authority" was developed, not just at Cowan Bridge, but at home where her father became "the quiet tyrant of her life" and where William Weightman, her father's curate, engaged in "callous chatter about his many [love] conquests" (83). Peters sees this hostility to males expressed by the "obvious phallic symbolism with which [Mr. Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*] is so antagonistically described, as a male" (16). Such hostility, which Peters proclaims rather than proves, is dramatically depicted in a passage in which Peters imagines Charlotte expressing hostility towards her father after he has insisted that she reject Nicholls' proposal of marriage:

...Charlotte pondered her loyalties as she paced up and down the quiet room. Much as she cherished her father as the last of the family that had been all in all to her, much as she disciplined herself to obey his wishes, she was forced to admit his injustices....His unfairness to her; his obliviousness to her needs because she was plain and a girl; his unimaginative exhortations to "womanly duties"; the hours of writing time she had sacrificed to please him....His greed for her fame...his snobbery, his misanthropy, his selfishness, his silence. Her endless sacrifices... (380-381)

There is no evidence that Charlotte ever felt this antagonistic to her father; in fact, she mentions him, without rancor, in nearly every letter to Ellen. Although Charlotte does disapprove of the society that permitted males, and not females, to be educated and that discriminated against the plain and unmarried woman, these feelings do not seem primarily directed against her father or her brother. Without the provision of

supportive evidence, Peters's feminist thesis of Charlotte's rebellious nature and hostility to the dominant male society, coupled with her novelistic approach of exaggeration and dramatization, seems imposed upon, rather than generated by, Charlotte's behavior and, thus, loses authority.

It is difficult to assess Peters's view of Charlotte's kind of feminism, and I would argue that Peters's contradictions are partly a result of her own feminist views clashing with Charlotte's far more moderate stance and, also, a result of Peters's emotional approach which is more conducive to bold statement than to analysis. For example, having made a case for Charlotte's general "hostility" (16) towards men, she later argues that "[Charlotte] preferred Branwell to her sisters" (73) although she does so without supporting evidence and in spite of an earlier claim that Branwell's "weak, erratic character deeply challenged her loyalty" (67). From this unsupported claim and from Charlotte's indication in a letter that she preferred Mr. Sidgwick, her employer, to the mistress of the house, Peters argues that Charlotte generally preferred male company, and that she had "little sympathy with most women whose lives ran in this narrow channel [of domesticity]." In fact, she asserts that Charlotte "despised" these "inferior" women and that "a man's mind seemed to her broader, stronger, less censorious, more generous--and she felt at ease with these qualities" (73). This obviously contradicts Peters's position about Charlotte's relationship with Mr Brontë, Branwell and Mr Carus Wilson and refutes her generalized statement about Charlotte's "hostility" to men. Evidence from the letters challenges Peters's conclusions. According to Charlotte Monsieur Heger was extremely censorious and yet she seemed almost to worship him. Other men such as the curates were definitely not "broader" or "more generous." It is evident that Charlotte enjoyed some male company (George Smith, Thackeray, William Weightman, W.S. Williams, her father and, until his dissipation, Branwell) and some female company (her sisters, Ellen Nussey, Mary Taylor, Mrs. Gaskell and Harriet Martineau). Charlotte's closest friend, Ellen Nussey, led a very quiet, domestic life and Charlotte certainly did not despise her. In another instance, Peters claims that Brontë resented Madame Heger because her pregnancy made Charlotte aware "of her own wasting womanhood" (107), but, again, there is no evidence to support that speculation. The point is that Peters argues for Charlotte's hostility when it suits her thesis to illustrate Charlotte's

more radical feminist position against male authority, but, she also wants to argue that Charlotte emulated a masculine model of intellectual superiority. Similarly, she presents Charlotte's disgust for conventional women, yet her desire to be conventionally feminine. At the end of her biography Peters speaks of some of these as "ambivalent desires" (414), but because she does not hold together these tensions throughout the biography, addressing their simultaneous and conflicting nature, she betrays her own confusion about Charlotte's view of women's roles.

In spite of the contradictions created by overstating Charlotte's hostility to the patriarchal order of Victorian society, Peters wants to validate both the (feminine) domestic side and the (masculine) public self of Charlotte's personality. Alongside Charlotte's rage and intensity, Peters also presents a quieter and more domestic side of Charlotte. Gaskell, too, asserted the importance of Charlotte's female culture, but she underplayed Charlotte's tempestuous and independent spirit. Peters attempts to depict all aspects of female nature, the nurturing and the ambitious aspects: she focuses on Charlotte's matrilineage; she draws more attention than do previous biographers to Charlotte's female circle of friends, sketching their domestic scene as well as their feminist career interests; and she presents in detail Charlotte's own domesticity. In fact, contrary to what would be expected from Peters's generalized remarks that Charlotte "despised" the "conventionally feminine" woman and failed to fulfill that role herself (73), Peters shows Charlotte comfortable in the domestic sphere.

Most biographers begin with accounts of the history of Brontë's father, but Peters focuses on Brontë's mother, claiming that Charlotte "felt strongly drawn to her mother's memory" (3). In fact, other than a brief sentence about Patrick Brontë's physical appearance (5), Peters subversively relegates to a footnote the details of his birth in Ireland, his education at Cambridge and his curacies (418). Peters, of course, does not deny the impact, both negative and positive, of the father (and other men including Branwell and her various male teachers) who, after all, lived with her all her life whereas her mother was only present for the first five years. But, by displacing the father from his usual position of importance at the head of the biography, Peters stresses the significance of a female cultural model.

Establishing an intimacy with the mother, Peters breaks off from her

omniscient voice of the opening two paragraphs to write,

We know Maria Brontë because nine love letters written to Patrick during their courtship have survived....the letters are a touching blend of formality and frankness. The formality is expected in a woman of her time; it is the unusual frankness that plainly reveals a fine, delicate mind. (1)

Given the first directly quoted words in Charlotte's biography, Maria takes on a special significance. In one of her love letters Maria expresses the fear that Patrick "is replacing God as the first object of her love" (3), a fear that Charlotte ascribes to Jane Eyre, before having knowledge of her mother's letter. Peters draws attention to this "curious" (3) connection between mother and daughter. Although, in her opinion, Charlotte "inherited almost nothing of [her mother's piety]" (3), Peters implies, through her prominent placement of the mother in the biography, that Charlotte may have inherited other qualities: the intense capacity for love, the frankness, the "fine, delicate mind," as well as the conventionality and "self-doubt" (2). It is clear, too, that Maria is symbolic of the oppressed woman, the refined woman whose life, as Peters writes, was "unfulfilled...[and] ruined by childbearing" (4). Indeed later in the biography, Peters, imitating Charlotte's voice, accuses Patrick Brontë of many "injustices", one of which was expecting "the poor frail mother" (380) to bear six children in quick succession. By beginning with Maria's unfulfilled marriage in which "Patrick Brontë, decisive and self-assured, had the upper hand" (3), and concluding (her second last chapter) with Charlotte's marriage in which "Nicholls blighted the great powers of Currer Bell" (399), Peters questions the power relationships between men and women in love and marriage. In Peters's opinion childbirth is the primary cause of death for both Maria and Charlotte. Maria was weakened by numerous childbirths, and Peters argues that Charlotte died of "hyperemesis gravidarum," the "unconscious rejection of the baby" (410). In framing her biography in this way, Peters establishes Charlotte's inheritance of the problem of the oppression of women in Victorian society.

Peters separates her ending into three parts: the first recounts Charlotte's death, the second unfolds the destinies of the other important personages, the third ends with an encomium on Brontë, the novelist. Like Gaskell, Peters calls attention

to the influential women in Charlotte's life: Mrs. Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey (410-412). In the third section Peters stresses the continuation of Charlotte's lineage in the "echoes" (413) of her fictional voice that reach down through the years to speak to "wom[en] today" (414). Thus, women's words, the letter written by Charlotte's mother and Charlotte's fiction, frame this biography. As in Gaskell's ending Charlotte appears encircled by female influence rather than male. By ending the biography with the reference to her novels, Peters suggests that Charlotte achieved a cultural "triumph" for the ideals of equality even if her marriage was an acquiescence to conformity:

...for the most intelligent and talented Victorian women life could not be other than a battle between conformity and rebellion. This is why Charlotte Brontë's novels still speak to us so persuasively of what it was to suffer and triumph as a Victorian woman and--since the issue of women's equality has still not been resolved--as a woman today. (414)

Maintaining a focus on women's culture, Peters provides vignettes of the female figures in Charlotte's circle: Mary Taylor, Elizabeth Gaskell, Ellen Nussey, George Eliot (by reputation) and Harriet Martineau. These figures dramatize the various options open to and the problems besetting women, particularly women writers, during this period. Peters draws out for examination Charlotte's thoughts on "the woman question" and the conversations she had, by letter or in person, with these women about political equality (339), female economic independence (277), and literary equality (274). Peters presents Charlotte as an early and moderate feminist: "although she was no feminine activist, her novels vibrated with her dissatisfaction at women's lack of liberty" (339).

In exploring Victorian ideals of womanhood, Peters emphasizes the example set by Harriet Martineau. While an active feminist in "her economic, political, and religious radicalism" (313), Martineau was also "convinced that every woman needed domesticity in her life" (311). Martineau, Gaskell and Mary Taylor, although quite different in their own ways, established for Charlotte a positive and invigorating model of the possibilities of combining career and domestic duties. For example, Peters dramatizes Martineau performing ordinary domestic tasks:

Brown, strong, her sleeves rolled back on sturdy arms, she threw herself into running her two-acre estate: she gardened, sewed, churned, put up preserves, turned out fragrant custards and gingerbread, swept, dusted, fed cows, scrupulously trained her hired help--and still poured forth volumes of writing. (311)

Similarly, Elizabeth Gaskell was significant in providing an example of both conventional femininity and intellectual ambitions. She is described as combining "Mary's [Taylor] intelligence and spirit with Ellen's [Nussey] more traditional feminine charm" (303). Although Peters does not have a particularly high opinion of her writing (300), she recognizes that Gaskell fulfilled a need in Charlotte, responding both to her intellectual interests with discussions about "the woman question" (305) and her emotional needs by providing the sympathetic ear that Charlotte had missed since her sisters' deaths. As in her discussion of Martineau, Peters contributes small domestic details that reveal the 'feminine' aspect of their relationship:

Charlotte had opened Mrs. Gaskell's first letter [in fact, this was the second letter] to find a little bunch of wildflowers. The pledge of friendship was simple, grateful, and warm--like the sender. Charlotte lifted them carefully from the envelope, put them in water, and reveled in the perfume of the heliotrope for a whole week. (304)

Few of the Brontë male biographers (and certainly not all of the female biographers) have been much interested in documenting the seemingly trivial details of berry picking, walking, house-keeping, or even noting mundane details such as the barely rustling noises of manuscript papers or the re-roofing of the house. Perhaps because Charlotte's life is composed of such seemingly passive, such near-silent activities, male biographers accustomed to the more robust and public activity of their subjects do not see the significance of recording such daily events, but Peters emphasizes such details, indeed, sometimes lists activities to exaggerate eventfulness: "Breakfast with Papa, morning in the dining room with writing or letters, a walk, a solitary dinner, tea alone at four, the long evenings..." (400). Tom Winnifrith, on the other hand, describes such activities as "drab and uneventful" (4). Although Charlotte claimed at times to be lonely there was much simple activity that filled her

days and about which she wrote constantly to Ellen and of which she made use in her fiction (particularly Shirley). This dramatization of ordinary life makes Peters's Charlotte a much more active personality than Gaskell's, or even than Gérin's, Charlotte who is more controlled by her environment (physical and familial). Peters pictures Charlotte shopping in Keighley (33), pouring tea for the Sunday-school teachers (35), walking on the pier at Bridlington (77), doing the "iron[ing], sweep[ing] dust[ing]..." (78), and going into the village "in sober bonnet and shawl to buy paper and medicine" (360). These seemingly trivial activities convey Charlotte's conventionality in a domestic environment, but also suggest activity rather than passivity.

2. Novelistic Strategies

Some previously discussed Brontë biographers, such as Gaskell, Langbridge, Benson, and, in a small way, Gérin, employ novelistic strategies, but Peters is the most consistently novelistic of the major biographers of Charlotte. Although story-telling has always been an aspect of biography, more especially popular biography, it gained new respect around this time, associated as it was with the feminist drive to tell women's stories. Both Patricia Meyer Spacks and Katherine Frank argue that story is an essential part of the biographical enterprise. Frank argues that there is a place for biographers like Peters who "view their task not as a science but as a narrative art," and she concludes that "once we have conceded Peters her *donnée*, her life of Charlotte may be justly appreciated as perhaps the best we have had since Mrs. Gaskell" (Frank 154). Spacks, likewise, argues for the function of story with its "revelations of immediate significance."¹¹ Like Peters and Moglen she emphasizes that biography "tells us of ourselves" (Spacks 283). She, however, concludes that Peters fails, not only because of her "flabby sentimentality" (287), but because she tells "too simple a story" through her own mold of "romantic feminism" (292).¹²

¹¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Art of Life," The Hudson Review 29 1976: 283.

¹² It should be noted that Spacks speaks from her own mold of feminism; she adopts a psychological approach and wants Peters to consider whether "a woman's writing has special sources and meanings, for the individual subject or for the sex at large" (285). However, her objections to

I would argue that the assessment of Peters's narrative art should fall somewhere between these two views, for although Peters's flaws are numerous, she was at the forefront of new feminist biographers,¹³ and she attempted to legitimize story as an element in biography.

To convey her thesis of a rebellious subject and her active life, Peters adopts an aggressive narrative style. Shelston, among other academic critics, denounced her "excesses," her "embarrassingly effusive" prose and her "deployment of a heavily dramatic emphasis."¹⁴ Moglen criticizes Peters for her "simplistic" views, but comments that "the distinction of Peters's biography seems to be that it is pitched to a large general audience" and is therefore a "popular" and readable biography.¹⁵ I would agree with Shelston that Peters's language is extravagant and sometimes incongruous (as, for example, in the description of Charlotte exploding "like a rocket"), but, I would argue, it is purposely pitched that high to enable readers to "sympathize with Charlotte's rage" (xv). Using the natural world as a source for imagery (in imitation of Brontë's style), Peters describes a raging external world that reflects Charlotte's inner turmoil; the wind whirls, the sea swells, the animals bay and claw. Coupled with this is Peters's constant use of vivid metaphors such as "branded" (28), "lashed" (59) and "lacerated" (9) that give her prose an aggressive rhythm. Peters does not simply report M. Heger's physical appearance and his activities; rather she dramatizes the scene:

Monsieur whirled in and out of the Pensionnat, descending upon Charlotte to rail, inspire, encourage, and threaten. If he became too vehement and Charlotte burst into tears, the scene abruptly altered: out came a handkerchief

Peters's simplification of issues, her "facile interpretations" (286) and her reduction of "human complexity" (287) are, in my opinion, legitimate criticisms.

¹³ Carolyn Heilbrun in *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) identifies 1970 "as the beginning of a new period in women's biography because *Zelda* by Nancy Milford had been published that year" (12) which completely reversed earlier readings of the relationship between Fitzgerald and his wife.

¹⁴ Shelston, "Biography and the Brontës," 68. See also T.J. Winnifrith, rev of *Unquiet Soul* by Margot Peters, *Modern Language Review* 72 1977: 160-161; and Spacks, "The Art of Life," 287.

¹⁵ Helene Moglen, rev of *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë*, by Margot Peters, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 31 (1975): 223.

from one pocket and bonbons from another....Torn between dismay and delight at this fiery little man with the black mustaches, Charlotte braced herself for the lessons, reveled in them, and throve under his tutelage. (117)

Typical of Peters's style is this clustering of verbs that quickens the pace of her prose. In other examples, she amasses nouns ("his fears, his suspicions, his warnings tyrannized her unbearably" 297), and over-modifies her prose with adverbs and adjectives to heighten conditions (Charlotte is not simply tyrannized but tyrannized "unbearably"). Peters lists concrete and specific details to give a sense of place and mood. The Opera House in Brussels is described with its "deep crimson carpets, crimson curtains, alabaster and gold-fluted ceilings, and its chandelier" (225). Peters's text is vitalized by such choices and these, in turn, reflect a more colourful, energetic subject.

Gérin, while descriptive and warm, generally, does not adopt such heavily modified prose.¹⁶ For example, her description of Monsieur Heger is expressed in more subdued tones:

M. Heger she saw at close quarters every day--tempestuous, vehement, unreasonable, humourous, quite the opposite of his wife. At once amused and outraged by his complete lack of inhibitions, Charlotte studied him as though he were some rare species at a fair....(204)

As Gérin's prose remains restrained here so, too, does her portrait of Charlotte. Whereas in Gérin's view Charlotte "studied" M. Heger, "was watchful of his changing moods" and "wait[ed]...for one syllable of approbation" (204), Peters's style reflects her impression of a less controlled,¹⁷ but also a less passive, Charlotte. Gérin notes Charlotte's ambivalence, her amusement and outrage, but Peters dramatizes it with active verbs--"burst into tears," "braced," "reveled," and "throve."

¹⁶ I have previously discussed Gérin's excesses. Most Brontë biographers (with the exception of Tom Winnifrith) indulge in some excesses evoked by Brontë's own style as well as by, as Peters argues, the "tragedy of their lives" (xiv). However, Peters is more ebullient than any other of the major biographers under discussion here, including Gaskell.

¹⁷ Taken out of the context of the whole discussion it might appear that Peters is presenting Charlotte as victimized by M. Heger in her passage (117). However, Peters's view is that Charlotte "find[s] herself perversely stimulated to achievement by [Heger's] harshness" (110).

In Peters's handling Charlotte's life becomes full of excitement and trauma and she is an active player.

