

"THE FIRE AND THE CHANDELIER WERE NOT SUFFICIENT  
COMPANY FOR ME": WOMEN OF INTELLECT  
IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE

by

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## CHAPTER I

### BRONTË HEROINES AND INTELLECT IN LIFE

Brontë curses the fact that women are denied intellectual development.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,  
The Madwoman in the Attic

I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal.  
Lucy Snowe, Villette

"The fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me," Edward Fairfax Rochester tells Jane Eyre (Brontë, Jane Eyre, 123-24). His words, implying his recognition of Jane's capacity for intelligent conversation, brought to my attention the presence of intellectual characters in the text. I noticed similar characteristics in Charlotte Brontë's other novels Shirley, Villette, and The Professor. I also observed that the characters representative of the novels' cultural setting tend to disparage the intellectual characters, most of whom are women. I wondered what that situation could mean for the novels, which have the reputation for chronicling the spiritual oppression endured by nineteenth-century women. But what of the characters who have a conflicted relationship with their culture because of their intelligence and interest in intellectual pursuits? What can that relationship tell us about the culture's estimation of and expectations for women? What can we learn about Brontë's novels through

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their response to a situation of denigration and even intellectual repression? The answers to these questions will make up this study.

### Survey of Scholarship

Although the epigraph from Gilbert and Gubar which heads this chapter indicates that scholarly attention has been paid to the intellectual women in Brontë's novels, the brevity of their comment is symptomatic of the incidental way scholars approach the subject. Pauline Nestor writes that Brontë "did speak out in her fiction about the intellectual and spiritual equality of women," but Nestor, Gilbert and Gubar, and other scholars have paid virtually exclusive attention to the way Brontë speaks out about spiritual equality; they have not dealt in any detailed way with intellectual equality or with the topic of women's intellect in general (8). There has been no detailed treatment of the intellectual characters and the importance of their intellectual life, much less the fact that they have one. I have attempted to repair that omission by focusing on the relationship between Brontë and her culture and how it affects her treatment of women's intellect. Through this process, I have also made discoveries that bring out new aspects of Brontë's novels and her identity as a writer.

Previous scholars concentrate on Brontë's concern with spiritual independence in a culture that considered women's spirit only in the context of their relationships with other people. Elaine Showalter, for example, observes that Rochester "flattered the heroine's spirit by treating her as an equal . . . a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Woman' in a new aspect" (143). She also observes that in Jane Eyre, Brontë attempts to "depict a

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complete female identity" (Showalter 112). Whenever scholars mention women's talents and intellect, however, it is only in the most incidental way. There are some scholars who merely note the characters' possession of intellect, while others make general connections between gender and intellect or society and intellect, connections which do not investigate the definition and role of women's intellect in nineteenth-century culture.<sup>1</sup> Christine van Boheeman concedes that "Jane Eyre makes a strong claim for women's rights to intellectual and economic independence" (33). Norman A. Jeffares sees the historical background of Shirley as "the plight of the intellectual woman in the nineteenth century" (291). Three scholars, Helene Moglen, Shirley Foster, and Lyndall Gordon, mention Brontë's opinions about intellect's role as contributing to nineteenth-century literature. Moglen remarks that in Jane Eyre, Brontë "establishes her heroine on the same terms as the traditional hero--by virtue of her interiority: her qualities of mind, character, and personality" (106). Foster comments on The Professor that "Crimsworth's desire for a wife who is neither conventionally beautiful nor empty-headed, but who is intelligent and companionable, suggests an ideal of womanhood which Brontë wishes to recommend in the face of more conventional images" (81). Gordon describes Shirley as "a theoretic possibility: what a woman might be if she combined independence and a means of her own with intellect" (187). Moglen does not explain the phrase "qualities of mind" but leaves it fascinating in its vagueness. Foster does not elaborate on Brontë's suggestions of "an ideal of womanhood" that is apparently different from "more conventional images;" she does not define those "conventional

images" nor account for their cultural origins, nor does she examine the implications, based on the culture's conventionality, of what she points out as Brontë's suggestion of an ideal that is apparently in direct opposition to the cultural standard. Gordon does not go on to explore the reasons that Shirley remains only a "theoretic possibility." These scholars seem to identify Brontë's concern that women have the opportunity to use their intellect in ways beyond the relational domestic sphere and current estimation of women's capabilities, but they do not connect that concern with Victorian culture's interpretation of women's intellect and roles as I do. Instead, they stop short of sustained, thorough attention to the implications of what might be called "the intellectual woman theme."

There have been a few scholars--Inga-Stina Ewbank, Geoffrey Wagner, Brenda R. Silver, and Jocelyn Harris--who have gone beyond incidental, isolated comments in their treatment of the intellectual woman as a character type in Brontë's novels. These scholars give more attention to the importance of intellect in relationships between characters, but do not consistently pursue other connections, such as the origin of that importance in contrast to existing cultural conditions, which Brontë herself explores through her characters, their priorities, and their experiences. These scholars' studies of Brontë's novels do not represent a trend or school of thought, but simply unrelated examples of scholarship on the topic.

Though Ewbank focuses on Charlotte Brontë's wish to be known as an author only, rather than specifically as a woman author, she gives most of her attention to the novels themselves, rather than particular biographical details. She discusses what she calls the "real subject of Charlotte Brontë's

novels . . . the emotional and intellectual needs (the two inextricably related) of a woman" (160). She emphasizes the experiences and attitudes of the characters, without taking into consideration the nineteenth-century culture's judgments about women's mental capacity and intellectual needs. For Ewbank, this subject's most important aspect is the romantic facet of the teacher-student relationship in each novel. She notes briefly the implications of this in the relationship between Jane and Rochester, commenting only that the teacher-student relationship "is an underlying metaphor, as Jane and Rochester teach each other" (198).

In her discussion of Brontë's other novels, Ewbank examines in more detail the power of superior intelligence upon this type of relationship (198). Crimsworth is first attracted to Frances because of her mental qualities, and "to her he always remains the intellectual master that she first fell in love with" (Ewbank 199). Ewbank calls Caroline and Robert's relationship in Shirley more conventionally romantic than that of Shirley and Louis, though she writes that the former couple "appear as pupil and master in their joint French and English poetry reading" and describes as "revealing" the passage in which Robert tells Mr. Yorke of his ideal of a wife--one who possessed a "thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information" (199). She sees the teacher-student relationship between Louis and Shirley as making their romantic relationship possible, for she remarks about Louis that "it is as her tutor that he feels he can claim Shirley," and to explain, uses as evidence the passage: "It was unutterably sweet to feel myself at once near her and above her: to be conscious of a natural right and power to sustain her, as a husband should sustain a wife" (199). Ewbank sees the

same type of relationship in Villette, contending that the mere acquaintanceship of Lucy and Paul has its turning point in Chapter 30 when he finds her "deficient in some branch of knowledge [and] begins to instruct her" (201). Ewbank takes into account Paul's resistance to female intellectual development, but views his response as a step in their relationship: "he can see Lucy as a lovable woman only after he has learnt to recognise her as an individual, with a mind and intelligence of her own" (201). She also sums up Brontë's creation of Lucy Snowe in terms of the intellect:

in creating her, Charlotte Brontë achieved her ultimate reconciliation of 'realism' with 'poetry' into 'truth,' and that truth is a realisation of modern womanhood with its painfully paradoxical impulses: intellectual ambition and emotional hunger, drive towards independence and need for love. (202)

Geoffrey Wagner's study combines psychological, biographical, and feminist criticism. He looks at the implications of Brontë's use of intellectual characters in Jane Eyre, writing that Brontë's novel challenges the complications in the power aspect of male-female relationships through the importance of intellect to the relationship; Jane and Rochester's marriage is "a matter of proper union, balance, between sex and intelligence" (126). He also notes that intellectual equality itself exerts enough power over Jane that she almost capitulates to St. John Rivers' marriage proposal (Wagner 127).