One of the primary marks of the novelistic biography is its rendering of the subject's inner world. Peters attempts this in a number of ways. As narrator, she speculates about her subjects' emotional states (often, in fact, without qualifying expressions as "perhaps" or "it might be said"). Secondly, although less frequently, she uses dialogue, either invented from statements in Charlotte's letters, lifted as dialogue from the letters, or transferred from a fictional character to Charlotte herself. Thirdly, Peters impersonates her subject, attempting to render Charlotte's thoughts in her own idiom while still retaining an omniscient point of view.¹⁸ I will refer to these techniques of entering the interior as interiorizing.

It is the novelistic impulse which impels Peters to speculate that Branwell "felt a glow of satisfaction at the thought of taking command" (23) of the Glass Town chronicles, that Charlotte's "heart expanded" (29) when she visited the Taylors and discovered that they were interesting and cultured, and that Henry Nussey "sighed" (64) when he received Charlotte's letter rejecting his proposal. Peters does not provide any sources for such speculation, nor does she even register it as speculation. Peters writes that Heger responded to Charlotte's letters "with letters like himself--warm, sympathetic, magnetic" (149) even though there are no such letters extant (to Charlotte) from which she could factually draw such conclusions. Rather, acting like an omniscient narrator of a novel, Peters omnipotently assumes knowledge of her subjects' interiors.

Peters, also, occasionally uses direct dialogue to dramatize a scene. For example, in describing Charlotte's meeting with Richard Monkton Milnes during her stay in London in 1851, Peters writes: "Someone came up behind her, bent over the sofa, and murmured, 'Will you permit me, as a Yorkshireman, to introduce myself?'" (327). Charlotte, herself, had written this as dialogue in a letter to her father (LCF

¹⁸ This latter technique is referred to as free indirect speech, substitutionary narration or narrated monologue. Jeremy Hawthorne in A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), quoting from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, provides an example illustrating the differences between Direct Discourse ("He said, 'I love her'"), Indirect or Reported Discourse ("He said that he loved her") and Free Indirect Discourse ("He loved her"). He defines the latter as "the technique for rendering a character's thought in their own idiom while maintaining a third-person reference and the basic tense of narration" (70).

III 239), and Peters's only addition is the word, "murmured." In another instance, Peters, for dramatic purposes, alters the format of a long letter from Catherine Winkworth to her sister Emily Shaen. The letter is conversational, describing a discussion with Charlotte about her upcoming wedding (LFC IV 121-125), and although it suggests direct dialogue between Charlotte and Catherine, it is presented in paragraph form. Peters, however, renders it as dialogue, illustrative of her urge to dramatize wherever possible.

Some of Peters's dialogue is invented. I have previously provided the example of Peters assuming the voice of "Society" (51) to suggest a kind of inner dialogue that Charlotte might have waged with herself as her desires to write clash with the reality of making a living. This invention, in my opinion, is not entirely effective because, although it imitates Charlotte's authorial voice in Villette, it does not recreate the more natural conversational tone she uses in letters. In another example, when Charlotte ventures to London for the first time to reveal her identity to George Smith, Peters imagines her saying to Smith at the Opera House, "'You know I am not accustomed to this sort of thing.'" (225). Continuing the dramatization of Curren Bell's revelation of herself as Charlotte Brontë, Peters concludes this chapter with invented dialogue given to Smith: "You are Curren Bell!" (227).

The third strategy, slipping omnisciently into her subject's voice, is used more frequently by Peters than by any other of the major Brontë biographers under discussion here. The movement from one mode to another often occurs within one sentence and thus we hear two voices, the biographer's and the simulated or appropriated subject's idiom:

Charlotte soon began to cast an envious eye at Branwell's literary project. She who had recorded so lovingly in her "History" their acquaintance with Blackwood's, even to the date of the editor's birthday, ought to be in charge. Besides, she could write so much better than Branwell. (21)

The last sentence is designed to imitate Charlotte's young (and domineering) voice. Peters often refers to Patrick Brontë as "Papa" thus imitating Charlotte's child-like attachment to him. For example:

...during Charlotte's absence in London Papa had ordered that Emily's upright cottage piano be moved out of his parlour and stored upstairs. Charlotte was upset at the change: why didn't Papa let it stay in his room where it looked so well? (345)

Peters wants to show dramatically the effect of the deaths of her sisters on Charlotte and how these "painful changes" (345) upset her. The additional and thematic effect of this dramatization is to make Charlotte seem childishly petulant under her father's control. In my opinion, the actual letter from which this reference is taken, conveys a more adult and opinionated personality. From London on 14 June 1851 Charlotte writes to her father:

I am glad the parlour is done and that you have got safely settled, but am quite shocked to hear of the piano being dragged up into the bedroom--there it must necessarily be absurd, and in the parlour it looked so well, besides being convenient for your books. I wonder why you don't like it. (LFC III 247)

In fact, the last line may imply that Mr. Brontë is more "upset" by the piano as a constant reminder of Emily than is Charlotte who is more concerned with convenience and appearance. Nevertheless, it is possible to see by this comparison how small domestic details are made emphatic through interiorizing techniques and how Peters uses them to construct her view of Charlotte as someone capable of 'raging' against authoritarian control.

Such assumed omniscient closeness to the subject allows the biographer to reveal the process by which the subject formulates her selfhood. For example, in the chapter called "Crisis" Charlotte is concerned with Emily's "flight from Roe Head" (45) where she was a very unhappy pupil at Miss Wooler's school:

Charlotte remembered Maria and Elizabeth, and the conviction that Emily too would die seized her. Yet how to explain the inexplicable to Miss Wooler? Emily wanted to learn, the routine was easy....What ailed Emily? (45)

Peters, imitating Charlotte's voice, reveals Charlotte's distress about her sister's health. Emily lasted only two and a half months at Roe Head, and Charlotte finally

interceded on her behalf to have her sent home. Charlotte's own account in her preface to Ellis Bell's poems is less questioning and uncertain than Peters's portrayal. Charlotte simply wrote (and Peters provides this quotation): "Nobody knew what ailed [Emily] but me--I knew only too well" (46). However, Peters comments that "Charlotte's public statement [blaming the routine of school life] accounts for a fraction of the truth," (46) and Peters's interiorizing suggests the process by which Charlotte came to that conclusion.

To write a biography of a woman whose most active part of life is, primarily, internal and concealed in her fiction, rather than public, requires different strategies. Peters uses these novelistic techniques of interiorizing not simply to produce a biography of "compelling readability" (Frank 153), but to expose a hidden life, to bridge the gap between what Charlotte's life appears to be (passive, reclusive, conventional) and what she writes about (issues of selfhood and independence, the politics of relationships). Peters's methods of interiorizing dramatize Charlotte's thought processes, turning passivity into activity. These techniques are much more successful when speculation is validated by letters or other relatively reliable sources. Nevertheless, I would argue that in attempting to reveal a hidden life such strategies can effectively recreate anxieties, frustrations, and questionings, and by doing so they serve a purpose that is scholarly as well as dramatic.

A particularly dominant feature of Peters's approach, and one which overlaps with interiorizing, is her use of questions. In the chapter, "Crisis," which deals with "the conflict the Victorian woman of talent faced" (56), Peters employs questions, often two or three, on nearly every page. This technique, like interiorizing, is used to mimic and dramatize the quest for selfhood. By drawing forth passages from letters in which Charlotte herself asks questions (for example, "Am I forced to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage?" 51) and by employing or inventing interrogative dialogue, Peters reflects a questioning, frustrated and rebellious subject. Attempting to express Charlotte's guilt about the sexual fantasies associated with her dream world of Angria, Peters's mimics her voice:

Was she wicked? A hopeless sinner? No one knows what other "sins" preyed on her mind--sexual frustration, masturbatory fantasies, a half conscious awareness of a more than sisterly affection for Branwell? (47-48).

Imitating the questioning subject, Peters is also able to indicate her own speculation and uncertainty about finding answers. In another example, Peters attempts to reconstruct Charlotte's reasons for rejecting and then accepting Nicholls, at the same time indicating her own uncertainty about Charlotte's motivations:

Now she could give no hope to a man who hungered for her as she had hungered for Monsieur....Or was this her fate? To scorn what was given, unasked; to pant after what was withheld? So it almost seemed, except that, in effect, Papa was withholding Mr. Nicholls from her. There lay a certain challenge in the fact. (380)

Although I believe that this questioning strategy can illuminate process, both the subject's conflicts and the biographer's investigations, and can promote a more open biography, it can also be exploited for the opposite purpose of directing the reader to the biographer's thesis. For example, Peters also uses the question strategy to lead the reader into her own predetermined answer:

Mrs. Smith's note was very kind, but the magic had gone out of her friendliness since the previous summer when--who knows to what extent through her influence?--Charlotte had been made to understand that more than friendship with George Smith was impossible. (357)

This question is not used to raise an issue but to direct the reader to Peters's view that Mrs. Smith did, in fact, exert her influence.

The uncertainty and controversy surrounding an event in Charlotte's life is dealt with, on a number of occasions, by asking multiple questions (383, 307-308, 384-385). One key example will highlight some of the problems when Peters's interrogative style overburdens the text. The penultimate chapter, "A Solemn, Strange, and Perilous Thing," examines the controversy surrounding Charlotte's marriage and her death. In the short space of three-quarters of a page, Peters asks nine questions, three embedded in one sentence. A few questions from this section will give a sense of Peters's method:

If she had lived, would there have been more novels? Would Nicholls have

permitted her to write?...Would he laugh at a frank portrait of himself as husband?

A further question....Would marriage socialize her? reconcile her? release the torrents churning and foaming behind the dam into a broad, placid stream? Or would marriage generate new and creative tensions to be shaped into art?

.....Or was her death to be in a sense voluntary--an unconscious solution to an unsolvable conflict--as she felt it--between her art and her marriage?
(405)

Certainly this questioning strategy depicts a personality in conflict, the unquiet soul at the centre of Peters's thesis. In addition, these questions activate the reader to problematize issues rather than to accept one interpretation. However, a surfeit of questions can lead to confusion rather than direction. In this example, the reader has too many options, and the inclination might well be to translate the last question into an answer because it is placed in the traditionally significant place at the end of the series of questions (and at the end of the chapter). Thus, Peters, leaves the reader with the view that Charlotte willed her death, an explanation frequently applied to Emily, but not to Charlotte, and that Charlotte's marriage thwarted her art.

Obviously, Peters uses the questioning strategy as a novelistic convention to enhance the story. But more significantly she uses it to stress the internal conflict of her subject, to draw attention to the complexity of issues, and to undermine an authoritarian biographical approach of definitiveness and completeness. However, as in other areas discussed, Peters's excessiveness often defeats her, and I would argue that her indulgence in over-questioning at times camouflages a directive, rather than open, approach. While innovative and effective on a smaller scale, the ultimate effect of these lengthier passages, is to lead the reader to a conclusion, and, in fact, one that is narrowly feminist: that "[Charlotte's] art and her marriage" are an "unsolvable conflict" (405) and that marriage inevitably leads to "loss of identity" (386). The note struck at the beginning of the biography with the mother's words running through her letters "like a troubled whisper" (2) indicating her "self-doubt" is picked up, in another multiple questions section, by Peters's foreboding refrain, "What would become of Currer Bell?" (384-385). Repeated four times, this question produces a sense of doom that drowns out Peters's understated remark that "Charlotte went forward now, fearful, doubtful, but embracing life and reality" (386).

3. Conclusion

This is a biography which attempts to be feminist in its social vision and its poetics. In looking at her subject, her subject's relationships, the letters and the fiction through a feminist sociobiographical point of view, Peters brings to the fore details not previously examined thoroughly. That she does not explore in any depth the cultural and social environment is a legitimate complaint against such a "large" biography (as she herself calls it). However, Peters can be credited with revealing aspects of Charlotte's personality (frustration, doubt, rage, independence, ambition) previously passed over or suppressed by other biographers. Thackeray discovered "a fire and fury raging in that little woman [Charlotte]" (328) which did not suit him, and Matthew Arnold described her "writer's mind" as containing "nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage" (371). Peters is the first to draw out this "fire and fury" in Charlotte. In Peters's experiments with interiorizing, with the question strategy, with domesticating the landscape and with focusing on matrilineage and female culture, she created the first distinctive feminist biography of Charlotte.

III. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC MODEL: HELENE MOGLEN'S CHARLOTTE BRONTË: THE SELF CONCEIVED

Helene Moglen uses psychoanalysis and feminism to explore Brontë's developing female identity through her fictional and dream images. Showalter describes psychoanalytic feminist criticism as that which "locates the difference of women's writing in the author's psyche and in the relation of gender to the creative process":

It incorporates the biological and linguistic models of gender difference in a theory of the female psyche or self, shaped by the body, by the development of language, and by sex-role socialization. ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 256)

Moglen focuses primarily on "sex-role socialization" and at the basis of her approach is the assumption that Freudian patterns of the unconscious are reinforced in a sexual ordering of society. As Moglen writes, "metaphysical striving acquires a political form" (30), and she believes that psychological relationships of dominance and submission are played out in the patriarchal structuring of Victorian society. Using Freudian theories (which Lucile Dooley had done in 1920),¹⁹ Moglen interprets Charlotte's personality as one repressed by "guilt, shame, unworthiness, anxiety, insecurity" (23). She claims that Charlotte "wished for the death of a parent [her mother]" (22), rejected, and felt rejected by her siblings, was psychosexually "bound" to her father (24) and her brother (39), and desired a "father-lover" (233). Although Charlotte's "oedipal struggle" was eventually "calmed" (238), Charlotte never achieved "full integration" (239) in Moglen's view. Moglen usually, but not always, traces these instinctual drives to a sexually differentiated society. For example, Moglen explains Charlotte's "self-abnegating" (40) relationship with her brother as a result of socially ingrained sex-linked responses:

Much stronger than rational analysis were the social forces which inhibited even normal levels of female aggression and stunted women's intellectual and psychic growth; forces which defined marriage as women's only appropriate occupation and nurturance as their only mode of relation. (41)

Moglen believes that Charlotte absorbed the current beliefs in women's "biological and intellectual inferiority" (41), and accepted the social view that the female's role was to cater to "the idolatrous needs of the masculine posture" with "patience, understanding, tolerance, duty" (40). Moglen, more narrowly than Peters, limits her exploration of social and cultural determination of the personality to examples of what Showalter refers to as "sex-role socialization." As Peters indicated in her comparison of her own and Moglen's biographies, Moglen "begins inside, with the psyche"

¹⁹ Lucile Dooley, previously discussed, was the first to explore clinically Charlotte's neurasthenia or nervous instability. Whereas Dooley is a psychoanalyst using fiction to establish a case history, Moglen is the reverse, a critic employing psychoanalytical theories to establish a literary reading. Although Dooley's final chapter (259-272) is on "The Revelations in the Novels, especially in *Villette*", she is not a literary critic and her interpretation of the fiction is not nearly so sophisticated as Moglen's.

whereas she begins with outside determinants such as history and culture ("Biographies of Women" 211). For example, both these feminist biographers claim that Brontë had difficult relations with men, but Peters's position is that Charlotte's "hostility" to men (16) developed as a result of external circumstances (familial and societal) such as her mother's early death, her father's tyrannical parenting and, in particular, Carus Wilson's authoritarian regime at Cowan Bridge. Moglen, on the other hand, begins with a discussion of Charlotte's deep-seated oedipal bonding with her father and her sibling rivalry with Branwell as causes of Charlotte's repressed nature. As she does not enter the debate about the influences on psychological formation, it is not always clear why she sees some aspects of Brontë's personality, the oedipal relationship with the father and her guilt complex, as instinctual while others such as masochism as adaptations to social pressures. Moglen's focus is always on psychosexual dynamics, on personal conflicts, not on the subject's relationship to economic, historical, cultural or social influences.

Moglen bases her theories about Charlotte's female identity and struggle largely on a psychosexual reading of Brontë's early childhood familial relationships (which she refers to as "traumas" 241) and on the influence of Byron's life view on her and Branwell. Whereas a cultural biographer like Gérin notes Charlotte's imitation of Byron's imagery and her adoption of the Byronic model of "the Ideal Hero" (Gérin 89), Moglen is interested in Byron's incestuous relationship with his sister and with the symbolic rebellion against conventional forms of love that it represented. Byron's longing for "psychic and social liberation" took on "symbolic importance" (Moglen 31) for Charlotte and Branwell. Drawn to Byron as a model of intense feeling, eroticism, and narcissism, Charlotte and Branwell, according to Moglen, develop an "incest of the imagination" (39) in their shared creative projects.

In the first chapter of her study, Moglen establishes Charlotte's oedipal struggle with her father, her psychologically incestuous and then rivalrous relationship with Branwell, and her psycho-sexual attraction to Byron. She then turns to the mature fiction to find revelations and developments of these initial influences in images, fantasies and characters. The psychoanalytical readings of the fiction constitute the largest part of her study with only Chapter One ("Survival") and the Conclusion ("Birth and Death") outlining the actual events of Brontë's life in, at least,

a partially chronological manner. While Moglen's approach offers a new framework (for biographies of Charlotte) in which to see the formation of the female identity and new critical insights into the fiction, there are, as will be discussed below, limitations to this approach. One troublesome area is whether or not Moglen, as she claims, has created "a new version of an old literary form" by the combination of feminism and psychoanalysis with her reading of the life from the novels. Carolyn Heilbrun calls Moglen's approach "revolutionary", particularly because she "perceives in the writing of novels a biography."²⁰ Although other biographers have selectively read Charlotte's fiction autobiographically, looking for real-life models and events, Heilbrun suggests Moglen is radically different because she uses the fiction more extensively and because the course of the "fictive process" from the early writings through to Villette traces Charlotte's psychic maturation. However, I would argue that this is not a new form of biography, and that the lack of reference to the life itself along with the emphasis on the novels makes this work a "critical biographical study," as John Maynard refers to it.²¹

1. "The life...transmuted into fiction" (14)

Moglen argues that the power dynamics between characters in Brontë's fiction reflect Brontë's internal conflicts, and that as the characters develop a more feminist vision so, too, does Charlotte's vision mature (although her marriage retards this progress). Through the writing of The Professor Brontë "finds the path to her androgynous self," that is, she recognizes her drive for independence, her "masculine" impulses (103). Through the experiences of Jane in Jane Eyre, Brontë continues her movement towards equality but allows her female sexuality to surface, recognizing the "integrity of the emergent female self" (143). Moglen characterizes

²⁰ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Women's Biographies of Women: A New Genre," Review 2, 1980: 341, 342.