Brenda R. Silver studies Brontë as a novelist consciously writing to shape the audience's response so that it will see Lucy as she never could be seen by her culture. Silver's study includes a discussion of the narrator's

intellect and society's response to her because of that quality. The society in which Lucy lives does not have the ability to evaluate her correctly, because of the cultural ideology that taught women to be submissive, unintellectual domestic creatures. Silver sees Lucy's selfhood as an aspect of her personality which includes her "unfeminine desire to be her own person--to achieve independence--and her knowledge of her powers: an active intellect and the ability to feel strongly and act decisively" (97). Silver then explores the other characters' reactions to Lucy's intellect in terms of its lack of social value and her reactions to the way people treat her because she is an intellectual woman. Silver quotes Ginevra Fanshawe's remark to Lucy that "Nobody in the world but you cares for cleverness" and uses that comment as a starting point for her discussion (97). She observes that Lucy is seen and not recognized by an old schoolmate of lower intelligence, and that this experience enables her to realize that "intelligence does not lead to social visibility or acceptance" (97). Silver argues that Lucy "resolves the conflict between intelligence and womanhood by insisting that others perceive her as clever, or interested in learning, or quick whereas in truth she was none of these things" (97). Lucy's decision to take the teaching job instead of remaining at her nursery-governess work is an "assertion of female selfhood broad enough to include intellectual ambition and achievement" (98). Silver also includes the importance of intellect in her connection of the development of Lucy's character to the theme of Silver's article--the relationship between Lucy and her reader:

The path, however, to a maturity that is intellectually and financially fulfilling, and I would argue existentially

fulfilling as well, involves more than just the telling of the tale; ultimately, Lucy's development resides in the mediation of the reader who grants her the recognition and the reality of her perceptions lacking in the external world. (111)

Jocelyn Harris' feminist-based intertextual study emphasizes Brontë's awareness of the conflict between romantic love and intellectual aspiration. Harris argues that Brontë used male writers' tradition instead of that of female writers to resolve the problem of *Villette*. Harris does address in part the cultural situation in which "learning and love . . . are usually set in opposition for women" and how the novel is pessimistic about the possibility of reconciliation (83). As Silver does, Harris quotes Ginevra Fanshawe's remark to Lucy that she cares for cleverness unlike anyone else, but then concentrates her discussion on the role of intellect in the relationship between Lucy and Paul (83). According to Harris, they share a desire for a sphere for their "passionate blood . . . and intellectual brains" (84). Paul recognizes Lucy's intellect and "even expands her intellectually and emotionally by offering 'mental wealth' from the 'library' of his mind," but punishes her for her pride in intellect (Harris 85-86). Yet Lucy is not discouraged by Paul's disparagement; she remains challenged intellectually by him (Harris 91). The romantic aspect of their relationship remains a problem, however; even after their engagement, they contain their attraction to each other in the safety of a brother-sister relationship (Harris 85).

Thus Ewbank, Wagner, and Silver indeed discuss various aspects of the "woman of intellect" theme, but their work does not question in any great detail the relationship of the theme to the cultural ideologies of the novels' settings and the contribution of Brontë's works to nineteenth-century

literature. In spite of some comments related to Victorian culture's conception of male-female relationships and women's characteristics, Ewbank and Wagner do not seem to have sufficient awareness of the uniqueness of the intellectual woman theme. In her discussion of the romantic relationships, Ewbank does not address the apparent unusualness in nineteenth-century literature of a man being attracted to a woman because of her intelligence. Wagner also ignores that issue. In addition, he does not explain his remark that "the 'sense of power' Jane had first felt over Rochester now makes it possible for her to be the submissive, the Helen Burns that she had earlier envied, since he has accepted her as his intellectual equal" (133). Is Jane's "'sense of power'" kept in reserve so that she will feel comfortable taking on the submissive role that was not only culturally prescribed but seen as natural?

Silver does address the social implications of being identified as a woman of intellect in a culture which denigrated women's intellect; she points out, for example, Lucy's discovery that intelligence is not socially acceptable, but her discussion is only a corollary to the subject of the narrator's relationship to the reader. Harris pursues the effects of the social implications on romance further. She shows how intellect can be an advantage for a woman in a romantic relationship. She does not, however, discuss how the mere existence of a woman of intellect in a nineteenth-century novel confronts the cultural standard. She and the other Brontë critics who have paid some attention to the woman of intellect theme have not questioned the appearance in the novels of the references to intellect and the characters who consider intellect important. The critics have not taken

into consideration the cultural origins of society's views of intellect nor the consequent implications of Brontë's response in her portrayal of Victorian society's standards for women's intellect and her creation of characters who hold different standards.

Therefore, there is a need for a study that focuses on the intellectual woman theme in Brontë's novels, treating her position on society at length. In order to examine the origins of the Victorian society's beliefs which shaped their estimates of women's intellect and Brontë's response, I will look at the cultural ideology of the segment of Victorian society about which Brontë writes, the methods used to put the ideology in place, and the cultural practices and cultural capital in which that ideology is embodied. Although she included some working class and gentry class characters, Brontë focused primarily on the middle, or bourgeois, class. Thus I will focus on the middle class and its bourgeois ideology and the effects of each on women's intellect that Brontë criticizes.

In Ideology: An Introduction, Terry Eagleton writes that "a mode of domination is generally legitimated when those subjected to it come to judge their own behaviour by the criteria of their rulers" (55). These criteria are influential because ideology relies for reinforcement on processes of naturalization and rationalization which deny that "ideas and beliefs are specific to a particular time, place, and social group," and which conceal its artificiality (Eagleton, Ideology, 59). Ideology appears in the culture through practices at a number of "levels" which can work together; as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, the "complicity between cultural and economic value-systems is acted out in almost every decision we make"

("Speculations" 166). Pierre Bourdieu captures this sense of "complicity" in his term "cultural capital," the possession of which--in the form of information, characteristics, actions, or material goods--is evidence that a person knows what the culture, for ideological reasons, values. According to Bourdieu, people can accumulate and even invest in these habits, customs, or types of knowledge for social and material gain, just as people accumulate or invest in economic capital. Of course, different segments of the general culture will value different things: the gentry and middle-class British most evident in Brontë's novels valued accomplishments for young women such as piano playing and singing as romantic capital, but the middle-class tended to value possession of moral influence and housekeeping knowledge as romantic capital also. These forms of "capital" were important for social and economic advancement.

In their various ways, Eagleton, Spivak, and Bourdieu are all alluding to the processes of constructing what Linda Shires, quoting Richard Johnson, calls "intersubjectivity" or the sense of identity people derive from their relationships with others (though for Eagleton, at least when "ideology" is concerned, these relationships take hierarchical forms) (189). Shires, however, points out that people can have a greater role or agency in the formation of their identities, for she also emphasizes the importance of "personal history" or the self's relationship to itself (189). For her, then, people possess "multiple subjectivities" (189). The Brontë heroines have the self-confidence in their personal history to persevere in their intellectual pursuits, but their intersubjectivity is influenced by society so that they do feel some qualms when receiving society's scorn for not fulfilling cultural

demands. However, the various rights, duties, and relationships with others created by multiple subjectivities bring contradictions that leave room for people to develop their own ideas about what they should do. Out of this independence, or personal agency, come ideas which may not conform to the duties people may have internalized, thus preparing, however inadvertently, for changes in the culture.

In this study, I will look at the domestic ideology of the nineteenth-century Victorian middle-class culture, its practices in regards to women's roles, its cultural capital, and the effects on its estimation of women's intellect. I will then turn to Brontë's portrayal of the culture and her presentation of alternative views and treatment of women who value their intellect and its enrichment.

### Cultural Context

The Victorians defined intellect and its corollary words as a mental faculty.<sup>2</sup> The New English Dictionary gives nineteenth-century uses of the word intellect which define it as "that faculty or sum of faculties, of the mind or soul by which one knows and reasons . . . intellectual powers, mental faculties." The high culture and popular culture writers considered intellect to be a faculty of the mind. John Ruskin, in "Of Queens' Gardens," observes that "the relation of the womanly to the manly nature, their different capacities of intellect or virtue, seem never to have been yet estimated with entire consent" (82). In "Middle-class Education: Girls," Harriet Martineau writes that "the custom of giving girls a classical education three centuries ago, ought to have settled forever the pretended

doubt whether the female intellect is adequate to the profitable study of the classics" (108). T. H. Lister, a writer in the popular press, notes a "masculine exercise of intellect" in women writers (97). Matthew Arnold and conduct book author Elizabeth Sandford use the adjectival form of the word intellect; the former writes of a person's "real intellectual life" and the latter uses the phrase "intellectual pursuits" in reference to a woman's alleged ineptitude (Arnold 136; Sandford 29). Benjamin Parsons, in his work The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman, asks, "shall we suppose that the intelligent Creator who had so deeply at heart the intellectual improvement of man, selected or rather called into existence for his favourite son, a woman of inferior capacity?" (21-22). Sarah Stickney Ellis notes, in The Women of England, middle-class citizens' possession of "so vast a portion of the intelligence and moral power of the country at large" (14). These definitions show that the Victorians considered intellect as a mental faculty but that it could itself be influenced or influence other things like gender and class.