²¹ John Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 218. Although this point is not a concern of Maynard's book, he describes Peters's Unquiet Soul as a "biography," Moglen's book as a "critical biographical study" and a work by Robert Keefe (Charlotte Brontë's World of Death) as a "critical study with a biographical emphasis" (Maynard 218). Likewise, Shirley Forster in a review refers to Moglen's work as "Bio-Criticism" ("Brontë Bio-Criticism," rev. of Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived by Helene Moglen, Novel 10, 1977: 270).

Brontë as moving away from her early romantic myth (the Byronic myth) about male dominance and female submission with her creation, in *Jane Eyre*, of a "feminist myth" (105) about equality in a marriage. However, this remains a myth because Rochester and Jane cannot be situated in the real world, but remain in Ferndean, a psychological Eden. Again in *Shirley*, although there is personal enlightenment and empowerment, Brontë cannot envision this psychological change in women occurring in the real world. Finally, *Villette* reveals the evolution of a repressed psyche and the attempted integration of erotic and ambitious desires. The old romantic myth of marriage is quashed, and Lucy Snowe's victory, as Moglen expresses it, is survival. Even though Lucy does not marry, she has felt passion, and has achieved independence as a schoolmistress in charge of her own school. Moglen, rather cryptically concludes: "Surviving, she need not live as a survivor" (229). "Surviving," Moglen implies, has to do with the understanding of one's self and the process of living. To "live as a survivor" implies merely hanging on, a repressive state in which one is alienated from society.

Moglen recognizes that she "risks partiality in the interest of emphasis" (14), and, in fact, her intention to interpret from an autobiographic, psychoanalytic and feminist perspective, triples the risks of partiality. The first approach, reading Charlotte's inner life through her fiction, is frequently criticized for its confusion of the fictive and the real worlds. Moglen identifies Charlotte with her heroines, and equates the "pattern...in Brontë's [sic] life" with the pattern "as she traced it in the lives of her heroines" (239). Such an equation denies the force and independence of the creative imagination. Similarly, both the psychoanalytic and feminist approaches channel interpretation and can be over-simplistic and reductive when not employed wisely.²² Furthermore, as Showalter points out, the "negativity in psychoanalytic criticism" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 257) has created difficulties for feminists who want to present female development in a more positive manner. The psychoanalytic approach leads to a negative view of the female personality as neurotic, alienated, repressed and, generally, unable to change. Since the artist's creativity, in this view, is a result of neurotic energies, she is either troubled and

²² Maynard deals with this in *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Chapter 2: "Charlotte on the couch: the perils of posthumous analysis" (31-39).

creative, or cured and uncreative. In Moglen's view, Charlotte is neurotic (masochistic) to her death. Moglen's approach, I believe, suffers from these problems. Thus, although her approach is narrow and often reductive, she pays more attention to the fiction than any other biographer of Charlotte, and her work is the only one which approximates a critical literary biography.

Moglen conceptualizes Charlotte as a survivor. Two Brontë images dominate Moglen's biography: the "raven survivor" image (19) and the sea cave image (42). Other biographers (Sinclair, Peters and Gérin) refer to these images, but they are central to Moglen's thesis and her biographical strategies. A comparison of the treatment of the raven image by these four biographers illustrates Moglen's different approach. Moglen opens her biography with the raven image, taken from Charlotte's letter to W.S. Williams in 1849. Like Gaskell's opening chapter, her beginning disrupts the usual birth-to-death chronology and establishes her figural approach. Moglen quotes only the last part of this long letter in order to focus on the pattern of survival. Referring to the biblical story of the deluge, Charlotte says that her writing career has been her "ark". Without it she would have been like the raven destined to wander unsuccessfully in search of land:²³

Lonely as I am--how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career--perseverance to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me? How should I be with youth past--sisters lost--a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family? In that case I should have no world at all: the raven, weary of surveying the deluge and without an ark to return to, would be my type. As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters--I wish every woman in England had also a hope and a motive: Alas, there are many old maids who have neither. (Moglen 19)

Charlotte as a "raven-survivor" becomes the controlling image throughout the biography. However, and this is typical of many of Moglen's interpretations, she has to adjust the image to fit her conception, for Brontë says she is not the raven because her career has been an "ark" to which she can return. There is a sense of success

²³ Genesis 8:7: "At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth."

("hope and motive") that Moglen overlooks. Furthermore, Moglen does not always employ the survivor image in a consistent manner. Although she suggests, as I indicated earlier, that Charlotte achieves a relatively self-aware state ("surviving"), Moglen has earlier stated that in her life-time "Charlotte had merely survived" (74). "Surviving" does not quite capture the notions of change, development and adaptation that Moglen wants to convey about Charlotte's journey to self-hood.

Moglen strains her interpretation more when she mixes her symbolic and psychoanalytical interpretations with the literal facts of Brontë's life. For instance, Moglen concludes her beginning paragraph with the statement that "In six years time, like the wearied raven forced to descend, [Charlotte] too would drown" (19). Although Moglen has presented Brontë achieving "survivorship" (230) at the completion of *Villette*, life suddenly "move[s] regressively" (238) when Brontë marries. "Drowning" becomes a confusing metaphor; it obviously refers to Brontë's death, but it also refers to Charlotte's marriage which, however, Moglen treats ambiguously as both a submersion in dependency in which case, "drowning" is an appropriate image, and a movement toward happiness and "equality" (235-237). Then, abruptly, Moglen suggests that Charlotte drowns in the deluge of "the traumas of her own childhood" (241), interpreting Brontë's death entirely in psychoanalytical terms. Thus, in Moglen's interpretation, Charlotte's death reverses all the self-hood she has achieved and suggests that oedipal fixation is irreversible. Moglen does not mention consumption as a cause of death, but footnotes a description of "hyperemesis gravidarum" (241), or excessive morning sickness. This allows her to link Charlotte's (supposed) anxiety about her mother's death as a result of childbirth with Brontë's (unproven although generally acknowledged) condition of pregnancy as the cause of her death. John Maynard, who surveys all the evidence of Charlotte's symptoms, concludes that, although the causes of her death are not precisely known, "what seems clear is that there is no ground for using the facts of her death to establish a psychological illness" (Maynard 224). Moglen's psychoanalytic approach and her distortion of the raven image result in a reductive interpretation of her subject as permanently fixated in a traumatic childhood although her feminist approach contradicts this in attempting to depict Charlotte's emerging self.

The actual letter is nearly two pages long and contains two long paragraphs

on the education of women, including Brontë's comments that "the great curse of a single female life is its dependency" and that daughters, like sons, should be given some "object" in life (LFC III 4-6). The letter, as read by Sinclair, Gérin and Peters, is more positive and spirited in tone than Moglen's interpretation suggests. Sinclair uses these passages to comment on Brontë's social and economic awareness of the plight of women (Sinclair 78). Gérin focuses on the same passage that Moglen does, and stresses, though not psychoanalytically, Brontë's feelings about love and marriage (Gérin 394). Peters, too, quotes sections from this letter concentrating, like Sinclair, on the issue of economic freedom for women (Peters 276). Peters omits the raven passage, probably because it is extraneous to her focus on the socialization of Brontë and to her strategy of looking more at external than internal events. Sinclair, Gérin and Peters are more interested in the content of the letter whereas Moglen analyzes its images. For Moglen, Brontë is a survivor, ultimately trapped by her psychological conditioning and oppressive relationships; for Sinclair she is defiantly feminist; for Gérin she is a lonely but successful artist; and for Peters she is an ambivalent, but politically aware, feminist.

Another image, the sea-cave image²⁴ which occurs in an early story written when Charlotte was thirteen, is a focal point for Moglen's theories about Charlotte's fears of sexuality. This second image, which conveys a fear of claustrophobia and water, has metaphoric connections to the first image of the ark and the deluge. However, she misleadingly refers to it (as Lucile Dooley had done earlier) as a "dream of [Brontë's] early adolescence" recorded in one of her "little books" (Moglen 42). Rather it is the dream of one of her male characters in a story entitled "An Adventure in Ireland."²⁵ Quoting Dooley, Moglen writes that Charlotte finds herself in a cave under the ocean "feeling the terror of the walls heaving and cracking, of the

²⁴ Four other biographers who refer to this dream sequence are Clement Shorter who quotes it, without comment, in the context of Charlotte's story, "An Adventure in Ireland" (Circle 65-66); Lucile Dooley who says the cave and water represent "the regression into infantile pre-natal life" (242-243); and May Sinclair who quotes the passages to illustrate Charlotte's "mastery of expression" in her early writings (101-102). Gérin quotes two sentences from the story, describing the "roar of mighty water" (43), but does not quote the portions referring to the cracking walls or the raging lion. Her intent, like Sinclair's, is to illustrate the influence of the painter, John Martin, upon Brontë's imaginative and "pictorial" powers.

²⁵ Shorter, The Brontës: Life and Letters I, 74-76.

floods about to overwhelm her." The scene abruptly changes and "a roaring lion rush[es] toward her while she remain[s] rooted to the spot" (42). Moglen interprets the cave as "a womblike world of fantasy," a comfortable, but also claustrophobic world, threatened by the cracking walls and floods of reality. The lion represents a "raging lion of sexuality" (42) which, like the cave, is paradoxically expressive of both desires and "fear[s] of negation" (205).

Moglen argues that these ambivalent images are manifestations of Brontë's feelings towards men. In her early writings, Charlotte was drawn to an "old romantic idealism" (51) and created Byronic heroes who were powerful and passionate but also cruel and tyrannical. In Moglen's view, Brontë's confusion about sexuality is determined, in part, by the strong influence of Byron upon her early intellectual and creative development, but also by her dominating father, by her psychologically "incestuous" relationship (39) with her brother, and her feelings of guilt concerning her mother's death (22). Moglen writes that "the dream image is compelling" (42), and she locates fictional manifestations of the image in Brontë's mature fiction. She finds connections between the womblike world of this "dream" sequence and Crimsworth's retreat into hypochondria in *The Professor* (95-96), Jane's terrifying experience in the red-room in *Jane Eyre* (111), and Lucy Snowe's temporary relief from her loneliness and overwhelming passions in the "submarine home" of the past at Mrs Bretton's (211). In this womb-like world, Moglen claims that Charlotte (like her characters) repressed her self and her sexuality, and this produced not only terror and loneliness, but guilt. It is Lucy Snowe who most comes to terms with "the claustrophobic spaces" and the "labyrinthian ways of anxiety and repression" and thus "she achieves with Brontë herself the maturity of her creator's art" (225). However, as already mentioned, Moglen sees Charlotte's death as a regression, with the deluge (of childhood traumas) breaking down the walls of the cave-self. In other words, Moglen claims that Charlotte feared birth or entry into the real world and concludes her biography noting Charlotte's failure: "[Charlotte] could not bring to birth the self she had conceived (241). Moglen has been led to interpret Charlotte's life and marriage as failures in order to complete her Freudian analysis. She sees Charlotte rejecting the vision of the emergent self that she created through the fictive process and marrying a "father substitute, reenacting now the role of her mother....lulled by

the deceptions of the familiar patriarchal trap" (238). Although Moglen's study is predicated upon the parallels between fiction and life, she here separates the two in order to facilitate her Freudian thesis. Furthermore, she makes errors in biographical fact (stating that Charlotte fell ill "a year and a half after her marriage" 241), she consigns Nicholls to the role of "the temperamental son" (237), and she sees Charlotte "reenacting now the role of her mother" (238). Moglen does not argue these points with supporting evidence, but assumes them, apparently to satisfy her psychoanalytical structure. In fact, Charlotte falls ill about five months after marriage, the similarity between Nicholls and Mr. Brontë is not self-evident, and what is meant by "the role of her mother" is not clarified.

It is in the nature of the psychoanalytical approach, the exploration of the invisible rather than visible world of the subject, to make claims which will be more speculative than those of traditional biography. Furthermore, Moglen's use of fiction as her major biographical source raises questions about reliability. It would seem even more crucial, then, to establish a reliable factual foundation from which to launch her more speculative discussions. One highly significant 'fact' upon which Moglen rests many of her arguments about Brontë's struggles against masculine repressive forces is that of an "incestuous" relationship between Branwell and Charlotte. Moglen bases this claim of an almost unnatural "symbiosis" (39) on one piece of evidence, Ellen Nussey's account that Branwell was a "very dear brother, as dear to Charlotte as her own soul" (40). However, she argues that "such complete harmony" is true only on "a conscious level," for "the complementary ambivalence which we suspect [in their relationship] is indeed found in Charlotte's writing, rather than in her friendly confidences or overt behavior." (40) Moglen sees this ambivalence surfacing in the satiric portraits of "Captain Bud" and "Young Salt [Soul] the Rhymer" in Charlotte's early writing. These portraits, modelled on Branwell, release her feelings about Branwell's dominance of her and show her moving towards a break from him. While Charlotte is away at Roe Head, Branwell kills off some of their shared characters, and Moglen sees this as an act of aggression against Charlotte: "he had, on some level, disposed of her" (44). Charlotte, in turn, has to free herself from such aggression through the destruction of her male characters, or what Moglen refers to as "the symbolic castration of Rochester" and

the death of Paul Emanuel (228). In arriving at such conclusions, Moglen equates Branwell and Charlotte with their characters, and thus fails to credit them with independent and conscious creative imaginations. Furthermore, Moglen presents her thesis as a certainty: "the...ambivalence which we suspect is indeed found [my emphasis]" (40) in these early writings. Without any evidence of an "overt" nature to indicate that this was the beginning of a "violent separation" (39), Moglen, in my opinion, fails to fulfill the plan, announced in her "Preface," to discuss how the life is "transmuted into fiction" (14). Rather than exploring the "interaction" (14) between life and art, a reading of how life turns into art, Moglen reads the life in the art. Her psychoanalytic patient is not Charlotte, but the characters, Jane, Shirley, Carolyn and Lucy, and her case rests upon equation not transmutation of life into art.

The large part of this biography, four chapters of six, is concerned with Brontë's mature fiction. Moglen is more convincing in her analysis of the literature because she psychoanalyzes the characters rather than Charlotte. Here her psychoanalytic patient is not Charlotte, but the characters, Jane, Shirley, Carolyn and Lucy. Although Moglen's assumption is that the pattern she traces in the fiction of the development of the emerging female self is, in fact, the pattern of Charlotte's life, she does not continually draw Charlotte and her fictional characters together in this part of her study. Consequently, it is easy to read much of this as literary rather than biographical analysis. While Moglen makes valid points about the psychic and feminist journeys of the characters, the actual life of her real subject, Charlotte Brontë, is frequently neglected. In fact, Moglen is in a double bind: in her first and last chapters she equates her subject and the characters too directly and can be accused of over-simplification and confusion of fact and fiction; on the other hand, in her middle four chapters she does not consistently note the similarities and more truly engages in literary criticism than biography. In losing sight of "the life" in these four chapters, Moglen does not convincingly illustrate the process of transmutation.

Moglen's chapter on Jane Eyre is primarily an analysis of Jane, not of Brontë. Biographical material is sparingly provided and largely in footnotes. Readers are directed to other biographers, particularly Gérin, for more complete details. In forty pages of discussion on Jane Eyre Moglen employs only about fifteen brief

biographical references to Charlotte's life; six are presented in footnotes, two are short bracketed remarks; and three are the traditional references to real-life models (for example, Lowood as the fictional representation of Cowan Bridge). On only two occasions does Moglen refer to a letter to illustrate Brontë's own psychic condition as it relates to that of her character, and in both instances she has to manipulate the language of the letter to suit her own interpretation. The theories she posits in her first chapter, that Charlotte "rose from the ashes of [Branwell's] dissolution" (75) and that she found freedom in her father's growing dependency on her (78), are not substantiated in the first chapter, but are cited as fact thereafter. Moglen relates this familial situation to the power dynamics established between Rochester and Jane at the end of the novel. Moglen suggests that the "cost" of obtaining "a relationship of equality" is, for Jane, "Rochester's mutilation" and for Charlotte, the "collapse" of her brother and her father (142). Maynard, arguing against this Freudian conclusion, writes that "this kind of deep schematic anger" hardly fits either Jane or Charlotte (Maynard 250). Furthermore, Moglen overlooks the fact that Patrick Brontë continued to exert influence over Charlotte to the extent that she rejected, as he requested, a proposal of marriage from Arthur Nicholls.