The Victorians considered intellect a mental faculty, but their estimation of woman's intellect was made contingent upon their definition of womanhood within the current domestic ideology. A debate, referred to as the "Woman Question," raged over woman's nature, abilities, and duties. According to E. M. Palmegiano, that debate was "part of that favorite past time, evaluating the effects of industrialism" (xi). Those self-conscious Victorians wanted to discover some "law of femininity" so that they could know "what woman was supposed to be" and "make appropriate adjustments in her condition, bring her back to her proper orbit"

(Palmegiano xi). Despite the debate, there existed a consensus on the basics. Palmegiano describes the Victorians' interpretation of womanhood

as the negation of being male. As the sexes were complementary physically, so they must be otherwise. What suited one sex would, in the catchword, "unsex" the other. Thus if men were strong, women were weak. If men were amoral, women were virtuous. If men were free, women were dependent. Above all, if men were rational, women must be emotional or intuitive or instinctive. (xi-xii)

This interpretation of womanhood and its characteristics determined the definition of woman's mental faculty. Since the Victorians accorded to men the rationality of mental faculty, women could not be rational in intellect, but were "emotional or intuitive or instinctive" and therefore weak, inferior in intellect. Any superior mental traits ascribed to women were traits still considered inferior to those possessed by men. Lister writes that woman was "inferior in power of close and logical reasoning . . . in combination and of generalization" and in "capability of steady and concentrated attention" (193). Like Lister, John Dix contends that man's mind possesses more stability and strength, along with greater ability to analyze, to generalize and to "draw a conclusion from a consecutive chain of ideas" (40). He also ascribes to woman an inferior faculty of reason and judgment (40). M. L. G., author of the article "Men and Women," refers to the estimate of some people that woman's intellect is earlier and more rapidly developed than man's but less firm and profound (102). The essayists who sign themselves T. F. O., S. W., and Senoj state, respectively, in their series of articles, that women possess less energy of intellect, are deficient in intellectual faculties in general, and have minds suited to

"intellectual urbanity" (219, 222, 226). The phrase "intellectual urbanity" is similar to Dix's statement that "the mind of woman seems constituted more for elegant literature than the severer disquisitions of metaphysics: resembling the delicate but beautiful flower, which charms by its fragrance and beauty" (40). T. H. Huxley, John Stuart Mill, Ellis, Dix, and Lister agree that women are quicker in perceptions and observations than men. Ellis, Lister, and T. F. O. note woman's delicacy and "nicer perceptions of minute circumstance" (Lister 193). Dix writes that women have "amiable and attractive qualities of mind," such as taste, vivacity, and a keen sense of propriety (40). Thus their comments characterize female intellect as slight, possessed of traits less valuable than the strength and rationality of male intellect. They do concede that women may possess certain mental qualities to a superior degree than men, but these qualities themselves are considered less important than the strength and rationality accorded to men's intellect.

There were a few people in the nineteenth century who considered woman to be intellectually equal to man. Despite his valuation of woman's quick perception, Huxley states that women have instinctive intellectual insight (19). He also argues that people should recognize that girls "share the senses, perceptions, feelings, reasoning powers, emotions of boys and that the mind of the average girl is less different from that of the average boy, than the mind of one boy is from that of another one" (21). Mill contends that since women have proven themselves capable of doing successfully everything done by men, women's culturally enforced inability to compete with men in the exercise of intellectual faculties is detrimental to society (300). Parsons also argues that women are intellectually equal to

men, as indicated by my earlier reference to his observation that God would not create an inferior being as a help suitable for man (21-22). Parsons also addresses the culture's fears that intelligence hurts women's femininity; he states that intellectual powers do not make a woman hard, immodest, unsympathetic, or insubordinate to patriarchal authority--in other words, intelligence in women does not clash with their gender, with the characteristics that make up their femininity.

Just as Victorian notions of gender determined the characteristics and quality of woman's intellect, it would determine its uses as well. Woman's duties, referred to as "Woman's Mission," consisted primarily of marrying and raising children. Both Ellis and the author of "Woman and Her Master" advise a woman to obey her husband, make him happy, improve his character, and give dignity to his house, as well as watch devotedly over his children and train them well ("Woman and Her Master" 166; Ellis, Wives, 10, 23). There were other duties. Richard D. Altick writes in his book Victorian People and Ideas that the proper middle-class female was "a priestess dedicated to preserving the home as a refuge from the abrasive outside world" (53). Wives also supervised the household and did charity work, but nothing more, except the accomplishments learned in youth, in order to preserve the status that the family's leisure gave them (Altick 51-52). According to Amanda Vickery, it is possible that the concept of separate spheres in the sense of separateness of gender power existed before the nineteenth century; therefore, the Victorians used the vocabulary of separate spheres for their own agenda: the marginalization of middle-class women (400-01, 412-13).

Influence was also important. Because a woman's moral nature was considered to be higher than man's, woman was considered to possess and to exercise moral influence over her family. Influence was a characteristic as well as a vehicle through which she exerted moral power. Through woman's influence for good, morality spread from the family to the rest of the world, from the domestic sphere to the public sphere. This perception of the effect of woman's influence developed out of the intersecting beliefs of the Puritans and the Benthamites, who shared the philosophy that "public morality depended upon private virtue" and that the "well-being of society was derived from the spiritual health of its members" (Altick 181). Influence, household management, procreation--these then were woman's duties, "Woman's Mission," which grew out of her nature and expressed the Victorians' general conception of her selfhood as relational--only seen in her relationships with other people, only seen in her identity as daughter, sister, friend, wife, and mother (Rabine 885).

Woman's intellect was considered relational also--another quality, like influence--used in "Woman's Mission," even though woman's intellect was considered inferior. The author of "Female Education: The Positive--The Possible" stresses that excellence in female intellect was not to be the goal, but only intellectual exercise at the level of the

domestic affections, the formation of character, the strengthening of that heroic, self-denying element which is the basis of a woman's nature, and which enables her to find in duty its own motive and reward, and to do right for right's sake. (55)

Ellis emphasizes the ability of woman's intellect to advance man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature (Wives 35). She admonishes that woman was to use her intelligence to draw out the conversation of the man of the house so that everyone would benefit from his intelligence (Wives 34). J. P. H., in "The Intellectual Mission of Woman," writes that the mental part of woman's mission also includes instruction, for "woman's quick perceptive powers qualify her for the task of impart[ing] vitality and direction to the development of the mind and soul in both sexes" (79). The development of the woman's own intellect was less important than that of others in her care.

For Victorians, any other use of intellect for the improvement of other people is regarded as dangerous for woman. For example, Ellis writes that intellectual capability is not a fortuitous trait for a woman to have because it is more often a bane than a blessing and thus not conducive to her own or others' happiness (Wives 39). She warns that intellectual talent is a "dangerous heritage--a jewel which cannot with propriety be worn--a mine of wealth which has no legitimate channel for the expenditure of its vast resources" (Ellis, Wives, 36-37). Thus woman's intellect was seen by Victorian society as best used only to fulfill the duties of instruction and influence, which were more important tasks in "Woman's Mission." Woman's intellect was seen as best used as relational, limited to the activities connected with their relationships with other people, with their roles as daughters, sisters, friends, wives, and mothers.

Charlotte Brontë herself defines the word intellect and its corollaries in the same way as her contemporaries--as a mental faculty. She considers

intellect as a faculty which can be "pigmy" or dulled by "heartless, sensual pleasure," or which can distinguish a person as "an intellectual, faithful, loving woman" (*Jane Eyre* 206, 291, 297). She uses the words intelligence and intellect similarly--Mrs. Fairfax is a woman of "average intelligence" and Mary Rivers is an intelligent art student (*Jane Eyre* 100, 334). Brontë's difference from her contemporaries is seen in her identification of the implications and applications of intellect in women and in her amplification of the cultural conception, for she presents alternative views and uses of intellect.