Moglen is more successful with this approach in Villette. Here she attempts to use the language of transmutation ("Modeling her heroine upon herself" 195), although she occasionally slips into equational language ("Lucy Snowe is a faithful self-portrait" 195). Moglen attempts to keep Brontë's own life-story before the reader, even though in small and often unsubstantiated measure. For example, she mentions Charlotte's personal loneliness and "thwarted relationships" (194) that become the subject of her exploration in Villette. She also attempts to point out traumas in Charlotte's life that transmute to Lucy Snowe's: "Lucy and Charlotte Brontë herself were always rejected by casual acquaintances" (196); Lucy and Charlotte both identify "more with the dead than with the living" (197); Charlotte's experience of "unworthiness" expressed in her "dreams of the dead Maria and Elizabeth" is central to Lucy Snowe's character (201). These, however, are simply stated rather than argued or substantiated. No evidence is provided, for example, of Charlotte's rejection by acquaintances. However, in her discussion of Villette, Moglen attempts to reveal more precisely the transmutation process by suggesting that

Brontë developed Lucy as an ironic narrator and one who "does not share the totality of Brontë's awareness" (225). Thus, the autobiographical structure of the novel reveals more than the outpouring of personal fears and desires. In fact, inherent in it is Brontë's ability to distance herself from her life experiences so that she can use them creatively, and her ability to separate herself from her character. This, in Moglen's opinion, indicates the degree of Brontë's psychic and aesthetic maturity. Yet, according to Moglen, Charlotte's "subconscious doubts" (225) which are controlled by this narrative distance suddenly resurface when Charlotte marries and deny her self-fulfilment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Both Peters and Moglen look at Charlotte from a specific feminist "partiality" (Moglen 14), and although they both explore Charlotte's conflicts as a feminist struggle against a patriarchal society, their visions of her are quite different. Peters celebrates Charlotte's rebellion, her "productive struggle" (414), her "triumph" (414), and her establishment within a female culture. Moglen sees Charlotte as displaced and alienated, and her psychological struggle (though not her fiction) as inevitably a failure. Whereas Peters's Charlotte is a rebel, Moglen's Charlotte is a victim, or, at best, a survivor.

Carolyn Heilbrun claims that "the seventies mark themselves as a turning point" because "we have not just a proliferation of biographies of women writers, but "we have also had women biographers of women ("Women's Biographies of Women" 340). Brontë biography, however, has had a preponderance of women biographers since its beginning in 1857 with Gaskell's *Life*.²⁶ I would argue, rather, that in the seventies women biographers began to adopt feminist approaches and to employ new

²⁶ I would suspect even the validity of her general point. For example, several Brontë biographers have written biographies of other women before the 1970s: Margaret Oliphant (*Four Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* 1897); Mrs. Ellis Chadwick (*Mrs Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories* 1914); Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson (*Marian Evans & George Eliot* 1952); Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson (*Necessary Evil: The Life of Jane Welsh Carlyle* 1952), and Margaret Crompton (*George Eliot* 1960).

strategies. Heilbrun praises Moglen's biography "as the paradigm of the new art of female biography" specifically because of its use of the fiction to explore the "revolutionary process by which female selfhood might emerge" ("Women's Biographies" 341). In linking images and themes in the fiction to the psychosexual personality of her subject, Moglen mapped out new territory and she succeeded in drawing attention to the inner life and to the fiction. However, her extensive foregrounding of fiction, her assumption that character and author have an identical psychic life, her relegation of fact to footnotes or unsubstantiated remarks, and the clash of psychoanalytic and feminist aims have raised questions about accuracy, reductive arguments, links between life and fiction, and the negative interpretation of Charlotte's life. In losing sight of her biographical subject and in "tak[ing] for granted earlier, exhaustive [biographies]" (14), thus refusing to enter into debates concerning source material, Moglen, I would argue, is more engaged in literary criticism than life-writing. Nevertheless she, like Peters, is a rebel in describing "the nature and limits of [Charlotte's] feminist consciousness" (226) though the claim that her biography is a "paradigm of the new art of female biography" overstates the achievement of her work. In fact, her influence is most widely noted in the critical field where, in the eighties, as Maynard noted in 1984, "biographical interpretation through psychoanalysis remains--somewhat unusually with Brontë--the most prevalent mode of interpretation" (Maynard 31).

CHAPTER FIVE

"UNSENTIMENTAL SCRUTINY"¹ DOCUMENTARY APPROACHES OF THE 1980s

In 1988 two biographies of Charlotte Brontë appeared: Rebecca Fraser's Charlotte Brontë and Tom Winnifrith's A New Life of Charlotte Brontë. Both biographies were, in part, prompted by access to new letters. As Fraser notes in her introduction, "the Seton-Gordon papers and Charlotte Brontë's marriage settlement, in particular, are vital new documents unavailable to previous scholars" (ix). Fraser and Winnifrith consulted the Seton-Gordon papers at the Brontë Parsonage Museum which include letters from Charlotte to her publisher, George Smith,² and Fraser further made use of letters, including some from Nicholls to Smith, in the John Murray archives³ which provide a "far fuller picture" of the relationship between Charlotte and her husband. In addition, Fraser's archival work included examining manuscripts of other letters and the family papers of M. Heger (509). The importance of scholarly research is clearly evident in both these biographies. Winnifrith makes large claims for the "objectivity" of his biography, and observes that the time is "right for a new look at Charlotte Brontë, based on all available evidence, carefully sifted for any inaccuracies" (3). Employing the same phrase of sifting evidence, Fraser describes the climate in which she is writing:

...assiduous Brontë scholars have been steadily filling in the mosaic of Charlotte Brontë's life with a multitude of new detail. Old evidence is continually being sifted and re-analysed until nothing will have escaped the keen-eyed, unsentimental scrutiny of the late twentieth century. (ix)

¹ Fraser ix.

² Elizabeth Seton-Gordon was the granddaughter of George Smith. She presented about 100 letters to the Brontë Society in 1974. Arthur Pollard transcribed fifteen of these letters in "The Seton-Gordon Brontë Letters," BST 18 (1982): 101-114. On her death in 1985, Mrs. Gordon bequeathed the remainder of her collection, twenty-five items, which are listed in "The Gordon Bequest," BST 19 (1986): 41-43.

³ As noted by Margaret Smith in her article, "New Light on Mr. Nicholls," BST 19 (1987): 97-106, the firm of John Murray holds "a series of 33 letters from Mr. Nicholls to George Smith, written between 21st August 1856 and 25th June 1861" (98).

In emphasizing documentation (gathering and sifting evidence, "unsentimental scrutiny" and "detachment") these two biographers differ from Peters and Moglen who declare their partiality and personal involvement with the subject.

However, there are significant differences between the approaches of Fraser and Winnifrith. Winnifrith focuses specifically on fact whereas Fraser offers more interpretative analysis and shapes her biography more aesthetically. Winnifrith is more akin to a Brontë scholar than a biographer in his emphasis on dates, the bare chronological outlines of Brontë's life, influences on her life and possible models for her fictional characters (although primarily to disprove parallels located by other biographers). In emphasizing the granite-like solidity of fact, Winnifrith looks back to the academic biographies of the 1960s (though not to Gérin who modifies the academic approach) which, as Nadel describes them, are "unadventurous" (FFF 113) in form and interpretation. Although A New Life is not comprehensive and detailed like most academic biographies (it is only 136 pages compared to, for example, Haight's George Eliot⁴ which is 616 pages), his philosophy is similar to that of the documentary biographer. Nadel describes Haight's biography as "meticulous in...detail and scrupulous in...documentation," and he claims that documentary biographers "tend to avoid any analysis of the writer's work, fail to establish any theoretical connections between individual experience and the literary text and concentrate on influence rather than interpretation." Their biographies act as "records rather than responses to the life" (FFF 113). Such "empiricists who place their faith in language for conveying fact" (FFF 155) are very uneasy about interpretation and speculation, particularly psychological speculation. Haight, for example, believes that "[psychological] speculations are futile; one can only tell the facts."⁵

Winnifrith and Fraser, though in different ways, respond to the subjective, partial and interrogative approaches adopted by Peters and Moglen in the seventies. The implicit dialogue about biographical approaches engaged in by these four biographers reflects a much larger and intense debate taking place in history in general. In a recent book, Telling the Truth About History, three American

⁴ Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford University Press, 1968).

⁵ Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography 22.

historians, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, reflect on "the debates currently raging about history's relationship to scientific truth, objectivity, postmodernism, and the politics of identity."⁶ They see this debate, in its extreme form, as a "dichotomy between absolute objectivity and totally arbitrary interpretations of the world of objects" (Appleby 246) or, more simply, between absolutism and relativism. Nineteenth and early twentieth century historians, they point out, "chose to think of themselves as empiricists seeking to discover and document objective facts" (243). Faith in archival documentation and fact gathering produced the "absolutism" (247) of the 1960s while the postmodern theories of the 1980s and 1990s have produced a period of "relativism" (6). The authors attempt to work out a compromise between these extreme positions, a "newer version" of an historical approach which they call "practical realism" (247). As practical realists they believe in the reality of the objective world and in the capability of representing that world in a tentative way, but recognize that absolute truth is limited because all knowledge is a production of linguistic practice. Truth, for them, is neither singular nor totally pluralistic. Reality is not "fix[ed]...for all time" (247). Unlike Winnifrith who finds historical and textual uncertainty "disappointing...for the prospective biographer"(BB 26), they are challenged by the new areas opened up by contemporary theorists:

Their efforts to liberate the thinking of historians from the tyranny of positivism have continued to generate intellectual excitement, because these critics forced into the open the centrality of interpretation in all historical scholarship....The understanding of the processes through which human beings create information has been greatly extended by examinations of historians as the carriers of culturally encoded ideas. Similarly, hermeneutics has shown scholars and their readers how words shape consciousness. (Appleby 246)

I would argue that Winnifrith, in principle though not always in practice, adopts many of the tenets of absolutism. Winnifrith stresses "objective truth" (1) as the task of biography, and expresses great uneasiness about partiality or what he describes as "moral, psychological and political straitjackets" including "feminist

⁶ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth About History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994) 10.

criticism" (3). He disapproves of "hypotheses...based upon uncertain oral tradition" and of reading autobiographically from the fiction (2). As a result of such suspicion about subjectivity, his primary tendency is to correct previous biographies rather than to establish his own vision of Brontë's life. Thus, his methodology subverts both his goal of offering a "new" life and his aim "to see [Charlotte] whole" (3). Moglen and Peters do not adopt the extreme position of relativism where all truth becomes subjective and arbitrary, but they question so-called historical objectivity, particularly the ways in which it has traditionally constructed the identity of women. In their opinion, their partiality opens the way to a new version of truth. Fraser attempts to mediate between these two extremes, but in a much more analytic manner than did the biographers of the 1950s who also sought a middle course. Fraser, I believe, adopts a position similar to the perspective of "practical realism" which, as outlined by Appleby, Hunt and Jacob, requires "rigorous attention to the details of the archival records as well as imaginative casting of narrative and interpretation" (249). This approach pays attention to both the documentary and the aesthetic aims of biography. Fraser sees the process of biography as accumulative and accommodational, the building of the "mosaic of Charlotte Brontë's life" (ix), and her language is less absolutist than Winnifrith's. Evidence, she indicates, is not only gathered and sifted but "re-analysed" (ix) which suggests that perception plays a role in deciphering fact and that truth is not "exact" as Winnifrith claims.⁷ Rather than looking back to an empirical phase in biography, Fraser believes that the "mosaic" of a life is created from other biographers' speculations, from recent theories, and from her own input. Fraser is challenged by the "new perceptual framework" opened up by "the feminist revolution" (ix), which suggests a more relative position than Winnifrith's, a belief that facts can be read differently in different times by scholars with different views. Rather than criticizing previous biographers (particularly feminist critics) as Winnifrith does, Fraser builds, for example, on Margot Peters's conception of a defiant Charlotte who rebelled against society. It is indicative of Fraser's overall approach that she incorporates in her "Introduction" her acknowledgements of other biographies. She notes a few biographers who have been "of particular inspiration

⁷ *The Brontës* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977) 15. Winnifrith claims that if letters from Heger to Charlotte had been found, an "exact truth" about the relationship would have been possible.

and worth," and it is interesting that her approach can accommodate two extremes: Margot Peters's Unquiet Soul as well as "the many publications of Dr T. Winnifrith..." (xi).

I. "THE DETACHED OBSERVER": TOM WINNIFRITH'S A NEW LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Winnifrith has built a reputation as the demythologizer of the Brontë story.⁸ He claims that the "faults of subjectivity, inaccuracy, controversy and even prudery" (BB 1) have permeated the biographies of the Brontës. In fact, in The Brontës (1977), he devotes a chapter to a consideration of such problems. He first outlines, in about two pages, the "bare facts of the Brontës' lives, attested by solid documentary evidence which there is not reason to doubt" (9), and then turns to the "area of legend, inference, conjecture, and hypothesis" that has grown up around the Brontë story:

...most of the rather extended biographical section of this book is devoted to the negative task of showing just how shaky our knowledge of the Brontës' lives is. My main aim in spending so much time on the biography has been to show that the lives of the Brontës are different from their books. The popular cult of the Brontës is right in admiring Jane Eyre and right in admiring Charlotte Brontë, but wrong in equating the two. (Brontës 5)

This statement is characteristic of both the aim and the tone of A New Life. His objective, as he states in his introduction, is to consider both the writer and the "human being of singular pathos" but "not [my emphasis] to blur the distinction between them" (4). His task, as he says, is a negative one, and the tone that pervades the biography is, to a large degree, a result of his focus on the inaccurate

⁸ Winnifrith has written (or co-written) the following critical books on the Brontës: The Brontës and Their Background: Romance and Reality (1973; London: Macmillan Press, 1988); The Brontës (London: Macmillan, 1977); Tom Winnifrith and Edward Chitham, Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).

parallels between life and art that have been made by previous biographers or critics.⁹ He attempts to be "a detached observer" and, while he states that "Charlotte Brontë was both admirable and pitiable" (7), he seems intent on reversing the previous "rhapsodic" approaches to her by pointing out that her life was "not really exciting" (4), that she was "not a particularly attractive figure" (5), that her "attitude was not perfect" either towards her friends or her family, and that she had "certain faults" (6).

Arguing that too many books on the Brontës have "a partial and unsteady air" (4), he aims to correct that with his "objectivity": "This book has no axe to grind, but aims to see Charlotte Brontë and to see her whole" (3). His primary task of correcting other biographers carries with it an implicit message of reversing other biographers' more sympathetic views of Charlotte as heroic, tragic, rebellious, or courageous. Clearly, he, too, has his preferential "axe to grind" which is evident in his introductory overview of Charlotte's life:

Charlotte's life was drab and uneventful. The loss of her mother at an early age, her unhappiness at school, both as a pupil and as teacher, her lack of success as a governess, her unrequited love for Monsieur Heger, the disgrace of Branwell, followed by his death and that of Emily and Anne, the loneliness of early middle age, terminated by the tepid courtship with Mr Nicholls, the brief period of marriage, and then Charlotte's own death may seem tragic, but they are not really exciting, nor particularly unusual at a time when life expectancy and expectations in life were considerably less than is the case at the present time. (4)

Here Winnifrith adopts an omniscient narrator's point of view, not one that privileges the inner world such as Peters's, but one that assumes an aloof, all-seeing position. Lionel Trilling, in a lecture on the scientific or historical attitude to war, called such a perspective the "long view":

To minds of a certain sensitivity, "the long view" is the falsest historical view

⁹ Winnifrith is quite rightly concerned about the "dangers in looking for too close parallels between the Brontës' own experiences...and the adventures of the heroines of their novels" (48), but he most often deals with these parallels on a literal level such as whether or not Charlotte and Anne were as successful governesses as were Jane Eyre and Agnes Grey (48) or whether Madame Heger behaved like Madame Beck (61).

of all, and indeed the insistence on the length of perspective is intended precisely to overcome sensitivity--seen from a sufficient distance, it says, the corpse and hacked limbs are not so very terrible, and eventually they even begin to compose themselves into a "meaningful pattern".¹⁰

The "long view" allows Winnifrith to "overcome sensitivity" to the tragic elements of Charlotte's life, and place the events in his own pattern of "drab and uneventful," quite different from the usual pattern of seeing her life filled with conflict. By presenting everything as a negative event, a "loss", a "lack", "unrequited love" and "disgrace", he adopts a rhetorical strategy that makes Charlotte's life seem "drab." Furthermore, such a "superior observational position," as the authors of Telling the Truth About History describe the traditional historic stance, "lull[s] readers into believing that the information comes from a transcendent place" (Appleby 245). As a detached biographer it may be his aim to ignore the emotional impact of death on the Brontës, but he does not bolster his historical argument with details that might support the view that the multiple deaths in the Brontë family were usual for the times. Fraser, in fact, indicates that Haworth had an "extraordinary disease rate" (Fraser 23), and Patrick Brontë fought for years to get a new drainage and water system in the village.¹¹ The so-called detached voice is, in fact, closely aligned to his thesis of Charlotte's "drab and uneventful" life.

In order to maintain the "long view" Winnifrith resists embellishing the story of the Brontës' lives with dramatic prose, novelistic strategies, argued interpretation or extensive details. He attempts to make the chronology of events his "pattern". Most significantly, he almost eliminates Charlotte's voice by only infrequently and briefly quoting from her letters.¹² His minimalist recording of events produces a

¹⁰ This unattributed quotation appeared in an essay by James Bowman, "Cowboys and curators," Times Literary Supplement, 10 May, 1991: 12. Bowman indicated in a personal letter to me (22 May 1991) that he was quoting Lionel Trilling from Gertrude Himmelfarb's Jefferson Lecture given in Washington earlier that year.

¹¹ The most recent biographer Lyndall Gordon in Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994) indicates that the death rate in Haworth due to a contaminated water supply was "25.4 in a thousand, while that of a neighbouring village was only 17.6." She claims that Haworth's rate "corresponded to some of the worst areas in London" (312).

¹² On only four occasions (66, 96, 101, 115) does Winnifrith quote three or more lines from one of Charlotte's letters.

static and aloof biography in contrast to the bildungsroman type of biography that Gérin and Fraser write and the intimate narrative that Gaskell produced. Typical of his reportorial approach throughout the biography is his matter-of-fact, condensed account of Charlotte's month-long visit to London from 28 May to 27 June in 1851:

In London [Charlotte] led a life very different from the lonely existence of Haworth. Visits to lectures by Thackeray, the Crystal Palace and Somerset House all took place before 2 June. On 7 June Charlotte went to see the famous French actress Rachel, an episode relived in describing Vashti in Villette. On 11 June Charlotte complained of a sick headache, and was clearly not well for much of her visit. A constant stream of visitors depressed and tired Charlotte. It is worth repeating again before trying to link too many of the events in London with the writing of Villette that, unlike Lucy Snowe, Charlotte was not an unknown schoolteacher, but a famous writer, much in demand by aristocratic and literary society. She left London later than she had wished, returning via Mrs Gaskell's house in Manchester to Haworth on 30 June. (102)

By eliminating the details and the emotion conveyed through Charlotte's letters, and by not suggesting any different weight between, for example, a "sick headache" and the various events she attended, he is not simply observing, as he believes, but is composing things into his own "meaningful pattern," that of a drab life.

Winnifrith indicates in his introduction that his aim is to emphasize "those parts of Charlotte's life which have most bearing on her career as an author" (4-5), but he does not, in this example, expand upon the connections between Charlotte's experience at the performance by Rachel and her use of it in Villette. A number of biographers draw parallels at this point between George Smith who attended the performance with Charlotte and John Graham who, in Villette, accompanied Lucy Snowe. Winnifrith notes (in a footnote) that "there is no real evidence¹³ for a love-affair" (126) between Charlotte and George Smith, and while other biographers do not limit themselves to this meaning of "real" evidence, his point is that Charlotte never stated directly in her letters that she was in love with Smith. This position is

¹³ In contrast to Winnifrith's methodology, Fraser announces in her discussion of the Rachel performance that she intends to judge "by indirect indications" (406) that this night signalled the beginning of the end of Charlotte's relationship with Smith. Her indirect methods include references to Villette as well as to letters indicating depression or emotional hurt.

consistent with his aim of objectivity, but he does not go on to indicate, from the "real" evidence in the letters, how these experiences do have a "bearing on her career as an author," only on how they do not. He states in his introduction that, in The Brontës and Their Background, he did not pay "sufficient attention to the way in which real events suggested, rather than dictated, events in Charlotte's novels" (2-3), implying that he intends to address this area in A New Life. However, by not quoting passages from Charlotte's letters, he does not indicate the degree or nature of her excitement about this performance, nor what it might have "suggested" relating to thematic or character treatment in Villette. Charlotte mentions Rachel in seven different letters during this time, writing, for example, that "She [Rachel] and Thackeray are the two living things that have a spell for me in this great London" (LFC III 245). She writes on a number of occasions that the performance held an ambivalent attraction and repulsion for her: "I neither love, esteem, nor admire this strange being, but (if I could bear the high mental stimulus so long), I would go every night for three months to watch and study its manifestations" (LFC III 253). Thus, by selecting what to summarize from the letters, by deciding not to quote from them, and by giving no importance to Charlotte's repeated accounts, he does not satisfy his own standard of basing his biography on "all available evidence" (3), nor of indicating the relevance of this event to Charlotte's career.¹⁴

Charlotte's letters to her father and Ellen during this time are quite detailed and while she mentions to Mrs Gaskell a "recurring nervous headache," she also indicates many times in her letters how "stirred and interested" she was by Thackeray's lectures and how she "liked" the sermons preached by D'Aubigny and Melville (LFC III 248). She visited the Great Exhibition five times and writes to Mrs Gaskell that it was a "fine sight but not much in my way" (LFC III 248), although she provides many details of the exhibit in other letters, particularly to her father (LFC III 243). By focusing on the dates, by simply noting the event and by eliminating Charlotte's own comments, Winnifrith diminishes the action, the eventfulness, of Charlotte's life. Hayden White, a contemporary historiographer,

¹⁴ Winnifrith treats the events surrounding Charlotte's deteriorating relationship with the Hegers in much the same way. Because he does not quote passages from the letters, but only selects one detail from each to report, he misleadingly arrives at the conclusion that "it is clear that Madame Heger did not behave like Madame Beck...(61).

differentiates between event and fact; White calls events a "configuration" in which facts are only "propositional indicators,"¹⁵ and this helps explain why Winnifrith's portrait appears static. To suggest a configuration requires interpretation; to note facts is a more passive activity of observation rather than involvement. It may be that Winnifrith's assessment of Charlotte's life as "uneventful" is a result of his own biographical strategy of observing rather than interpreting.

I would argue that there is a distinction between an argued and informed partiality and an unsupported prejudgement or bias. Winnifrith attempts to observe rather than judge, but, at times, I believe, he confuses detachment with an aloofness that betrays a bias against other biographers and Charlotte. Winnifrith occasionally makes personal remarks that, in my opinion, are inconsistent with a detached approach. For instance, he remarks that "The Brontës had of course a mother as well as a father" (9), an unnecessarily flippant comment which seems to be directed at previous biographers who over-emphasize Mr. Brontë or neglect the family altogether, rather than aimed at providing information. In another instance Winnifrith claims,

Mr Brontë's opposition [to Charlotte's marriage to Arthur Nicholls] was perfectly natural. Most fathers are, whether consciously or unconsciously, jealous of any man who wishes to marry their daughter, and Mr Brontë was a tired old man, unwilling or unable to suffer any more losses or endure any changes. (109)

This, it seems to me, betrays an unsupported bias towards Mr Brontë. The facts are that Charlotte was thirty-six, her father turned apoplectic with rage when he heard that Nicholls had proposed,¹⁶ he remained so angry he did not attend the wedding ceremony, and he refused to give her away. Mr Brontë's opposition does not seem a "perfectly natural" response although it may be explainable. Winnifrith's unsupported generalization that "most fathers" act this way undermines his aim to be

¹⁵ Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 41.

¹⁶ Charlotte wrote to Ellen on 15 December 1852: "...papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with, the veins on his temples started up like whipcord, and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot" (LFC IV 29).

impartial and to base his judgements upon sifted evidence.

Winnifrith is not simply making impartial observations about Charlotte's faults and problems when, in commenting about her distress while attending Roe Head, he concludes that, "Charlotte's psychological difficulties would have provided a rich field for an adolescent counsellor or modern psychologist..."(29). At this point he indicates a number of explanations about Charlotte's distress that have been posited by others such as "adolescent religion as well as adolescent sexuality" and immersion in "the world of her imagination" (29). But his reference to psychological problems coupled with the view he offers at the beginning of his discussion that "we cannot dismiss" the idea that there may be "something unnatural in the friendship" between Ellen and Charlotte suggests his view that Charlotte was abnormal.

A comment at the end of his discussion on Villette further illustrates the problem of adopting a "superior observational position" (Appleby 245) from which judgements are made without evidence or argument. He concludes Chapter 9: "We should salute [Charlotte's] achievement [in completing Villette] while noting wryly the rather prosaic way in which Charlotte reacted to it by complaining of delay and lack of money" (106). A few sentences before he comments that Charlotte wrote a "stern letter" to Smith about the delay in publication, and that she complained to Miss Wooler "in a slightly mercenary fashion" (105) that Smith had given her only £500, the same amount he had paid for her other novels. Because Winnifrith does not quote the passages, there is no opportunity to evaluate his interpretations with reference to the overall context and tone. For example, Winnifrith indicates that Smith's "attentiveness to his author deserves high praise" (104), but the fact is that Charlotte writes the "stern letter" on 6 December after not hearing from Smith since 26 October except to receive a receipt for payment "without a line" about the novel (LFC IV 22). Furthermore, Winnifrith, who acknowledges earlier that "the letters to Smith are full of banter" (100), does not detect banter in the following passage, but describes it as a "stern" letter:

On Sunday morning your letter came, and you have thus been spared the visitation of the unannounced and unsummoned apparition of Curren Bell in Cornhill. Inexplicable delays should be avoided when possible, for they are apt to urge those subjected to their harassment to sudden and impulsive steps. (LFC IV 22)

The second comment about Charlotte's "slightly mercenary" attitude arises from her letter of 7 December to Miss Wooler:

The money transaction, of course, remains the same--and perhaps is not quite equitable--but when an author finds that his work is cordially approved--he can pardon the rest; indeed my chief regret now lies in the conviction that Papa will be disappointed.... (LFC IV 23)

Another biographer¹⁷ would argue that the tone and context of these remarks suggest something other than a "mercenary" reaction. Aside from that, however, it is clear that Winnifrith is not simply making an impartial observation when he describes her as "mercenary". In his introduction he criticizes biographers for their "inadequate knowledge of Victorian social and religious history" (2), and yet here he makes no attempt to investigate comparative payments to other novelists that might provide an informed social context for Charlotte's attitude. Peters, taking an opposing stand, writes that "Smith's stinginess with Charlotte was indeed unfair and hardly comprehensible" (355). This displays partiality, as Winnifrith would argue. However, Peters, supports her opinion by indicating the fee Smith paid to other writers: "In 1859 he offered Thackeray £4,200 for a novel in twelve installments....George Eliot £10,000 in 1862 for the rights to issue her Romola serially..." (355).¹⁸

Winnifrith who in principle espouses many of the tenets of a documentary biographer, claiming detachment, objectivity, the importance of sifting evidence for inaccuracies, and faith in his own and history's ability to "see Charlotte Brontë and to see her whole" (3), fails to consistently put these principles in practice. I would argue that this failure is partly due to the impossibility of the task itself. New literary theories and new historiographical approaches since the 1960s have eroded notions of the certainty of fact, the singleness of truth, concepts of the wholeness of personality, and belief in a purely objective point of view. Partiality and

¹⁷ Peters and Gordon do not mention this letter specifically but their analysis of Charlotte's response in other letters suggests the opposite view, that Charlotte was exploited by Smith.

¹⁸ Gordon also adopts this interpretation noting that "the amount might be measured against the £1,200 which Smith paid at this time for Esmond" (251).

interpretation have become central to biographies of the 1970s onwards, although not without problems as evidenced by Peters's and Moglen's experiments in approach and style. However, aside from his reluctance to recognize the impact of such theories on the biographical enterprise, Winnifrith contradicts his own terms of investigation by expressing biased views, by speculating, and by failing to provide the contexts and evidence he expects of other biographers. Although he has explored religious, social and cultural influences on the Brontës in his critical books (particularly The Brontës and Their Background), he has not made use of or expanded this material for his biography. The new information that has come to light, which one would expect to constitute a core section of a biography entitled A New Life, is lost in the footnotes. For example, it is in two footnotes that the reader is informed about unpublished letters between George Smith and Charlotte Brontë, but while Winnifrith tells us in the text that her letters to George Smith are "full of banter" (100), his only example of banter, provided in a footnote, is that "Charlotte rather comically [told] Smith about the rule that i precedes e except after c" (126). In his text he notes about eight letters, but it is not clear which of these constitute new material or which, if any, have produced a new way of looking at Charlotte's relationship with her publisher. One of Winnifrith's major criticisms against other biographers (particularly Gérin) is their reliance on "untrustworthy printed evidence" (BB 6), specifically, reliance on the Shakespeare Head edition of the letters. In the introduction to A New Life he writes, "Once we are aware of the inaccuracy, omissions and incorrect datings which mar such editions as The Shakespeare Head edition (London, 1932, reprinted 1980) we can, by checking available manuscripts, do something to remedy this deficiency" (3). Winnifrith has checked the manuscripts which is a valuable scholarly service; he notes in his footnotes where the manuscripts are located and indicates where he has discovered "defective" (124) texts, problems with dates (125), and some "omissions" (126). On only one occasion, however, does he consider that a change in dates is important enough to note within his main text (41), but he does not indicate how such alterations affect the reading of Charlotte's life and result in a "New Life."

Paul Murray Kendall, Richard Altick and Ira Bruce Nadel all argue that the "'source'" biography (Altick 412), the purist documentary approach, although admirable in its collection of information, is not satisfactory as biography.

Winnifrith, as he claims, has "sifted" the evidence for inaccuracies, and it is possible to turn to him for correct datings and locations of letters, for a chronology of events, and for an appropriate warning (though too frequently and simply applied) about the dangers of drawing parallels between art and life. Kendall writes that such studies "should perhaps be named biographical scholarship rather than biography" (Kendall 132). Winnifrith, in my opinion, fails to produce a portrait, to recreate either the writer or the "human being of pathos" that he himself admits to be "two demands" of biography (4). His partiality is made glaring by his naive presumption of objectivity, and his dismissal of the merits of literary style in life-writing has resulted in a report rather than a portrait. As Nadel writes, when "research replaces experience...the result is usually a dull but accurate account, a reference book rather than a life-story" (Nadel 172). Although A New Life is not a comprehensive multivolumed academic biography, Altick's remarks about the problems of the "'source'" biography seem applicable to it:

It compels respect for its reliability and for the care with which its author has linked fact to fact through two or three long volumes; but it ordinarily lacks flavor and vivacity, the pervasive feeling (indispensable to a truly good biography) that it is the chronicle of a man who really lived. If the essence of a human being is missing from the very pages that in theory are dedicated to setting it forth, we are not much better off, apart from heightened confidence in the information received, than we were with the old multivolume compilation [of the nineteenth century]. (Altick 412)

II. "FILLING IN THE MOSAIC": REBECCA FRASER'S CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Fraser describes the biographic process as a steady "filling in" of "the mosaic" of a life (ix). This view emphasizes the constructive building upon rather than tearing down of the past and allows room for diverse interpretations. Her opening statements imply several paradoxical positions: to construct a mosaic of a life conveys a sense of artistry, of imaginative patterning and arrangement, but this is combined with her admonition to maintain "unsentimental scrutiny"; a mosaic conveys a sense of

completion, but Fraser adds that "evidence is continually being sifted and re-analysed" (ix), indicative of the ongoing biographic process. This combination of a functional and archival interest in documentation with an imaginative and interpretative impulse underlines how her approach differs from that of Winnifrith. Similar to the position of the "practical realists" described above, Fraser adopts a tripartite approach which respects fact, form and interpretation. Valuing objective research, she also acknowledges tentativeness and subjectivity.

The new material referred to by Fraser, the Seton-Gordon collection and Charlotte's marriage agreement, enables Fraser to flesh out Charlotte's relationships with Arthur Nicholls and George Smith, the two most important men in Charlotte's last five years of life. The marriage contract, which stated that Nicholls would not inherit any of Charlotte's personal money, was unusual for the time and undermines the suggestion that theirs was a strictly conventional marriage with Charlotte giving away her rights. By looking more fully at Nicholls, by recognizing that nine months is too short a time to judge whether or not Charlotte would have continued to write, and by examining some of the "positive" changes that marriage brought (472), Fraser re-assesses the single focus developed by Peters and Moglen that marriage entailed a submersion of her identity. Peters, for example, entitles her chapter on the marriage "A Solemn, Strange, and Perilous Thing," a phrase taken from one of Charlotte's letters to Ellen, whereas Fraser, more neutrally, entitles her chapter "The Final Months." Although Fraser agrees, in part, with Peters that Charlotte's "identity was becoming quite submerged in her husband's" (Fraser 477), she questions the meaning of Charlotte's reference to wifhood as "a solemn and strange and perilous thing":

Although this letter has been interpreted, using unrepresentative extracts, to show that Charlotte was unhappy in her marriage, its overall tone is one of considerable contentment. (Fraser 472)

To represent the overall context and tone Fraser quotes two paragraphs and the postscript. Although Charlotte wrote that her "life is changed indeed," she also commented that to be "constantly called for" by one's husband is "a marvellously

good thing" (472).¹⁹

Fraser maintains an open perspective on Nicholls; he is neither, as some biographers depict him, the authoritarian who killed Charlotte's creative spirit, nor the man who brought her the only happiness she had ever known. The marriage contract (as well as some of Charlotte's letters) indicate "the depth of doubt Charlotte felt about Nicholls' motives in marrying her" (463). Yet, Fraser points out that although Nicholls was "domineering", Charlotte "liked being ruled" (476). By November Charlotte had discovered that "their tastes were more congenial than she thought" (479). In February Charlotte changed her will to leave everything to Nicholls, and Fraser writes, "Arthur had won his colours" (482). Although Nicholls was opposed to the idea of a biography of Charlotte, Fraser indicates that the new letters she has seen regarding Nicholls' editing of Charlotte's poetry show his "pride in his wife and reverence for the fame of the family" (495). Thus, Fraser considers the relationship as complex and changing, and the supposition that he thwarted her career is offset by the care with which he selected and edited her poetry after her death.

Fraser also explores more fully than previous biographers the relationship between George Smith and Charlotte. Two new letters concerning George Smith suggest, according to Fraser, the point at which Charlotte recognized that "her hopes about Mr Smith" were futile (453). These letters, one written by Charlotte to Mrs Smith and the other from Mrs Smith to Charlotte, indicate the extent to which Mrs Smith concerned herself with her son's future. Only the draft of Mrs Smith's letter remains, but it appears she wrote Charlotte to tell her of George's imminent engagement. It seems likely that such a letter was sent because Charlotte writes to Williams a short time later asking him to desist from sending further books, an indication that she wished to sever relations with the publishing firm. Fraser concludes that "the brusqueness with which [Charlotte] did this suggests emotional hurt" (453). In the light of these and other letters in the Seton-Gordon collection which became available after Moglen's and Peters's biographies, Fraser is able to

¹⁹ Winnifrith quotes only this one paragraph and reads it as "pessimistic" and the letter as "slightly strained." The lines in question may refer, he suggests, "to the secrets of the marriage bed" (115). His overall view is that the marriage was unhappy and Charlotte would not have written again.

explore the development of the relationship between George Smith and Charlotte. She traces its breakdown from the "fatal night" (406) of 7 June 1851, when they attend a performance given by Rachel, to the formal announcement of Smith's engagement around December 10 1853 which Fraser believes "may have helped finally to pave the way for Mr Nicholls" (454).