### Brontë Against the Culture

Brontë considers the standard, gendered view of women's intellect as repressive, and she illustrates the causes and results of this repression (and the ideology that is its source) "by way of [the ideology's] enactment and reversal" through the conventional characters (Jameson 211). Brontë counters the ideology by exposing its limitations in conventional characters, such as Hortense Moore, who teaches Caroline Helstone a certain style of darning merely because it had been done that way by her ancestresses. The conventional characters' priorities reveal patriarchally based motives behind domestic ideology. Brontë also reverses ideology through presenting alternatives which were opposite, or the reverse of, the culture. Instead of virtually ignoring women's intellectual potential, Brontë contends that the situation should be reversed and women's intellect be nurtured to the full. Brontë creates conventional female characters who are at best shallow and good-natured, like Rosamond Oliver, and at worst vacuous and unpleasant,

like Blanche Ingram, both of Jane Eyre, but all unintellectual and superficial in mind. These characters exemplify intellect created by domestic ideology's concept of gender. Like the essayists I have discussed, the conventional characters represent gendered intellect in qualities and use, and Brontë points out the estimations of and expectations for women's intellect, along with their naturalization into the culture. For example, in Shirley, Rev. Helstone admonishes his niece Caroline Helstone to "stick to the needle, learn shirt-making and pie-crust-making and you'll be a clever woman some day" (122). Rev. Helstone, as a matter of course--which is really a matter of gender--would have Caroline's intellect not be nurtured beyond the limits of a thoroughly domestic education. Similarly, Caroline's tutor-cousin Hortense Moore teaches her darning because it is, according to Hortense and her ancestresses before her, one of the "first duties of woman" (Shirley 107). Mademoiselle Reuter in The Professor warns William Crimsworth not to encourage literary ambition in Frances Evans Henri because it would make her unfit for the domestic life she should more properly keep to. St. John Rivers admires Jane Eyre's intellect, but nevertheless calls it masculine. These and other examples I will study reveal Brontë's awareness that the culture worked to gender intellect through its domestic ideology.

Brontë responded to the limitations put on women through the culture's gendering of intellect by treating intellect, its characteristics, and uses as gender-neutral. The minds of the intellectual major characters--men and women alike--have the same components. Degrees of intellect depend on the individual, rather than on his or her gender. But the women receive

the focus. Linda C. Hunt observes that Brontë creates in her major women characters "'counter-ideals': idealized characterizations which greatly modify or invert the values of traditional femininity" because she wanted to "avoid the stereotypes and conventions" of the era (96). In her study of Brontë's novels, Hunt focuses on the ideal of the independent woman. I am going to follow Hunt in the use of the phrase and propose that the woman of intellect is a counter-ideal, a type of reversal of the unintellectual, mentally shallow conventional women like Blanche Ingram, Rosamond Oliver, and the Sympson sisters of Shirley. This counter-ideal forms the basis of Brontë's presentation of an alternative view of women's intellect. The characterization of the alternative, the ideal, begins with the components of the intellect of the heroines and intellectual secondary women characters. Brontë is not at all specific in naming the components, but some differences from the type of woman characterized by Brontë's contemporaries, which I discussed previously, can be inferred. Brontë's ideal women are intelligent and aware of their powers of analysis, combination, and generalization. They consider these abilities valuable, with the possible exception of Lucy Snowe of Villette, who denies that she is intellectual even as she strives for intellectual achievement.

Brontë goes on to posit alternatives in the counter-ideal for the uses of women's intellect, an ideal that is based firmly in gender-neutrality itself. After making intellect and its components gender neutral, it is only logical to make neutral the activities to which intellect is applied, activities which are noticeably beyond the bounds of the duties of "Woman's Mission,"

beyond the home, which was considered woman's sphere. These activities included social conversation, education, work, and romance.

In successive chapters, I will analyze the response in Brontë's novels to the Victorian domestic ideology's characterization of woman's nature, mission, and intellect. In Chapter II, I will discuss the way Brontë heroines expand the use of social conversation and negotiate their sense of self in a culture which denigrated them for the use of their intellect beyond the standard. Domestic ideology dictated the use of female conversation for the transmission of female influence. The Brontë heroines' moral instruction emphasizes the individual's relationship with God rather than the culture. Their gender-neutral approach to topics of conversation delimits the bounds of subject matter in such a way that leads to intellectual enrichment. They also dealt with a sometimes hostile society by developing a sense of intellectual community without forfeiting their mental autonomy; they share ideas without being pressured to conform their opinions to those of others.

Chapter III considers the efforts of the Brontë heroines to contend with an educational system which prepared them only for marriage and maternity and, failing matrimony and motherhood, the jobs of governessing, schoolteaching, or sewing--jobs which were only approved extensions of domestic tasks. Not all the Brontë heroines receive extensive formal schooling. Not all of them have to work. The desire for an education which would prepare them for life in general, not simply a domestic life, and which would even help them get work that suits their intellect is made plain, however, especially through Caroline Helstone.

In nineteenth-century England, women were warned to hide their intellectual equality or superiority from men lest they lose romantic capital and the chance of transferring it to economic capital upon marriage. In Chapter IV, I will focus on how Brontë's novels show women disregarding that cultural dictum. More than that, intellect works as cultural capital for all the Brontë heroines in their romantic relationships with the Brontë heroes who are men of intellect; if not for their intelligence, the women--with the possible exception of Paulina Home of Villette--would not have been loved by the intellectual men.

Through Brontë's emphasis on women of intellect and their response to the dominant ideology of womanhood, the novels' concept of gender-neutral intellect frees women from the contingency of the standard Victorian concept of the female gender and thus paves the way for alternative views of women's intellect and its contributions to society. In Chapter V, the conclusion, I will discuss how these alternatives in the novels contribute to nineteenth-century culture and literature through their new views of women's intellect and its potential.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Gilbert and Gubar's comment appears in a sentence in a chapter about George Eliot, in which they contrast her approach to intellect and its contribution to a woman's life with Brontë's. Other scholars who have made incidental remarks about intellect in their work on Brontë include Tess Cosslett, Barbara Hardy, Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., Kate Millet, Adrienne Rich, Margot Peters, Judith Williams, and Jean Wyatt.

<sup>2</sup>To facilitate my examination of nineteenth-century domestic ideology, I have gathered information from contemporary sources, including conduct books and periodical articles. The conduct books were originally written to instruct the middle-class woman on proper demeanor, attitudes, and domestic and social practices. The periodical articles were part of the more extensive discussion of what was referred to as the "Woman Question." For twentieth-century scholars, these books and articles, augmented by twentieth-century historians' conclusions, provide a rich source of information on attitudes and practices of the era in which Charlotte Brontë lived and wrote. Some of the information on domestic ideology which I present in discussing the cultural context comes from periodicals with which we know that Brontë was familiar, and others which, if it is not known whether Brontë actually read them, were published in the same years in which her novels appeared. Brontë's habit of reading newspapers and magazines began in childhood, prompted by the example of her father and her oldest sister, Maria, and the entire family's interest in local and foreign politics and public characters (Gaskell 93-95). In her juvenilia and letters, the young Brontë mentions the newspapers Leeds Intelligencer, Leeds Mercury, John Bull, and the periodicals Blackwood's Magazine and Fraser's Magazine (Gaskell 116-17, 131-32). Brontë and her siblings used Blackwood's as a prototype for their writing (Bock 11). Blackwoods' also influenced the children's taste in politics, explorers' travels, monarchical court news, and art criticism (Gerin 24). In letters written in her adulthood, Brontë mentions periodicals which have reviewed her novels, including such newspapers as the Daily News, Britannia, Athenaeum, Literary Gazette, Critic, Times, as well as such magazines as The Edinburgh Review, Punch, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, Hood's Magazine, Westminster Review, Jerrold's Shilling Magazine, and

her childhood favorite Blackwood's (Gaskell 293-94, 320-31, 404, 421). Brontë also mentions articles on women's roles from the Westminster Review. In Chapter 25 of Shirley, there is a comment on Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

## CHAPTER II

### SOCIETY AND SELFHOOD

Yesterday (Monday) I was sent for at ten to breakfast with Mr. Rogers, the patriarch-poet. Mrs. Davenport and Lord Glenelg were there; no one else: this certainly proved a most calm, refined, and intellectual treat.

Charlotte Brontë

Everybody appreciates certain social properties and likes his neighbour for possessing them; but perhaps few dwell upon a friend's capacity for the intellect or care how this might expand, if there were but facilities allowed for cultivation, and space given for growth.

Charlotte Brontë

She seemed to think our business was and ought to be, to see all the pictures and statues we could. She knew the artists and knew where other productions of theirs were to be found. I don't remember what we saw except St. Paul's. Emily was like her in these habits of mind, but certainly never took her opinion, but always had one to offer.

Mary Taylor, remembering her tour of London with Charlotte and Emily Brontë

The situations described by Charlotte Brontë in the epigraphs above were not conventional. Women were generally taught to repress their intellect, in public and private, and so would not describe a social gathering

as an "intellectual treat." Neither would they express such concern for a friend's intellect *as* intellect, especially if the friend to whom they were writing was male, as in Charlotte Brontë's letter to her publisher George Smith, of which an excerpt appears above. Victorians considered women who used their intellect beyond the relational to be unacceptable. Brontë's intellectual heroines are treated like curiosities, aliens, and freaks. However, they do not give up their intellect. Through them, Brontë shows how intellectual community and autonomy can be achieved. Her heroines find acceptance without forfeiting their opinions. Brontë also de genders subject matter, which adds another form of autonomy and a greater opportunity for intellectual enrichment. When women's topics of conversation are not determined by gender, they can discuss what they want with more freedom and intellectual fulfillment.

### Victorian Culture

In Victorian middle-class culture, women's social life was both produced and bounded by the domestic sphere. This sphere was, however, ostensibly presided over by women. Women's influence on the sphere that they presided over was such that the sphere took on characteristics of what Victorians conceived of as woman's nature, and so was expected to express the same characteristics. They considered women to have a nature (or personality) that was the opposite of men's and therefore appropriate to the domestic sphere. Women's virtue, dependence, intuitiveness, and instinct were important components of women's nature, which gave home its atmosphere of respectability and refinement. Home became, as Kathryn

Hughes describes it, "an oasis of domestic comfort where sons and husbands could refresh themselves before returning to the fray" (13).

An atmosphere of domestic comfort also bolstered the social status of the family and middle-class stability in general. Elizabeth Langland, using Michael Curtin's terminology, notes a "career of sociability which women pursued to help their husbands succeed in business and their daughters make successful matches" (8). Thus the virtue, calmness, and refinement of women's nature worked as social capital. The patriarchal middle-class hegemony used this etiquette to protect the class against those who had not the knowledge to use it as capital--

a protection against offenses the 'law' cannot touch --a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar . . . the reasons that have caused certain rules to be established, indispensable to the well-being of society, and without which, indeed, it would inevitably fall to pieces, and be destroyed. (Day 1-2)

Victorians tended to consider intrusive and improper things not consistent with their ideas about culture in general and male and female characteristics in particular, so intellectual conversation from women would be seen as inconsistent and thus improper.

The creation of this genteel domestic atmosphere was one of the cultural responses to the Industrial Revolution. Altick observes that changes in business were seen to require a type of "managerial expertise which was supposedly a peculiarly masculine gift," and women's resulting detachment from the "money-making" world contributed to the power of the concept of refinement (51). Refinement included having no visible

responsibility, an "elaborate idleness" which concealed the duties of supervising servants and children, and other household work, and thus leisure became a "sign of status" (Altick 51-52). It did not matter, socially, whether a middle-class woman cooked the meals and made the beds with her own hands; what did matter was that she gave the impression of not having to cook and clean, or even supervise the servants.

Because of cultural expectations about women's nature and its contribution to the domestic sphere and opinions about women's intellectual inferiority, women's intellect did not have an important place in the accomplishment of domestic tasks and in social life. This application of mental capability only to domestic tasks, tasks which were not ordinarily considered very challenging, mentally, also applied to women's social life. Women were seen as instinctive, not rational like men (Palmegiano xii). Women's subjectivity was based in femininity and femininity was defined by its opposition to masculinity, so it was in women's best interest to act in ways which would reinforce their femininity and thus their cultural capital, including not being intellectual, not exhibiting an intellect that was used for the domestic sphere. The author of "Female Education and Modern Match-making" remarks that when a woman finds she is intellectually equal or superior to the men in her society, "who can be surprised at her cowering beneath her strength and sinking into the frivolities of fashion, rather than incurring the charge of masculine-mindedness?" but does not thoroughly condemn the men for provoking women to such behavior (309). John Wilson Ross notes that women know that learning blunts their wit, turns their delicacy into coarseness, and makes them ungraceful and offensive to

men; therefore "have they wisely relinquished its pursuits" (53).

Conversation, an integral part of social life, would then not run along intellectual lines of any subject, but would be concerned with issues such as family and religion, issues that were gendered by the culture as being important to women.

### Brontë's Response to Convention

Brontë considers this relational use of intellect to be repressive. Her novels show a domestic sphere which produced shallow and trivial conversation and social life. As Palmegiano notes, the Victorians wanted to define woman and "put her back into her proper orbit" (xi). That desire influenced social life and led to cultural strictures on women's actions and topics of conversation, which in turn created a uniformity with the possibility of variations occurring according to each woman's character and attitude. In Brontë's novels, the variations occur in conventional women's emphasis on their relationship to society and their attitudes toward the women of intellect. Even with variations, the conventional characters make the same statement about the type of women produced by that culture, women who are "so dedicated to the social role that they have become empty vessels who embody all the materialism, triviality, and egocentrism Brontë deplores" (Hunt 79).

The unsympathetic characters appear in each of Brontë's novels. The conversation of the most unsympathetic is mean-spirited and even cruel. These characters consider social caste important, and this emphasis affects how they present themselves and treat others. Their attitudes and actions

show the disadvantages of the importance placed on social status. In Jane Eyre's hearing, Blanche and Lady Ingram disparage governesses in general and Jane in particular, concluding that governesses are detestable, ridiculous nuisances; to Mrs. Dent's whispered reminder that "one of the anathematized race was present, Lady Ingram replies "'I hope it may do her good!'" (Jane Eyre 166). The Ingrams' words show their disregard for women who have to work, and their complacency in their own status as they point out that they are of the class that can afford to hire a governess.

Blanche also commits a faux pas that Elizabeth Sandford condemns in a lady:

No matter how superior she may be, she will never be liked if she talks chiefly of herself. The impression of her own importance can convey no pleasure to others . . . affectation and dependence only to attract notice from others spoils it.  
(10-11)

During the house party, Blanche "talks chiefly of herself," and tries to give--to Rochester primarily--"the impression of her own importance" by exhibiting her expertise at music and French, and expounding on the type of man she prefers, a man who will not be a competitor with her. Women were encouraged to display their cultural capital of accomplishments, especially in the presence of single, eligible men, but Blanche is self-conscious, and not at all subtle. Her reliance on status for self-aggrandizement shows what sort of atmosphere her home would have if she were married.

The Sykes, Nunnely, and Sympson women of Shirley are characterized somewhat less unpleasantly. These women are simply nondescript. Yet this trait is emphasized. Hunt observes that through these characters who appear as "mechanical puppets," Brontë satirizes "the notion

of a universal female personality" (74). The topics of conversation are nondescript and mechanical as well. The Sykes women, while visiting Caroline, discuss the recent Bible Society meeting, but only to remark upon their father's nap during the German Moravian minister's sermon, and the disparity between the Reverend Broadbent's appearance and eloquence: that worthy speaks like an angel, but looks like a butcher. The details of the sermons are not discussed, nor their influence--if any--on the listeners. The satire which Hunt describes is evident in the conversation of these women. In a culture which strives for a standard social atmosphere that itself grows from what was meant to be the uniform nature of woman, conventional women lose an opportunity to contribute something substantial to the conversation, and instead say something trite, or talk in circles of "dress, visiting, and compliments," as do the fashionable women in The Professor (58).

For Brontë, even gentleness and sympathy can render a woman insipid, at least in the culture she describes, although the sympathetic characters' conventionality is tempered by a veneer of individuality. Their distinguishing traits simply show differing effects of social conventions' strictures. Hortense Moore concentrates on the duties which make up woman's mission and the differences between the domestic spheres in England and her native Belgium. Mrs. Eshton and Mrs. Dent are distinguished from Blanche and Lady Ingram by their good-naturedness and gentleness. They simply talk, not mime like the "mechanical puppets" of Hunt's description, and sometimes give a "courteous word or smile to Jane (Jane Eyre 177). Other women seek to charm the eligible men in their

vicinity. Mary Ingram and the Eshton sisters flirt with the younger gentlemen of the house party. Rosamond Oliver, with coquetry and good humor, tells St. John Rivers of the dances she attends.

Ginevra Fanshawe is just as conventional as Rosamond Oliver and the other young women, but she is more complex in treatment. Along with Lucy Snowe, we see Ginevra's shallowness but remain fascinated by her; perhaps we live vicariously with Lucy the life of popularity, as we hear Ginevra talk of her romantic conquests and aristocratic friends. We also get a more extensive portrait of her character. We see her motivations, her friendship--in her way--for Lucy, her attitude toward life. Ellen Moers attributes Ginevra's treatment to Brontë's maturity, which helped her make peace

with merely pretty women characters, a peace with honor and with irony . . . Ginevra Fanshawe in *Villette* is a triumph of good humor and affection; she shows Charlotte Brontë's admiration for that particle of grit at the base of every 'merely pretty' woman's power to charm. (195)

Brontë may have made peace with "merely pretty" women characters, but she has not made peace with the beliefs about women's nature and responsibilities in social life. Her conventional characters, unsympathetic and sympathetic alike, testify to the harmful effects of those beliefs and duties--triviality of personality and intellect--so that, in the words of Caroline, "their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness" (*Shirley* 377).