It is a significant point to make in connection with my arguments for multiple versions of a life validating and completing one another that Winnifrith and Fraser, who publish in the same year, within a similar critical and historical context, and have at their disposal the same documents, adopt contrasting methodologies and perspectives. Winnifrith not only views Charlotte's marriage as unhappy and the love interest with Smith as debatable, but he interprets what Fraser calls Charlotte's "assertiveness" (x) as "insensitivity" and "intolerance" (A New Life 118). Whereas Fraser describes Charlotte as "a phenomenon," a "complex, passionate woman" and her life as "remarkable in its ordinariness" (x), Winnifrith, although he also mentions her "courage, her sincerity, her devotion to truth," stresses her "faults, her prickly vulnerability, her purblind romanticism...her dogmatism and her unkindness," and describes her life as "drab and uneventful" (118). Perhaps the most striking difference is evident in the reverberations from their contrasting use of the word "angel." Fraser's feminist contention is that Brontë resisted for herself and her characters the label of "the Angel in the House":

[Brontë's] assertive, passionate, realistic heroines were a threat to the concept of the 'angel in the house', the unprecedented moral influence ascribed to women from around 1820 onwards. Her brave and honest depiction in Jane Eyre of what was termed with horror 'the natural heart', her bold attack on the clergy and religious hypocrisy, swiftly earned the novel, despite its runaway success, the reputation of being pornographic and irreligious. (x)

Perhaps unaware of the political repercussions of the word, Winnifrith completes his portrait with this sentence: "Upright, forthright and downright, Charlotte Brontë is a good guardian angel against silliness and sin" (118). This sharply contrasts with Fraser's view and reduces Charlotte to the nineteenth century traditional attitude to women as disembodied moral stabilizers, an attitude that both Charlotte and Fraser

argue against.²⁰

As well as examining new evidence, Fraser, like Margot Peters, maps the cultural and social territory of the woman's sphere. Quoting Elaine Showalter, Fraser writes in her introduction that "with a new perceptual framework, material hitherto assumed to be non-existent has suddenly leaped into focus" (ix). Fraser provides more details of the cultural environment than Peters, but the primary difference, in terms of their sociological approach, is that Fraser more consistently presents Charlotte as "a phenomenon" (x) in her own era rather than, as Peters does, a radical feminist model for our own times. For example, in their opinion regarding Charlotte's marriage, Fraser is more willing to assess information and withhold final judgement whereas Peters concludes that Charlotte's career was thwarted by marriage. Fraser is more moderate in her view of Charlotte as a feminist and, perhaps as a veiled comment on Peters's approach, she writes, "Nowadays Charlotte was constantly being taken for something far more radical than she was" (439). Even when not pointing to Charlotte's rage, Peters envisions her as more active than she is usually perceived. Fraser, on the other hand, allows the passive side of Charlotte to coexist with the rebellious side, producing a more ambivalent figure than has been portrayed by other biographers.

Fraser highlights the economic, intellectual and cultural oppression of women during the nineteenth century: "It is hard to imagine today the stifling effect of nineteenth century codes of behaviour for middle-class women, the 'cult of domesticity' that had been growing from the turn of the century onwards" (145). Although Fraser provides some historical details about the economic and political attempts to deal with, for example, the surplus of unmarried women (147), she is particularly adept at exploring the ways in which the debates about woman's nature, their intellectual possibilities and moral responsibilities, were being treated by Charlotte's contemporaries in the cultural field. Quoting from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* about women's "potential faculty in everything/Of abdicating power in it" (146), Fraser notes that women were recognizing their potential in moral and education spheres and were "demanding political justice" (147).

²⁰ Brontë has Jane contradict Rochester when he calls her his "angel": "'I am not an angel,' I asserted; 'and I will not be one till I die; I will be myself'" (*Jane Eyre* 228).

Fraser discusses the debate as it raged between the traditionalists like Mrs Sarah Ellis, who in her "Women of England" manuals advocated character building ("grace and loveliness" 147) as the proper educational course for women, and the moderate feminists like Frances Power Cobbe or Harriet Martineau, who campaigned for more equality in education, "that every girl's faculties should be made the most of, as carefully as boys" (148). As well as describing the views of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ellis, Cobbe, and, at some length, Martineau "whom [Charlotte] admired above all women" (148), Fraser briefly notes the views on the feminine character as propounded by such prominent people as Florence Nightingale (146), John Stuart Mill (149), Geraldine Jewsbury (264), Harriet Taylor (386) and Tennyson whose poem "The Princess" contributed to "the vigorous debate" about education for women (331).

Similarly Fraser emphasizes the intellectual basis of the relationship between Charlotte and Mary Taylor, illustrating Mary's radical feminist ideas as they emerged in responses to Charlotte's work or in Mary's own writings, particularly her novel Miss Miles which, although it represents ideas of this period, was not published until 1890. Mary's strong views about women's education and economic independence led her to emigrate to New Zealand where she could put her ideas into practice by setting up her own business. Based on Mary Taylor, the character Rose Yorke in Shirley urges women to look beyond household duties and the idealization of such concepts of femininity as self-abnegation and dependence. Fraser's feminist perspective highlights this material so that Mary Taylor becomes a much stronger influence on Charlotte's feminist ideas than she appears to be in other biographies. Fraser, for example, comments that "Mary Taylor would in the end incite Charlotte to rebellious behaviour" (71) and points out that "Mary's determined attitudes had helped rescue Charlotte from being buried alive at Haworth" (175) by inspiring her to go to Brussels. Although, as Fraser notes, Charlotte "expressed in her novels a more radical view than in her letters and her day-to-day existence" (335), Charlotte, even in her novels, did not go as far as Mary wished her to in advocating work for all women. Writing from New Zealand about Shirley, Mary calls Charlotte "a coward and a traitor" for thinking that work is something that "some women may indulge in-- if they give up marriage and don't make themselves too disagreeable to the other sex"

(LFC III 104).

Charlotte and Mrs Gaskell were more moderate feminists than Mary. Their correspondence referring to articles appearing in the Westminster Review about the "woman question" indicates their more ambiguous position of attempting to reconcile emancipation with traditional notions of femininity. Charlotte, for example, approved of Harriet Taylor's arguments about careers for women, yet felt that she "forgot the existence of 'self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion'" (386). Although in her novels Charlotte expressed radical ideas, in her letters and in her life, she exhibits a self-sacrificing devotion to her father that angered the more radical Mary. By reconstructing the climate of debate about the woman's sphere through readings of the writers influencing Charlotte, Fraser shows how a particular perceptual framework can alter the conception of the subject. The effect is that Charlotte emerges as a woman more intellectually involved with and influenced by issues of her day than has previously been seen in other biographies.

Fraser describes both the radical and conventional aspects of personality without attempting to resolve them into a unified self, or, on the other hand, without suggesting that Charlotte was neurotic although she does not deny that Charlotte suppressed her "unfeminine individuality" (222). For example, Fraser simply points out that Charlotte's promotion of the virtues of self-sacrifice in her letters to Ellen Nussey did not correspond with the boldness of her claims for independence in her novels. After quoting from Charlotte's letter to Ellen advising her to stay at home and look after her infirm mother as she, herself, looks after her father, Fraser comments:

Nowhere could one find the standard Victorian belief that "the one quality on which woman's value and influence depends is the renunciation of self" more wholly followed, and nowhere to reviewers would it be more denied than in the assertive figure of Jane Eyre whose demands for her claims to happiness was [sic] so unusual as to seem to threaten the status quo. (223)

Fraser conceptualizes these opposites of self-abnegation and assertiveness as a continuum of personality rather than tracing them as aspects of a quest towards either obliteration of one side or the other or as an ultimate resolution of opposites. This

is a subtle shift from the emphasis taken by other biographers like Lane, Gérin or Peters.

During the difficult years of 1835-37 at Roe Head, although she indicates that Charlotte "teetered on the brink of a breakdown" (104), Fraser attempts to keep in view three spheres of activity: the "orderly life at the school" (105), the "dream world" (105) which "possessed" her, and her "role of rebel" (105) in which she "used her friendship" with Ellen to explore her "violent [sexual] emotions" (107) and her questioning of the "age's religious practice of outward forms of piety" (109). What is new in this interpretation is the hint that Charlotte is consciously exploring her creative talents, that she "revel[s] in the role of rebel" (105). The creative dream world is not simply explainable as a sickness or an escape from a dull life as a teacher, but is a nurturing of the role of the rebel-author who surfaces in the mature fiction. Thus, Fraser concludes,

The dream might be 'drug-like' as Margaret Lane describes it; nevertheless it had originally been inspired by grand ambitions, and despite the maelstrom of emotion Charlotte was living in, she never quite lost sight of them. (109)

The traditional concept of the female as divided between love and career interests (the Freudian model) is here reconfigured by Fraser who sees such contradictory urges, the compulsive passion and rational ambitions, as coexisting even in Charlotte's early years. Although recent biographers such as Lane, Gérin, Peters and Moglen acknowledge the ambitious aspects of Charlotte's nature, this is frequently at the expense of either her sexually erotic or her traditionally feminine nature. Gaskell emphasized the traditional feminine personality, denying, at least overtly, both the sexual and the ambitious aspects; Lane and Gérin, who acknowledge the ambitious drive, the author-self, sublimate erotic love, either by casting it as a neurosis or as a spiritual force; Moglen and Peters over-determine the ambitious impulses, reading Charlotte's marriage as a thwarting of her career. Fraser is not as compelled as these previous biographers to unify the personality and thus allows ambition, sexual emotions and feminine self-abnegation to coexist. Alongside Charlotte's radical thoughts about the "tyranny" of women's "undue humility" lies her conventional belief in "self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion" (335). Fraser does not

oppose marriage and career, for Charlotte is seen as happy in her nine months of marriage and capable of writing more novels. Though admitting that Charlotte suffered depression from such conflicts, Fraser tends to situate Charlotte's revolt within the context of an intelligent, self-aware and creative personality, rather than a sick or mad personality. The internal conflicts that Moglen sees resulting from Charlotte's parental and societal confrontations and which ultimately defeat Charlotte are not seen by either Peters or Fraser to be as debilitating or imprisoning. While there is no doubt that Charlotte suffered migraine headaches, nervousness and other psychosomatic disorders, Fraser and Peters present Charlotte as more capable of rising above these. Fraser's view is not to portray Charlotte as the psychologically repressed female (Moglen), nor as the female rebel appropriating male postures (Peters), but as an ambivalent feminist, more radical in theory than in practice.

Following in the feminist tradition of challenging origins and re-ordering relationships, Fraser, like Peters and Moglen before her, does not immediately begin with Patrick Brontë's lineage. As Peters began with Charlotte's mother to illustrate a matrilineage of both positive (love, intelligence, refinement) and negative (submissiveness) influences, Fraser begins with Charlotte's godmother, Miss Elizabeth Firth, who, even more strongly, represents the values that Charlotte revolts against in her novels: Miss Firth led "a typically dutiful quiet feminine ... unprotesting, Godfearing, unadventurous and undisturbed" (1) life. Nevertheless, Fraser makes it clear right at the beginning of her biography that Charlotte both revolted against and endorsed what Miss Firth represented:

Beneath the quiet dresses with their faintly printed patterns burnt a fire and a hunger that would demand more from her brief existence than the terrible inaction of the feminine life. The strong, impatient nature would crave a place to exercise her exceptional faculties as it chafed against convention. While never able to abandon wholly the feminine self-abnegation the age demanded, she would heroically articulate her creed of feeling with a power and frankness that was completely new in the writing of her sex. (1-2)

As well as disrupting the traditional genealogical history, Fraser breaks the usual chronology in her opening by presenting Charlotte's beginning and end, her childhood and adulthood, her traditional and her radical nature. On the surface,

Charlotte's life seems circular and uneventful like Miss Firth's: "Born a clergyman's daughter, she would end her days a clergyman's wife, who had taught at Sunday School, sewed religiously and listened to a thousand sermons..." (1). Nevertheless, in between these years and "beneath the quiet dresses," Charlotte rebelled against the traditional life. As Fraser writes in her conclusion, quoting Margaret Oliphant, *Jane Eyre* "'dashed into our well-ordered world, broke its boundaries, and defied its principles'" (501). Gaskell, also, begins by foreshadowing the end, but Gaskell's powerful graveyard image suggests an inescapable determinism whereas Fraser's dress image (echoing perhaps Brontë's own play with clothing imagery in her fiction) suggests a more willful act of donning roles or masks. Gaskell could only hint at, either subversively or disapprovingly, the "fire and hunger" beneath the "quiet dresses" whereas Fraser incorporates Gaskell's view of the victimized, sick, and tragic woman who suffered irreparably from the influences of an eccentric father and a severe schooling at Cowan Bridge. However, overall, these two biographers bring out opposite aspects of Charlotte's personality. Fraser projects a positive view of the heroic rebel, Gaskell a portrait of the tragic daughter.

Fraser's accommodation of Charlotte's ambivalence allows her to make some subtle shifts in interpretation. For instance, although Haworth was "a queer place," Fraser early on refers to Nicholls' remark (from one of the new letters in the John Murray Archives) that it was "nowhere as queer as Mrs Gaskell had made out" (25). Mr Brontë, commonly seen as a repressive force, is also seen by Fraser as providing, in a positive way, an "unfeminine" upbringing (25) that fostered Charlotte's 'masculine' views and ambitions. Rather than focusing on Charlotte's inability to cope and her submissive tendencies, Fraser draws out those incidents that show signs of Charlotte's creativity and of her active attributes. For example, at Roe Head where Charlotte is traditionally seen as shy, socially inept and morose, Fraser writes that "she had become quite a figure in her own way" (74) and ends her chapter on the positive note that Charlotte had entertained her schoolfriends with a ghost story and had written playlets. Within the context of Fraser's presentation on the opening page of the adventurous side of Charlotte's character, her conclusion to this chapter on Charlotte's Roe Head experience takes on a symbolic meaning, not of lost opportunities as some biographers suggest, but of opportunities to come:

On her very last day Charlotte was seized by a sudden desire to drop her dignified ways. She said to Ellen, "I should for once like to feel out and out a schoolgirl; I wish something would happen! Let us run round the fruit garden [running was what she never did]; perhaps we shall meet someone, or we may have a fine for a trespass." (75)

This episode, a sad moment in Lane's biography, in which Charlotte "regretted for a moment the strenuous application which had kept her apart from the normal life of the school" (Lane 82) is used by Fraser to prophesy rebelliousness, moments to come in which something does happen, and perhaps, ironically, times in which Charlotte will be seen as trespassing. Fraser does not say this directly, but the incident, placed significantly at the end of a chapter, carries these implications within the context of Fraser's initial portrait of Charlotte's "tempestuous spirit" hidden "beneath the quiet dresses" (1).

The nature of Charlotte's feelings for her tutor, M. Heger, constitutes one of the most difficult areas for her biographers. Fraser does not deny or repress the erotic undertone that developed between them, particularly in the second year of Charlotte's stay in Brussels, but she stresses their intellectual rapport. For example, she suggests that M. Heger brought Charlotte to a "new awareness" about "the possibilities of prose style" (168) and his corrections were "almost a collaboration" (168), a reading that sees Charlotte as more mature and in control. Another subtle but significant interpretation that shifts the familiar portrait of Charlotte as enraptured by her tutor is Fraser's reading of a line in one of Charlotte's letters to him when she writes that she would like to dedicate her first book to her master of literature (LFC III 11). For Fraser, such enthusiasm is not an example of infatuation but of "gratitude" for his "guidance" (168).

Similarly, the reason for Charlotte's return to Brussels in January 1843 is a controversial subject. Charlotte, three years later when she was back at Haworth, wrote to Ellen Nussey that she had been prompted to return by "'an irresistible impulse'" (183), and this impulse has been customarily interpreted as her love for M. Heger. Fraser, however, attempts to re-frame this incident by emphasizing the intellectual, rather than physical, attraction between student and teacher. She focuses on the letter that M. Heger writes to Mr Brontë encouraging him to send his

daughters back to complete their training. Gérin also emphasizes the impact of this letter upon Charlotte's decision to return indicating that it allowed Charlotte to reconcile her duty with her inclination (Gérin 215). She observes that the letter produced in Charlotte "the effect of feeling herself liked and valued" (214). However, Gérin stresses the affectionate rather than the intellectual bond, adding that Charlotte had commented about an earlier relationship that "'If anybody likes me I can't help liking them'" (214). Fraser, on the other hand, notes that the letter was a "distinct professional encouragement of her ambitions":

For Charlotte, ambitious, wanting to make something of herself, stimulated intellectually as never before by her teacher, M. Heger's opinion that she needed another year's study must have been sufficient "irresistible impulse", leaving aside any inadmissible personal attraction she felt for him. (182-183)

Nevertheless, once back in Brussels, as Fraser notes, Charlotte develops an "increasing emotional dependence" (191) on Heger. There is little doubt among recent biographers that Charlotte was emotionally attracted to Heger,²¹ but Fraser underlines the difficulty of "pin[ning down Charlotte Brontë's feelings for M. Heger precisely" (195). Fraser suggests that the letters Charlotte wrote to Heger and her "real confession" at Ste Gudule indicate, not an adulterous love, but "friendship" (195, 199). But, she also points out that M. Heger encouraged an "emotional rapport" (190) with his students that was not quite suitable. Fraser's method of "unsentimental scrutiny" (ix) is clearly illustrated in this section by her thorough investigation of all the evidence concerning this episode in Charlotte's life. Yet, Fraser's uncertainty about the precise nature of the relationship is stressed by her use of qualifying prose: "perhaps" is frequently used in this section (187, 190, 192) as are phrases such as "it is not unlikely" (188), "on the other hand" or "nevertheless" (195). Fraser recreates for the reader the process of argument that she herself has undertaken. She begins, "What was this grief [that Charlotte needed to confess]?" and then proceeds to examine various explanations posited by other biographers and to examine the clues offered by the parallel scene in *Villette*. Her own answer is

²¹ There is, however, still controversy about whether this love is primarily platonic (May Sinclair), spiritual (Gérin), passionate (Peters), or masochistic (Moglen).

only speculatively suggested: "But perhaps she made her confession of love for M. Heger, and then rigidly decided that hereafter she must think of him only as a friend..." (199). Up to this point, Fraser, adopting the approach of "the practical realists" (Appleby 248), provides evidence, reveals the process of her argument, consciously employs a specific (interrogative) style and still maintains an uncertainty about the relationship.