## Victorian Response to Intellectual Women

This narrow-mindedness causes conventional women, as well as conventional men, to treat the intellectual women as curiosities, aliens, and freaks. The Brontë heroines receive these varying degrees of treatment. The way that they are treated depends on the type of people they are around. People who treat intellectuals like curiosities, or even aliens, are not quite as hostile as those who treat them like threats or freaks and reject them. Ginevra Fanshawe, Rosamond Oliver, and Hannah, the Rivers' servant in Jane Eyre, treat women of intellect like curiosities. Lucy Snowe denies being clever, yet Ginevra persists in thinking her to be so. She informs Lucy rather nonchalantly that "Nobody in the world but you cares for cleverness," then does not bother her about it any more (Villette 138). Conventional characters in Brontë's novels often use the word "clever" to refer to mental capacity, as Mrs. Fairfax does when she says about Rochester "I daresay he is clever: but I never had much conversation with him" (Jane Eyre 96). Rosamond calls Jane "good, clever, composed, and firm," and after rummaging in her desk and finding a volume of Schiller, adds the word "miracle" to the list (Jane Eyre 352). Hannah thinks that learning sets people apart, and makes them different, and we can presume that she soon puts Jane in that category. Lucy Snowe, Jane Eyre, and the other women of intellect are much more than merely clever, however.

Nineteenth-century English society treats women of intellect as alien because of their often superior mental powers and interest in intellectual pursuits. Christine van Boheeman notes that "Jane's intelligence make[s] her different, a 'discord' in Gateshead Hall" (34). Helen Burns' intellectual

capability is one of the qualities that sets her apart at Lowood, but only Jane and Miss Temple appreciate her expertise in studies; others, including the teacher Miss Scatcherd, only see her faults, and "are blind to the full brightness of the orb" (*Jane Eyre* 60). The house party guests at Thornfield view Jane similarly, as do the employers of Diana and Mary Rivers, during their work as governesses.

Some characters are threatened by the presence of intellectual women whose gifts not only do not conform to the domestic sphere but rather seem more appropriate to the public sphere. Frances draws some unwelcome attention from Mademoiselle Reuter for being "that most anomalous of creatures, an openly intelligent woman" (Gilbert and Gubar 325-26). She fears that Frances will forget her place as a teacher. Mrs. Yorke and Joe Scott, the overseer of Hollows'-mill, in *Shirley*, intuit the intellectual woman's threat to the domestic sphere. Mrs. Yorke tries to keep domestic the ambition of her daughter Rose. Rose, however willing she is to learn how to sew and cook, is not willing to restrict her talents to domesticity; she wants to travel and multiply her skills.

Joe Scott's attitude is similar to Mrs. Yorke's. He does not like to talk politics and religion with Caroline and Shirley. His excuses typify the patriarchal perspective that refuses even to recognize the possibility of women possessing mental capability. He tells Shirley and Caroline that "it is rayther [sic] difficult to explain when you are sure not to be understood" and calls women "a kittle and froward generation" who should "take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion" because "it's wholesomest for them" (*Shirley* 321-23). Caroline and Shirley's matter-of-fact attitudes

about the conversation and the implications of their views make Joe Scott just as uncomfortable as their opinions do.<sup>1</sup> Like Mrs. Yorke, he wants to keep women and their intellect in the bounds of the domestic sphere.

Other more hostile characters see women of intellect to be so different that they are freaks and treat them accordingly. Lady Nunnely, the Misses Nunnely, and the Sympton daughters judge Shirley as improper, strange, and freakish, ironically because of her skill at one of the proper female accomplishments--singing:

What made her sing so? They never sang so. Was it proper to sing with such expression, with such originality--so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not: it was strange; it was unusual. What was strange must be wrong; what was unusual must be improper. Shirley was judged. (Shirley 508)

To these conventional women, to show unoriginality in singing was as important as the skill itself.

Lucy Snowe's experience is similar to Shirley's. Lucy is treated like a freak and a nonentity by people in England and Vilette. Eugenia DeLamotte, quoting Brenda Silver, comments that

the status that makes Lucy a mystery to others is defined not only by her economic position but also by the way she falls outside the conventional categories of womanhood. Silver points out that Lucy's intelligence, for example, has no "value in the context of cultural expectations for women" . . . . "Intelligence, she perceives, does not lead to social visibility or acceptance." (248)

Difference also leads to invisibility, as Kate Millet points out:

Lucy is no one, because she lacks any trait that might render her visible: beauty, money, conformity. Only a superb mind imperfectly developed and a soul so omnivorously large it casts every other character into the shadows, she is the great exception, the rest only the great mediocre rule. (256)

It is society's reaction to Lucy's "superb mind" which contributes so much to her invisibility. A "superb mind" in woman is not acceptable, so she is excluded by conventional society.

For Paul Emanuel, however, Lucy is visible. Like Ginevra, he accuses Lucy of being more learned than she actually is. Paul does not dismiss the subject as Ginevra does, but harps on it and makes negative remarks about women of intellect. He says that they are "a sort of 'lusus naturae,' a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker" (Villette 340).

Women of intellect are only luckless when they live in a culture which regards them as "luckless accidents." These women could say that it was a "luckless accident" which caused them to be born into such a culture. Paul even subjects Lucy to an academic interrogation by two of his colleagues from the neighboring Athénée. Lucy bears up under this treatment and studies more diligently.

### The Heroines' Negotiations with the Culture

Neither Lucy nor the other women of intellect give up interest in intellectual conversation and intellect in general. Their intellect is important to them. They value it because of the enrichment it gives them and because of its inherent value. They do not view their intellect as relational; their intellect is simply part of their identity as independent,

autonomous beings. Jane, at Gateshead and Lowood, never limits her learning to the standard. At Thornfield, she continues to improve her mind as she learns from Rochester, who tells her of the interesting things of this world. Life at Moor House brings further opportunity for her to nourish her intellect through conversation with her cousins, and to teach them, though all remain free to have their own opinions. Caroline values her intellect as well. She is quick to defend her intellect in conversation with Shirley, when the latter asks who told her of the ideas she expresses about Rousseau:

"Why should anybody have told me? . . . the voice we hear in solitude told me all I know on these subjects" (234). She also feels free to disagree with Shirley's more radical views on women's roles and Nature. Frances defends herself similarly in her sparring conversations with Yorke Hunsden. She also tells her fiancé William that she will continue working after marriage, for her intellect would atrophy if left in the bounds of the domestic. Paulina is less autonomous, as she lives most of her life through her father and her fiancé Graham Bretton, but she values her intellect for itself and its contribution to her life, independent of the bookish conversations she has with Graham. Paulina reads on her own and goes to German lessons, along with Lucy.

Shirley and Lucy each have approaches to the selfhood of the intellect different from each other and the rest of the Brontë heroines. Shirley enjoys cultivating her intellect through studying and conversation; these activities nourish her mental faculties or she would not participate in them. Yet the narrator comments that Shirley does not know the extent of her gift:

But indolent she is, reckless she is, and most ignorant, for she does not know her dreams are rare--her feeling peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green. (Shirley 374)

However, she still cultivates her intellect, though she may be wrong in her estimation of its power.

Lucy keeps the vitality of her intellect hidden, though she acknowledges that she has a knowledge of her own and says " [I] dearly like to think my own thoughts" (Villette 225). Being misconstrued by others does not trouble her. Perhaps she prefers being misunderstood, because then she will have more chance to keep her autonomy. As long as other people continue to make incorrect assumptions about her, they will miss the way she really is, and so her autonomy will be maintained, without even a threat of interference. She uses others' wrong estimates of herself as a shield against society's encroachments.

However much emphasis the Brontë heroines put on autonomy of intellect, they also need intellectual community. They give each other the freedom to have divergent opinions as they also provide the acceptance they do not get from others. Their creation of intellectual community is a reaction to being treated like curiosities, aliens, and freaks by others. This distinguishes them from the conventional women who socialize for more commonplace reasons such as status. Alone, the women of intellect live in what Margot Peters calls, referring to Jane Eyre's experience, "mental exile" (148-49). With other intellectuals, there is no prejudice to encounter, no barriers built by others to try to break down, or not, but understanding and camaraderie.<sup>2</sup> Jane Eyre feels sympathy for Helen Burns before she meets

her, because she simply sees Helen reading; "her occupation touched a cord of sympathy somewhere, for I, too, liked reading," Jane explains in her role as narrator (Jane Eyre 42). The women of intellect cannot find such sympathy with conventional men and women.

Appreciation of others' intellect transcends age, class, and gender barriers, and is not necessarily restricted to people who have superior intellectual powers and are interested in intellectual pursuits. Mrs. Fairfax is a woman "of competent education and average intelligence" who has no intellectually compatible companionship at Thornfield (Jane Eyre 100). Before Jane's arrival, she tries to remedy her loneliness by having a servant read to her, but that does not work out well. Mrs. Fairfax is not the only resident who is glad that Jane has come to live at Thornfield. Upon learning that Jane can speak French, Adèle says

. . . you can speak my language as well as Mr. Rochester does. I can talk to you as I can to him and so can Sophie. She will be glad; nobody here understands her; Madame Fairfax is all English. (Jane Eyre 93)

However, though their isolation may have disappeared, Jane's has not; she needs the company of people who are on her intellectual level.

Jane responds to the limitations of her situation by seeking solace in walking along the house leads and gazing over the countryside to the horizon:

I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I have heard of but never seen; than then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of

intercourse with my kind; of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. (Jane Eyre 100)

She also spends time walking along the corridor of the third story of Thornfield to

allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it--and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement which, while it swelled in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (Jane Eyre 101)

Rochester's response to the prevailing ideology about social life is as atypical as Jane's. Not long after they meet, he invites Jane to tea and interviews her about her education, background, and family. A few weeks later, he invites her downstairs after dinner. Governesses were not ordinarily invited to socialize, especially by their male employers. Rochester accounts for this unusual second invitation with these words:

I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night, and that is why I sent for you: the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me; nor would Pilot have been, for none of these can talk. Adèle is a degree better, but still far below the mark; Mrs. Fairfax ditto; you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will . . . . (Jane Eyre 123-24)

Rochester is in a situation similar to Jane's. Before Jane's arrival, there is no one at Thornfield who is his intellectual equal. His friends in the gentry at the Leas and Ingram Park, a few hours' ride away, are educated, but do not have the same cast of mind as he does. He spends most of his

time on the Continent, but travel does not remedy intellectual isolation unless a person has a traveling companion or a friend to visit who is intellectually compatible.

Then he meets Jane. The "fire and chandelier" passage quoted above can seem condescending--"you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will," he tells her--but any condescension inherent in those words is not the condescension of a David Copperfield to a Dora Spenlow; Rochester already knows that Jane is educated--he has talked to her before. He soon discovers that her mind is as keen and mercurial as his own. He consoles himself with their intellectual compatibility.

For her part, Jane finds the intellectual companionship that she has been seeking. She recognizes her discovery: "though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (*Jane Eyre* 164). Life at Thornfield is changed once Jane is no longer intellectually isolated.

Intellectual support also exists between women. At Moor House, Jane finds intellectual compatibility with Mary and Diana Rivers, a connection reminiscent of her friendship with Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Jane says "it was full satisfaction to discuss with them in the evening what I had perused during the day" (*Jane Eyre* 334). They are better read than Jane, and she learns from them. They in turn are impressed by her skill in drawing.

Caroline and Shirley are each intellectually isolated until they become acquainted. Caroline does not discuss truly intellectual subjects with her uncle, with whom she lives, nor her tutor-cousin, Hortense Moore, nor often

enough with Robert Moore, though he is intellectually compatible with her. Caroline is diffident and does not visit the Yorke family, who could give her plenty of intellectual conversation, because religious and political differences prevented the occupants of the parsonage, and Briarmains, the Yorke house, from socializing, unless they happened to meet in the company of other people, or, as in the case of Rev. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, had parish concerns to look after. There are no girls of Caroline's age who are interested in intellectual pursuits. Shirley herself is on

quite free and easy terms with all the Misses Sykes' and all the Misses Pearson, and the two superlative Misses Wynne of Walden Hall; yet, it appeared, she found none amongst them very genial: she fraternized with none of them, to use her own words. (Shirley 217)

Those young women are conventional, model young women who have nothing in common with her. She and Caroline, however, are both intellectual and interested in intellectual pursuits and conversation. They discuss such topics as women's need for work outside the home, and men's and women's roles in society and their relationship to the culture and to each other.

Frances, Lucy, and Paulina feel intellectual isolation much less keenly than Jane, Caroline, and Shirley. Frances is content to study on her own. She also enjoys intellectual conversations with Yorke Hunsden, but she does not seem to pursue actively the same equality in intellectual reciprocity with her husband William Crimsworth. Lucy finds company in solitary perusal of the books and pamphlets which Paul leaves in her desk, and in the study of German with Paulina. Paulina goes to the lessons as

much for the sake of socializing as for the study. Yet for all their nonchalance, a particular need is filled, and one that would not be filled in the company of conventional people.

### Gender-Neutral Conversation

The conversation of the women of intellect, however, not only offers them acceptance with autonomy, but also expansion of mind through ways of thinking and conversing beyond class and gender. Conventional women reinforce their class status through conversation as Blanche and Lady Ingram do in their disparagement of governesses. The women of intellect do not see class as a barrier when there is a chance for intellectual conversation. Caroline talks with William Farren, who has a gardening job, about nature, animals, and botany; she breaks class barriers and scandalizes Mrs. Pryor, for whom class is a stumbling block. The conversations between Frances and Hunsden, and Jane and Rochester, are similar. Frances is middle-class and Hunsden is gentry-class, but she does not make any effort to bolster her class status. She, not class conscious, spars with Hunsden over culture, English and Swiss nationalism, politics, and even women's nature. Neither Hunsden nor Crimsworth is offended; the former is amused, and the latter condescendingly willing to let Frances amuse herself. It is more than mere amusement for Frances, however; she finds the conversation intellectually enriching, and is able to hold her own, except when she finds that she agrees with Hunsden about Swiss religious intolerance and "only contradicted him out of opposition" (The Professor 265). This scene is quite different from the one in Jane Eyre in which Mrs.

Dent and Mrs. Eshton listen while their husbands "argue on politics" (164). Jane and Rochester's conversations are more informative than sparring, aside from the romantic banter they engage in, as he tells her about "the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways" (Jane Eyre 136). These conversations between men and women of different classes show how class and gender do not have to separate people intellectually and socially.

The conversations between the women of intellect also break gender barriers. Unlike conventional women whose conversation is restricted to topics considered to be women's province, the women of intellect give a new perspective on topics which they were expected to discuss, as women, such as moral instruction, and topics associated with the public sphere, including gender roles, politics, and business.

The Brontë heroines show the conventionally feminine topic of moral instruction in a new light. Moral instruction, as part of woman's mission, influenced woman's conversation. Nineteenth-century middle-class domestic ideology considered women to be moral agents for the society and expected them to use conversation as a vehicle for moral instruction, which would turn people's thoughts to higher, eternal things. Contact with others during visiting and entertaining brought opportunity to influence. Women had the power of forming the tastes of society, and they would not want to miss the chance to exercise that power in social situations (Phillimore 386). Therefore, conversation must not be simply an art (Ellis, Women, 159). Female conversation must not be such as that of the conversazione or soirée, for those styles are too artificial ("Female Character" 601). The type of conversation which best fulfills the criteria for moral instruction was seen as

only occurring through socializing with women "by their own fireside" when "the open heart discloses its most secret feeling to the investigation of friendship or affection" ("Female Character" 601). In a gathering of friends, rather than the more formal occasions of visiting, or entertaining at a dinner party, for example, women have a greater opportunity to use their moral influence for conversation brings "freedom for the exercise of truth" and "opportunities for confidence" (Ellis, Wives, 106).

Much of the moral instruction was aimed at men, according to Ellis, because as members of the public sphere, their minds have "become familiarized to the habit of investing with supreme importance, all considerations relating to the acquisition of wealth" (Women 50). Men need women to

win them away from this warfare, to remind them that they are hastening on towards a world into which none of the treasures they are amassing can be admitted; and, next to those holier influences which operate through the medium of revelation, or through the mysterious instrumentality of Divine love, I have little hesitation in saying, that the society of woman, in her highest moral capacity, is best calculated to effect this purpose. (Ellis, Women, 51)

Ellis does mention "revelation" and the "mysterious instrumentality of Divine love," but she still gives more emphasis here to women's mediation and influences. Women's moral influence was seen to act as a "second conscience, for mental reference and spiritual counsel" when men were tempted by the "snares of the world" and their own weakness so that they would remember the morally beautiful character of the "humble

monitress[es] who sat alone, guarding the fireside comforts of [their] distant home" and gave help in resisting temptation (Ellis, Women, 52). The Victorians generally expected this influence to work on individuals and stabilize society as a whole. Ellis' description shows the responsibilities ascribed to women and also the motives of the men--they did not, apparently, want to take responsibility for being moral themselves and so put on women much, if not all, of the responsibility for morality and spiritual thoughts.