However, following this, her conclusion counters both her documentary approach and her more postmodern tentativeness. By equating fiction and fact, Fraser suggests that Charlotte and Heger, like Lucy and M. Paul, developed a love relationship by the time of Charlotte's leaving. She claims that Villette does not just "project [Charlotte's] wish fulfilment" (195) for a relationship but holds the answer to "her actual [my emphasis] feelings":

For her actual feelings at this terrible parting...one must turn to her heartbreaking account in Villette of Lucy Snowe's parting with M. Paul; made more heartbreaking by one's consciousness of her recognition that only in her writing could she give a happy ending to her love.... (201)

Thus, in spite of her arguments about Charlotte's intellectual and "platonic" friendship and in violation of "Charlotte's maxim that reality must only suggest, never dictate" (195) which Fraser quotes, she concludes by claiming that Charlotte imaginatively reconstructs her "actual" feelings when she writes that Paul "takes Lucy Snowe in his arms" (202). In fact, Fraser later claims with no hint of uncertainty that, in writing Jane Eyre, Charlotte recognized her attachment to Heger for what it was, "an adulterous love" (263).

However, in a number of other key areas, Branwell's affair, Charlotte's response to Vashti, her relationship with George Smith and her marriage, Fraser sustains a tentativeness, employing again the strategy of representing the process of interpretation. She notes that "facts and details" are "puzzling" and reveal only "elements of truth" (231). In another instance, she questions reading either George Smith's or Charlotte's own comments on her lack of physical beauty as indicative of "an absolute value" rather than as an appraisal that "reflected George Smith's own system of values" (307).

Fraser shows an awareness of postmodern challenges to the definitiveness of truth although this perspective is neither methodized nor entirely consistent. She does not reject entirely the possibility of the representation of an external world or the possibility of ascribing meaning, but she attempts to explore multiple meanings inevitably resulting from a de-stabilized language. She challenges surface meanings, revealing competing meanings or contradictions. Her description of the process of biography as "filling in the mosaic of Charlotte Brontë's life" indicates her view of the multiplicity of self and her view that the role of the biographer is to compose, not simply reflect, reality.

Fraser, for example, reminds readers of the layers of subjectivity that disrupt the truth of any portrait. She questions how much the unfavourable portrait that Mrs Gaskell draws of Mr Brontë was formed from her conversations with Charlotte at their first meeting in August 1850, a time when Charlotte was affected by anxieties about her own health, the fairly recent deaths of her siblings, and her father's nagging obsessions about his own and her health. Fraser notes the "impossibility" of total accuracy:

The impression [Mrs Gaskell] received of Mr. Brontë was particularly unfavourable, but whether Charlotte herself realised what a poor idea she was giving of her father is impossible to know. (383)

While this interpretation is not explored in detail, Fraser recognizes the relativism of truth and the limitations on the factual, explanatory nature of historical narrative. In another instance, Fraser explores Charlotte's linguistic construction of self in her letters. Her examination of one of Charlotte's letters to Heger as inventive and fictive opens the door to understanding Charlotte's creation of multiple selves and to an understanding of the artifice, rather than the objectivity, of the text in question. What is real or factual is problematized for Fraser by the subjective and discursive nature of the text. Fraser analyzes the linguistic conventions of Charlotte's third letter to Heger, and suggests that Charlotte was inventing herself as an author:

Perhaps writing the letter, itself close to a work of art in its dramatic quality, with its use of inversion and poetic repetition, reminded Charlotte of the

solace she derived from writing. Certainly that year of 1845 saw a flood of poetry from Charlotte's pen, examining the themes of love and betrayal. (214)

Fraser, unfortunately, does not deconstruct specific passages of this letter. It is possible to read in all Charlotte's letters to Heger the tension (which is the central focus of Fraser's portrait) between Charlotte's self-abnegating role, asking only for a "little" interest, for the "crumbs that fall from the rich man's table," and her assertive role, declaring, "All I know is, that I cannot, that I will not, resign myself to lose wholly the friendship of my master" (213). Although this letter is "heartrending" (213), Fraser looks at its artifice as a distancing mechanism for Charlotte, as an attempt to attain some control in her life rather than abandoning all hope. Reading the letter at face value results in the commonly considered 'real' or objective interpretation of Charlotte as the utterly infatuated and rejected woman. Fraser disrupts this interpretation when she uncovers an alternate self, the experimental, creative artistic figure.

Fraser comments on a similar ambivalence in Charlotte's responses to the performances given by Rachel in London in June 1851. The performance moved her greatly, and she not only wrote about this experience in letters but used it as material in Villette. Fraser indicates that Charlotte was "far from being shocked...was attracted to the point of almost feeling a strange affinity with her....even though she felt it was evil" (405). In Fraser's opinion, the figure of Vashti, modelled after Rachel, represents "a woman unafraid of convention, powerful, altogether unVictorian..." (405). Thus, Fraser uses the mixed responses in Charlotte's letters and the powerful description in Villette of Vashti looking upon "calamity" with "the eye of a rebel" (405) to draw together the conventional and radical aspects of Charlotte's personality: "Beneath the surface of the neat, mittened spinster, so Quaker-like in appearance, there was concealed a good deal of Vashti" (405). That Fraser sees this as a significant episode in Charlotte's life is indicated by her use of the phrase, "The Eye of the Rebel," for the title of her next chapter. Here the Vashti or feminist aspects of Charlotte's character surface, her unwillingness "to be restrained by the straitjackets of sex roles being put round women" (426). With new defiance Charlotte chooses to visit hospitals and prisons in London, "the real rather

than the decorative side of life" (431), rebuffs Miss Martineau for her criticism of Villette, "sneer[s] at" (435) negative reviews, and, most importantly, finally stands up to her father, divulges her secret correspondence with Nicholls, and "dares to suggest" (451) to her father that she and Nicholls are going to meet. By concentrating on "a change in Charlotte," (431), a "new toughness" (431), a "new pragmatism and new calm" (435), Fraser presents Charlotte from a feminist perspective coupled with the traditional historical perspective of progress, of positive development. In this chapter she relaxes her stance of uncertainty and her view of the ambivalence of the subject.²²

By and large, Fraser manages to hold together convincingly these different strains of interpretation that pull against one another: the traditional, objective scrutiny of fact; the feminist interpretation of Brontë's emerging rebelliousness; and the postmodern assumptions of the decentred or multiple self. Sharon O'Brien points out in "Feminist Theory and Literary Biography" that "it is a perilous undertaking for a biographer to use any kind of feminist theory in an open, self-conscious way":

The biographer's overt use of feminist theory explodes the possibility that she could be writing from a neutral, objective, uncontaminated stance. Like many others, I believe it is never possible to write from such a stance, but it is still the case that the biographer who admits her own historical and theoretical context defies dominant assumptions about the genre and so takes a considerable risk. (O'Brien 127)

That feminism is a contaminated and partial perspective is precisely the argument that the more traditional biographer, Winnifrith, and some other critics make against the feminist biographers, Peters, Moglen and Fraser. Furthermore, as O'Brien writes, the postmodern questioning of the unified self collides with some feminist perspectives that argue for a female identity. Nevertheless O'Brien believes that it is possible to allow "feminism and deconstruction to interrupt each other, to establish common ground and points of contention...that would neither offer a falsely unified

²² Although the import of this chapter is change and the emergence of a new defiant Charlotte, Fraser does quote the letter of 18 July 1853 to the Christian Remembrancer in which Charlotte "defends her morals" (437) by stating, in the feminine rhetoric of the day, that her "place consequently is at home" (438).

female self nor deny the importance of gender to female experience" (128-129). One of the ways to achieve this, writes O'Brien, is for the biographer "to incorporate into the text a record of the shifts and developments in her own construction of the subject" (129). Fraser, in fact, does this at times, presenting contradictory evidence, arguing in front of the reader, sometimes concluding that one aspect makes sense while "equally another explanation may be called for" (451). By illustrating that interpretation is a process, and by keeping before the reader the contingent views of other biographers, Fraser, as O'Brien urges, "disrupts the illusion of the unified self as well as the illusion of biography as an objective, completed, unified narrative" (130).

Gaskell's portrait of Charlotte as selfless, dutiful and passive, though challenged by Fraser, is not obliterated by the opposite view of Charlotte as ambitious. Although Fraser discusses Gaskell's limitations, her "camouflag[ing]" of Charlotte's passions and strengths (492), she awards Gaskell the first and last word in her biography. Fraser opens her biography with a quotation from Gaskell (from an unpublished letter) which she uses to represent her own aims:

"If the Public will only see Charlotte as she really was...I shall feel my work has been successful": thus Mrs Gaskell expressed her aim in 1857....Some 130 years later, a biographer may humbly echo the same plea. (ix).

And Fraser closes her biography with a reference to Mrs Gaskell followed by her own question:

Mrs Gaskell often wondered what Charlotte Brontë might have been if she had been born into health and happiness, 'what would have been her transcendent grandeur?'. What indeed?

The effect of framing her biography with Gaskell's words emphasizes Fraser's accommodational methodology, her desire to create constructive links between biographies. In this respect her invocation of Gaskell works, although I believe that Fraser has not come to terms with the ways in which she differs from Gaskell, particularly on the issue of 'reality'. What Charlotte "really was" to Gaskell and her era is significantly different from what she is to Fraser and her era. That difference

becomes clear in the body of her biography, but Fraser, in beginning with this quotation, appears to suggest naively a similarity between her views and Gaskell's and, furthermore, to imply that a biographer is capable of representing realness and wholeness, and not just a version of truth. At the end, as well, there is more of a disjunction between the two biographers than Fraser suggests. Fraser's methodology is more grounded in defining socio-cultural underpinnings than in describing a "transcendent grandeur." Fraser's project is one of placing Charlotte in actual female experience, not speculating about what-might-have-been. Certainly the concluding question reflects in general her tentativeness about truth (and is a characteristic of her style), but Fraser's questioning has not been focused on Charlotte's mysterious genius but on "how she appeared to her era" (Fraser x). Although her use of Gaskell is philosophically ambiguous, it is indicative of Fraser's methodology of inclusiveness, of incorporating the biographical past of Charlotte's life within her own life-writing process.

Gaskell wrote in her Life in 1857: "I cannot map out vices, and virtues, and debateable land" (Gaskell 526). Fraser expands on that trope, quoting in her introduction, Elaine Showalter's reference to the "lost continent"²³ of female history:

The 'lost continent' of the mores and taboos hedging women round in the mid-nineteenth century has surfaced, and the sort of constraints under which the woman writer worked, and the inimical way she was perceived, have only recently become as clear to us as they were to Charlotte Brontë's contemporaries.

In the case of Charlotte Brontë the different landscape now visible is particularly electrifying.... (x)

Fraser undertakes to map out the "vices, virtues, and debateable land" that Gaskell for personal and ideological reasons could not. Pursuing this metaphor in her conclusion, Fraser quotes Margaret Oliphant's reference to Charlotte's rebelliousness from an article published in Blackwood's two months after Charlotte's death:

²³ Showalter writes: "As the works of dozens of women writers have been rescued from what E.P. Thompson calls 'the enormous condescension of posterity,' and considered in relation to each other, the lost continent of the female tradition has risen like Atlantis from the sea of English literature" (A Literature of Their Own 10).

...Mrs Oliphant commented that Jane Eyre had "turned the world of fancy upside down"; she had "dashed into our well-ordered world, broke its boundaries...." (Fraser 501)

Fraser, with the advantage of 130 years' separation, is able to explore both the familiar territory of the Victorian ethos of the day and the new territory, the remarkableness of Charlotte's "unsettling individualism, revolutionary in its implications" (501). Yet, there is still "debateable land." New challenges concerning language, fact and interpretation confront Fraser, and the encircling of her biography with Gaskell's points out the inclusive, yet difficult and tentative, mapping process of life-writing.

CONCLUSION

*There is no final truth about a life, and each age will distil its view.
(Gordon 4)*

A new biography, Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life, was published by Lyndall Gordon in the spring of 1994, too late for full inclusion in this study. Mrs Gaskell's Life figures prominently in Gordon's biography, thus offering an opportunity to consider where Brontë biography began, where it is now, and the impact of multiple versions upon the biographical process. In her conclusion Gordon asks, "Who owned Charlotte's memory?" (322). She briefly describes the "battles for possession" (317) of Charlotte's papers and the "competing interests" (326) of those who thought they had the truth about Charlotte's life. Beyond the personal interests and legal ramifications, however, this question concerns a larger issue of ownership. One of the central issues I have addressed is whether any biographer can fully "own" and, thus, reveal the "whole"¹ life of Charlotte Brontë. The language of possession, ownership and definitiveness, as I have indicated, has changed over the 140 years from Gaskell to Gordon, and Gordon's statement that "there is no final truth about a life" (4) firmly acknowledges an ongoing biographical process. I have argued, as Gordon does, that there is no ultimate and complete truth. Each "age distils its view" (views, I would argue), and each biographer interprets from his or her own subject position. Multiple versions are inevitable and, in fact, useful in validating, by a process of consensus certain aspects of the subject's life. A biography, like a palimpsest, is composed of wholly or partially erased texts, and even those almost wholly erased leave a lingering memory or impression. Contemporary biographers, in particular, have emphasized this palimpsest strategy of inclusiveness rather than of competitive replacement of past biographies. Thus, while some biographies fade, many more, such as Gaskell's, find their place in and contribute to the ongoing biographical process.

In Gordon's view, Gaskell's "representative eyes" (328) revealed Charlotte's historical place, in the context of contemporary expectations of womanhood, as the

¹ The concept of wholeness is employed, in variations, by many of the biographers, particularly Gérin (xiv, 512) and Winnifrith (2). Moglen, Peters and Gordon, however, stress partiality.

"shy, silent" (222) and "model Victorian" (339), and concealed what was not a "respectable image" (329), her "unquenchable fire" (4). Although Gordon sees the limitations of Gaskell's portrait, that it is "only part of the truth" (23), she does not obliterate that version, but explains and builds on it. Gordon believes that Gaskell "slid her subject into the sentimental slots of the time: the woman as victim, self-sacrificial, and beset by deathbeds" (223), but that she was "accurate within these limits" (331). Gordon, too, slides her subject into a slot of time, the contemporary period with its postmodern concept of a "rising" (341) character who invents herself by "evol[ing] a strategy of survival: to be quiet on the surface where the public gaze falls, yet to rise from within, a writer" (137). I have examined a range of "representative eyes" of Brontë biographers from 1857 to the present: the heroizing Victorian commemorators, the idol-smashing "new" biographers of the 1920s-30s, the status quo restorers of the 1950s, the socio-cultural scholarly biographers commencing in the 1960s, and the partisan feminist biographers of the 1970s. Gordon attempts to integrate feminist and postmodern theories and scholarly and narrative strategies. In the last twenty years most biographers have acknowledged the partiality of their positions, that no view, however, objective or neutral it attempts to be, entirely escapes the colouration of its era. Biography is recognized as a process of the encoding and then decoding of historical values. As one version of a life is dismantled and the subject de-mythologized, another version is constructed and the subject is re-mythologized.

I have attempted to trace the development of the biographer's increasing awareness of how historical values (intellectual, cultural and social) impinge upon the construction of self--both the identity of the subject and the vision of the biographer. The tension between individual agency and historical determination of self is more obviously an issue in Gordon's conception of personality than in earlier biographers' portraits. Gordon's thesis is that Brontë challenged the bonds of her own historical position by creating masks or alternate selves through her fiction and by adopting, at times, an ironic or poetic pose in her letters. Since Gaskell's portrait, Charlotte has been configured as a divided personality, and Gordon, too, believes that Charlotte exhibits an inner and an outer self. However, she claims that the dutiful, public self is only a role in which Charlotte "mimics the accents of subjection" (66), and that the

shy, timid self is a "public mask" (65). Gaskell, on the other hand, believed that the feminine characteristics of modesty and dutifulness were aspects of Charlotte's true self, apparent in both her private and public life. The author-self which produced the masculine and coarse attitudes displayed in her fiction was a result of her wild environment and was "but skin-deep" (Gaskell 496), not, in Gaskell's view, Charlotte's authentic self. While previous, modern biographers have downplayed the passive, conventional side of Charlotte's personality that was presented by Gaskell, Gordon is the first to conceive of passivity as a self-conscious defensive strategy rather than repression or victimization.

Gordon's view of Charlotte's "alternative selves" (67) reflects current theories about the plurality of self and how the subject is dissolved into codes of language, that is, how the subject represents herself in different discourses. However, Gordon does not entirely embrace the notion of the decentred self, for she claims that one self has more truth-value than another, that the private self, "the passion and vehemence that were part of the author," (172), is an "authentic self" (173). At times, Gordon views Charlotte's plurality in the over-simplified terms of a dichotomy between the outer and the inner selves.² In the opinion of Fraser and Peters, for example, some of Charlotte's exchanges with Thackeray or Lewes suggest a public self that is articulate, assertive and bold, not simply timid and shy as Gordon claims, and her "'home'" character³ manifests doubt and depression as well as strength and fire. Although Gordon aims at seeing selves as "coexist[ing]" (3), an approach that was taken by Fraser, she at times limits these selves too schematically to the public and the private. Gordon, however, is searching for language that will express her tentativeness about Charlotte, and her emphatic use of the present participle in her concluding remark about Charlotte is significant: "In bringing [independence and selflessness] together, Charlotte Brontë formed her rising character" (341). Gordon, I believe, struggles to present the self as an evolving construction, one that resists

² When Gordon speaks in terms of "polarities" (of "pilgrimage and passion" or "chill and fire" 153), and when she speaks of "the intersection of opposing modes" (317), it is not clear whether this configuration is like G erin's conflict and resolution design or whether it is a new approach. G erin sees Charlotte developing progressively into a new personality of blended opposites, whereas Gordon seems, at times, to see Charlotte slipping back and forth from one mode to another (67).

³ Gordon employs Charlotte's own term: her "'natural home-character'" (352).

"fixed positions" (317) and seeks a space somewhere "between" opposing forces (337). She rejects the concepts of wholeness, unity, resolution and certainty and ends her biography questioning the nature of Brontë: to some she was "a shadow of obscurity, to others a shadow of promise" (341).⁴

Gordon concedes that Gaskell, like Brontë, writes a text that, at least in part, subverts the traditional modes of writing:

...in so far as [The Life] presented itself as a woman's record of a woman, with its emphasis on private life, domesticity, obscurity, rather than public achievement, it has been called even 'subversive'. (331)

What I consider subversive, however, is not Gaskell's rendering of Charlotte's private life which, in my view, is a reflection of conventional Victorian attitudes to women,⁵ but the hints of Charlotte's more assertive, unfeminine public face. I have argued that Gaskell adopts several different types of narrative roles from the personal to the omniscient, and that the notes of subversiveness running through her biography, from her depiction of Mr Brontë's eccentricity and Mrs Robinson's seductive nature to implications concerning Charlotte's assertive intellectuality and her passion, are of a different subversive order from that suggested by Gordon.

Gordon's position about the interplay between individuality or agency (the subject's or the biographer's) and the historical construction of the self is not entirely clear. Gaskell at times is seen as locked into the language and configurations of her own era, imposing the image of Victorian femininity upon Charlotte. Gordon observes that Charlotte's life story "as relayed by Mrs Gaskell to friends, at once formulates the image of a shy, silent Charlotte Brontë..." (Gordon 222). At other times, Gordon appears to believe that Charlotte, herself, "tended to reticence" (229),

⁴ Gordon comments that her exploration of Brontë's character and her fiction centres on the question: "What is the nature of women?" (341). Like Moglen and Peters, Gordon makes a large claim here that Brontë's struggles represent those of all women. In her ending paragraph, and on occasion throughout her biography, Gordon lapses into romantic rhetoric: "Pause, and pause again: how are women's lives to be defined?" (341). However, the point I am emphasizing is that she, like Peters and Fraser, produces an open-ended, interrogative text.

⁵ I would argue, rather, that it would be subversive if a male biographer concentrated on the domestic domain of his male subject (Froude, for example, spends some time on Carlyle's relationship with his wife).

and that "she believed in duty and self-sacrifice with all the conviction of her time" (125). Yet Gordon presents Charlotte only mimicking "the given structures" (67). Gordon also presents Charlotte as manipulating her own story and, thus, contributing to Gaskell's emphasis on the tragic view:

The version of her life that Charlotte gave Mrs Gaskell was touched not only by [Charlotte's] grief and loneliness in a particular phase, but by acute feelers which would have picked up Mrs Gaskell's initial doubts as to her delicacy. (329)

Thus, Charlotte's passive self is sometimes seen as a consciously developed role, sometimes as an inescapable ideological conviction, and, at other times, an imposed interpretation by Gaskell. These statements illustrate Gordon's awareness of complex layers that compose Charlotte's selfhood, but underlying them, though never directly dealt with, are the questions of whether Gaskell (or, by extension, any other biographer) is able to represent the subject as she "really was" (Fraser ix), whether the biographer reflects his or her own self and particular bias, or whether the biographer imposes ("formulates") the image of the age, such as that of Victorian femininity or contemporary feminist. While Gordon grants Charlotte considerable agency by presenting her as consciously manipulating her own "strateg[ies] of survival" (137), she prefers to see Gaskell, largely, as reflecting the values of the age. Gordon's claim that "each age will distil its view" (4) seems only partly accurate in the context of how she explores personality in her biography. It suggests, not only that there is single dominant ideology for each age, but places an emphasis on historical determination rather than individual will, a view more in keeping with her treatment of Gaskell than of Brontë.

By placing the various biographies in their historical and cultural periods, on the one hand, and by exposing each biographer's challenge to biographical conventions, I have attempted to illustrate both the impact of ideology and the process of distillation by the individual biographer. For example in Gérin's biography, the ideology explicit in the very ordered and rational form of the quest motif (with its accompanying tests, lessons, and climax) structures her version of the life as one of progress and of the resolution of the conflict between passion and reason. Nevertheless, her own partiality (warmth and identification with the subject)

continually interrupts the traditional 1960s critical approach, resulting in a specific and partial version which represents Charlotte as more spiritual and passionate than rational. This partiality is more noticeable in the comparison of two biographers, Peters and Moglen, who write from a similar historical context, and from within a feminist framework, and yet see Charlotte as, respectively, triumphant and victimized. In placing biographies in their historical time frame, I have attempted to illustrate the intersection of general trends and subjective positions.

Although each biography explores new territory in some way, Gordon's metaphors such as the "unseen space" (5), the vacancies (1), the "'Shadow'" (4), and the "hidden aspects" (13), indicate that she, much more deliberately than any previous biographer, sets out to reveal the story of "the gaps in the life where facts [my emphasis] vanished":

I intend to open up these gaps with the help of Charlotte Brontë's autobiographical fictions which speak to specific men in a direct manner denied to Victorian women who meant to be ladies....This, then, is a writer's life which will trace the rising spark, secret 'books', and bold words which did not fear to speak about the experience of those alone and silent, unregarded and socially obscure: a new voice of passionate communion. (4)

Gordon explores the space that Gaskell was afraid to enter, the passionate interior that found expression through the author self. In her first chapter, "The Unseen Space," Gordon indicates that "what remains unknown about Charlotte Brontë lies between the facts" (5). Gordon examines the ways in which Brontë, under cover of the mask of fiction, develops a voice and a story of her own, how she resolves the tension between independence and selflessness and how she asks questions about "the nature of women" (341). Employing many of the same tropes as Gaskell, the images of space (graveyard, moors, parsonage, school) and the metaphor of mapping, Gordon, however, reverses Gaskell's vision. Rather than seeing the landscape as an oppressive force, Gordon investigates the ways in which "the expanse of the moors behind [Charlotte's] home and her rage at school" opened up "an interior landscape" (24) that nurtured strength and expressiveness. Thus, Charlotte "used her isolation" (13) as a protection which allowed her to see more clearly and to "explore hidden aspects of character" (13). Whereas Gaskell excluded this "debateable land" (Gaskell

526), the wildness and passion of the author self, Gordon sets out to expose the "uncharted region" (Gordon 338) of Charlotte's autobiographical fictions. She "peer[s] into shadow" (339) by analyzing the ways in which Charlotte's fiction, her juvenilia and the *devoirs* written for M. Heger speak about passion and the hidden self. The "Shadowy life" (338) about which Gaskell was uncomfortable--the fiery, rebellious inner nature--is seen by Gordon "not as feebleness but as potency that goes unseen" (4).

In Gordon's opinion Gaskell focused on "loss and grief" whereas she believes that "the time has come to bring out the strength that turned loss to gain" (4). The view of Charlotte as "impatient, sarcastic, strong in spirit, with an unquenchable fire" (4) is, in itself, not new (though Gordon implies it is). Fire is a major metaphor used to describe Charlotte in the biographies of both *Gérin* and *Peters*, and biographers from *Gérin* forward have portrayed Charlotte as triumphing over her disadvantages.⁶ Indeed, though Gordon mentions *Peters* and *Moglen* only in her bibliography, their versions are more integral to her conception of Charlotte than this would suggest. Gordon's configuration of Charlotte as a "survivor" (21) strongly parallels *Moglen's* view,⁷ and her view of *Brontë's* "salutary rage" (22) reflects *Peters's* focus on rage and rebellion. However, what is new about Gordon's interpretation is her depiction of Charlotte consciously inventing herself as a Victorian lady, rather than simply absorbing the feminine values of her age, and the creating of herself as author through her deliberate adoption of different modes of writing. In addition, Gordon's methodology, her focus on language, particularly on "Love's Language" (as she titles one of her chapters) and her relatively complete analysis of the fiction, is a departure from previous biographies of Charlotte.⁸

Not unexpectedly, the most significantly new contribution Gordon makes is through her focus on language, exploring it as a convention that Charlotte exploits in

⁶ Gaskell portrays Charlotte as a model of stoic, rather than rebellious, strength and courage, but does see these losses as a moral gain.

⁷ The survival motif is a prominent pattern in Gordon's biography. Her last chapter is entitled "Surviving" which recalls *Moglen's* conclusion about Charlotte that "surviving, she need not live as a survivor" (*Moglen* 229).

⁸ As I have previously indicated, *Moglen* discusses the fiction, but Gordon much more consciously ties together the life and the art.

her letters and as a theme, in the fiction, of finding one's voice. She examines letters, devoirs, poems, manuscripts, and the novels for their self-reflexiveness. The Angrian dream world, seen as drug-like by Lane, is viewed by Gordon as a period of "vital freedom of expression" (31). Gordon's approach alters, for instance, the interpretation of Charlotte's correspondence with Heger. The fact that Charlotte addresses Heger in his own language, the one she learned from him, and the view that "the epistolary act" is close to "the imaginative acts of art" (333) leads Gordon to conclude that the letters were "a fusion of passion and creativity which should not be seen in solely sexual terms" (333). Language becomes a means of establishing roles or selves, and the letters to Heger, in Gordon's view, are an "invented correspondence, close to an imaginative act" (118). Charlotte's response to Southey's advice that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life" (65), which is traditionally interpreted as the expression of a dutiful, passive personality, is transformed by Gordon into a defiant expression of sarcasm and an "almost professional facility" to slip from one role to another role, from the obedient to the sarcastic (66-67).

Gordon traces in Brontë's fiction the theme of "voicing" (335) or how the characters discover their own identities and determine their own stories or "plots," rejecting the conventional plots, such as those offered to Jane Eyre of orphan, governess, mistress, or angel (146). As Gordon notes, "Voicing was what was at issue for author and character" (335), and Gordon believes that Brontë voices the "polarities" or "tensions" (153) of her own life in her fiction. Like Moglen, Gordon attempts to illustrate how Brontë's fiction "sets out an exemplary pattern which realises the deepest structure of Charlotte's own life" (153). Both biographers focus on the transmutation of life into art (Moglen 14), and Gordon, echoing Moglen, states, "In Villette events and interior dramas in Charlotte's life were transmuted into her most searching revelation of hidden character" (253). However, Gordon works more in the mode of Peters and Fraser, adopting a cultural and social approach rather than Moglen's psychosexual perspective. Gordon is interested in ideological similarities between character and author, in how, through her characters, Brontë "gave form and meaning to the private extravagance of her own life tugged between the claims of the self and the claims of society" (158). In contrast to Winnifrith, she

does not emphasize the literal parallels of appearance and occurrences. And, unlike Moglen, Gordon establishes a strong foundation of biographic detail, referring to the letters to substantiate the deductions she makes from the fiction.

Autobiographical reading of the fiction is not a new approach, and, in fact, Brontë biographies have been particularly open to charges of the blurring of fact and fiction because of the intensely autobiographical nature of their fiction. What is innovative is Gordon's attempt to make respectable and authoritative the use of the fiction as a primary, not simply secondary, source. She does not simplistically blur character and author and observes areas where they differ.⁹ Most importantly, she establishes in the first few pages a very specific contract with the reader: to explore the space that "lies between the facts" (5). Thus, the reader is pre-warned of the speculative nature of Gordon's project and the resources she intends to use. Moglen was an instrumental forerunner, claiming openly, like Gordon, that she aimed to explore the gaps or what she called "the critical element" of "interaction" between life and art (Moglen 14). Moglen, however, not only adopts a narrower focus than Gordon does, but, as she admits, her biography "takes for granted, earlier, exhaustive studies" (Moglen 14). Gordon, however, imbeds her speculative approach in the documentary and archival tradition of examining manuscripts and letters.

In the opening pages Gordon attempts to establish the freedom she desires to rove between fiction and fact. Sometimes she does not acknowledge within the text itself¹⁰ the differences between fiction and letters. Her opening two paragraphs include quotations from the letters, from Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey, from Charlotte's "Biographical Notice," and from Villette without any recognition of the different truth-values these sources might command. However, most often she indicates if she is drawing a parallel between fiction and life. For example, acknowledging that Charlotte and Lucy Snowe were similarly distressed by the conflict between reason and passion, Gordon writes: "Through her heroine, [Charlotte] exposes the problem"

⁹ For example, Gordon writes: "Charlotte Brontë denied any identity with Jane beyond plainness. With contemporaries, it was prudent to preserve her detachment from that passionate voice. In fact, the author had not the overt rage nor quite the unflinching strength of Jane. (153)

¹⁰ Gordon, of course, provides endnotes, but the flow of reading is not interrupted by source references.

(248); or she comments on the nature of George Smith's letters: "Smith's letters to Charlotte Brontë have vanished, but she may well have described this particular letter in Villette..." (239). Once having established a phrase from the fiction, such as Lucy Snowe's "heretic narrative" (253) or her "rising character" (257), Gordon, however, transfers these to Charlotte without further acknowledgement (254, 341). In connecting the fiction and life so boldly, Gordon seeks a new direction in biography where autobiographical fictions might be granted more authority, and might not be written off as "the fatal blurring of fiction and fact which has bedevilled Brontë studies ever since ... [Gaskell's] Life of Charlotte Brontë" (BB 1). Moreover, in light of Gordon's postmodern perspective on Charlotte's role playing in all her writing, the separation of fact from fiction becomes more difficult to determine.

Gordon reads the gaps; she speculates about the connections between fiction and life, and she speculates about the poses adopted by Charlotte in her letters, how she played sarcastically with Southey, and how she "showed people only that part of herself they would wish to see" (330). In this respect her methodology transgresses traditional documentary approaches. Although such postmodern approaches to studies of the self open new avenues of investigation, the danger is that if everything is read as a fiction or invention, meaning and reliability begin to dissolve. I believe that some of Gordon's speculations and her reversals (of the public and private selves, for example) create problems, not only of confusion on Gordon's part as I have mentioned, but confusion for the reader. For instance, Gordon claims that Charlotte creates Ellen and Miss Wooler (318) as she would like them to be, and that, in fact, we do not get an accurate sense of who they really are from Charlotte's letters. Gordon writes, "It helped [Charlotte] to see Ellen as well-bred and conventional, for, then, if Ellen accepted her, she was not so deviant as she feared" (62). Aside from the quite unusual assertion that Nussey was unconventional which Gordon does not pursue, the ramifications of such a claim about the inventiveness of the letter writer, if applied to all the letters to Ellen, would unsettle their reliability and reduce the documents to fiction.

It seems a large leap from the view of Charlotte as silent and passive to the view of her as passionate, articulate and assertive. But my contention is that these constitute authentic aspects of her personality, and that multiple versions of a life

allow these authentic selves to coexist rather than to be superseded or to fade. Although earlier biographers (up to and including Gérin) attempted, in general, to harmonize or unify the subject, contemporary biographers allow pluralities of self to emerge. The criticism applied against these earlier biographers is that they artificially (by omission of contradictory facets or by false resolution) represented the self as whole. On the other hand, the danger for postmodern biographers is to over-pluralize the self, or to see it as constructed solely by historical processes, so that it loses any sense of an identity.

The nearly 140 years of Brontë biography show that some views fade more quickly and more certainly than others: the mechanistic interpretation of Charlotte posited by Langbridge has not found its way into any other biography, and Benson's portrait of a censorious Charlotte has been re-visioned as that of a boldly assertive Charlotte. Although the interpretations of these two biographers, and many of the biographers of the fifties, are seldom incorporated overtly in more recent biographies, their approaches and strategies did make a mark on the development of the genre. Gordon, in attempting to recast Charlotte for the 1990s writes,

Stale labels--Romantic or feminist rebel or spirit of the moors or dutiful daughter--fade before the subtle promise of her positions. Our view changes, as the Victorians recede behind the horizon of a century or more. (334)

Gordon sees Charlotte at a beginning point of working out positions between "venture and selflessness" (341), between the promise of a new world where women's desires and expressiveness find a voice and the reality of the old world where humility, endurance and duty are expected. Gordon remarks that, in describing Lucy Snowe as a "rising character," Charlotte's choice of "the present participle is not an accident" (338). This rising character has moved "beyond the limits of staling roles" (339) into a position that is "being without, as yet, form" (338).

Biography, too, is in the process of becoming as it negotiates between old forms and new, between traditional and postmodern concepts of self, between what "each age" distils and what each biographer brings to that process. In my view, this distillation process is not a rarefaction, an arrival at the essence of a life, as the word might suggest, but a continual layering of the present with the past, a hybridization

of multiple biographical positions. The old positions, the "stale labels," are, perhaps, not as stale as Gordon suggests. Her own biography is testimony to the fact that Gaskell and Gérin, Peters and Moglen, Fraser and Winniffrith continue to have roles to play in the process of writing the lives of Charlotte Brontë. And, there is still the "promise of ... positions" to be revealed.

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