Brontë's novels do portray the use of moral instruction, but it is de-emphasized through its treatment. Much of the moral instruction used by the conventional characters, whether woman-to-woman or woman-to-man, does not conform precisely to the ideal promoted by writers such as Ellis. Some moral instruction by conventional women and the heroines in Brontë's novels is used with sincerity, but other admonitions are used as a way of airing personal opinion, giving a warning, or manipulating through ulterior motives. The moral instruction, however, focuses more on the world's response to any change made in people's lives, rather than thoughts of higher, eternal things that would help them grow sprititually.

The morally instructive conversations which conform most to cultural expectations are between women. Mrs. Pryor, from a sincere heart, more than once reminds Shirley to be ladylike and refrain from referring to herself as a gentleman, lying on the hearthside rug, and whistling. Hortense Moore's moral instruction is just as sincere, but more habitual and officious. She gives advice to any woman who happens to be around, and even by proxy, as in the scene in which she describes to her brother Robert the

"unsettled hurry" of Caroline's nature which needs to be replaced by a quality more sedate and decorous (Shirley 95). Lucy plays the "moral instructress" role with Ginevra Fanshawe from disinterested motives. When Ginevra confides to Lucy her romantic conquests, opinions of mutual acquaintances, and hopes for the future, Lucy informs her of the error of her attitudes and ways. These admonitions do not achieve domestic ideology's goal for moral instruction--Ginevra does not give up her flighty, mercenary life and way of thinking, though she does receive a sort of mental peace after Lucy "storm[s] [her]down":

This was the right discipline for Ginevra . . . it suited her. I am quite sure she went to bed that night all the better and more settled in mind and mood, and slept all the more sweetly for having undergone a sound moral drubbing. (Villette 308-309)

Some characters give moral instruction from the wrong motives. Mrs. Yorke reprimands Caroline for setting her cap for Robert Moore and failing; the younger woman also, according to the matron, is sentimental, morbid, delicate, and arrogant enough to find "little worthy of [her] sympathies in the ordinary world," which is made up of people who are better "than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl can be, who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle, the parson's, garden wall" (Shirley 389). Caroline defends herself, and Mrs. Yorke replies placidly, "Always speak as honestly as you have done just now, and you'll do" (Shirley 390). Her reply confirms that she says what she says not to use her influence for the younger woman's moral good, but only to air her own opinions and to provoke Caroline, who happens to be the type of young girl she most disapproves of,

since the girl is "a shrinking, sensitive character--a nervous temperament" and had "a pretty, delicate, and youthful face" (Shirley 388).

Mademoiselle Reuter, speaking by proxy like Hortense, uses moral instruction for ulterior motives. She tells William Crimsworth to inform Frances that she needs to be more tactful and firm with her students. On another occasion, Mademoiselle Reuter speaks to him of Frances' literary ambitions, which she deems improper for a woman:

. . . it appears to me that ambition, literary ambition especially, is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of woman. Would not Mdlle. Henri be much safer and happier if taught to believe that in the sweet discharge of social duties consists her real vocation, than if stimulated to aspire after applause and publicity? (The Professor 178)

In reality, the domestic sphere and the public sphere which it influences would be "safer and happier" if Frances and other women like her took Mademoiselle Reuter's advice. Mademoiselle Reuter goes on to imply that Frances does not have enough cultural capital to get married, so it would be better for her to keep the character and habits of a decorous, sedate woman. On the surface, Mademoiselle Reuter's remarks seem sincere, if tactless, but we soon realize that she only wants to undermine Crimsworth's opinion and separate them, which latter goal she achieves, temporarily.

Lucy Snowe is an unconventional character who uses moral instruction the proper way. Her moral instruction calls for a definite, sincere change of heart and action. None of the conventional characters' moral instruction fulfills the strictures given by the conduct books. These

occasions do not illustrate the proper example and motivation, nor serve to draw people's attention to spiritual matters and make them morally steadfast. The advice of Mrs. Pryor and Hortense Moore, though given from good intentions, does not go beyond the bounds of the domestic sphere. Mrs. Pryor is only concerned that Shirley's appearance and demeanor is ladylike. Hortense holds a similar concern about Caroline's nature; she wants the younger girl to change so that her demeanor will exhibit a personality that conforms to the prevailing ideas about woman's nature. The instructions of Mrs. Yorke and Mademoiselle Reuter work in the same way--to draw the women they seek to influence back to the domestic sphere. These characters' attitudes and motivations reveal the priorities truly prevalent in Victorian domestic ideology--the preservation of the atmosphere and externals and, through them, preservation of the stability of the domestic sphere. The pull of earthly things is made stronger, ultimately, and eternal things are ignored.

The moral instruction of Helen Burns and Jane Eyre ostensibly fulfills the ideal, but is actually subversive in action and result. The reality, as we have seen, is actually advice which only reminds people of the importance of living up to society's standards and does not focus on specific moral issues and the individuals' relationship with God. The moral instruction of Jane and Helen, similar to Lucy's more ostensibly conventional advice, is aimed at turning people's thoughts to higher, eternal things. Their advice focuses on spiritual status rather than social status. Helen may be only fourteen, but her concentration on spiritual matters gives her a perspective beyond her years. After Jane is accused by Mr. Brocklehurst of being a liar

and is punished in the presence of fellow students and teachers, she tells Helen that she cannot bear to be hated. Helen replies:

you think too much of the love of human beings; you are too impulsive, too vehement: the sovereign Hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures feeble as you . . . . (Jane Eyre 62)

Jane, in adulthood, negotiates between her need to be loved and her desire to do God's will, exemplified in her refusal to become Rochester's nominal wife and her subsequent flight from Thornfield.

Jane gives similar moral instruction to Rochester, beginning during their second long conversation, though she only gives advice when he solicits it:

When I was old as you, I was a feeling fellow enough; partial to the unfledged, unfostered, and unlucky; but fortune has knocked me about since: she has even kneaded me with her knuckles, and now I flatter myself that I am hard and tough as an indiarubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me? (Jane Eyre 123)

"Hope of what, sir?" Jane asks (Jane Eyre 123). Rochester does not answer directly; he pursues the theme, talking about his plans for a regeneration by means of following an inspiring notion which he has taken in as a "bonny wanderer" and establishing a new law, because "unheard-of combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules" (Jane Eyre 123-28). Jane replies that if he tried he could in time become what he himself approved and that human beings should not "arrogate a power with which the divine and

perfect alone can be safely entrusted . . . that of saying of any strange, unsanctioned line of action, 'Let it be right'" (Jane Eyre 129).<sup>3</sup>

Jane's moral instruction continues in the same way in subsequent conversations. After the night that Bertha Mason Rochester attacks her brother Richard, Rochester tells Jane of a "capital error" he had committed in his youth (his marriage to Bertha, a definite misuse of the cultural capital of each of them) and then asks if he, now repentant, is "justified in daring the world's opinion" so that he can attach himself to someone who will regenerate him (Jane Eyre 206). Jane, with advice reminiscent of Helen's words to her, answers that

a wanderer's repose or sinner's reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom; and Christians in goodness; if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equal for strength to mend and solace to heal. Jane Eyre (206)<sup>4</sup>

She gives him similar advice after the interrupted wedding ceremony when he begs her to stay with him as his nominal wife:

"What shall I do, Jane? Where turn for a companion, and for some hope?"

"Do as I do: trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there." (Jane Eyre 301)

All of Jane's advice to Rochester fulfills on the surface the rules for moral instruction put forth by the culture: she turns his thoughts to higher, eternal things. Yet because she does turn his thoughts to spiritual matters,

her advice is true moral instruction and as such subverts the cultural practice. Jane's and Helen's advice accomplished what domestic ideology said moral instruction should be but did not live up to.

The moral instruction of the women of intellect also bypasses the proper method of influence by doing away with it altogether. Helen's and Jane's advice denies that human beings have the ability to reliably, thoroughly influence other human beings for moral good; thus Jane tells Rochester, "if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to mend and solace to heal" (Jane Eyre 206). This opposes and provides an alternative to the tenuous possibilities for moral growth through the mediation that the Victorians prescribed. The Victorians' ideal of "woman as moral agent" actually hindered the spiritual growth of individuals, growth which would have ultimately contributed to the societal stability they sought, because their advice only drew people's thoughts to their own personal social status, not their spiritual growth. When all the responsibility for everyone's morality is put on women, men are less apt to take the trouble to take responsibility for themselves and thus they develop lax attitudes about morality. The instruction of the women of intellect brings the responsibility back to each individual, male and female, and, more meaningful for each person, the emphasis on his or her relationship with God. People can encourage one another to spiritual growth, but they cannot take the place of divine influence. Helen's and Jane's instruction by contrast shows up standard moral instruction for what it is--a legalistic morality entrenched in cultural demands and how well people obey them, which does not encourage responsibility or a spiritual

regeneration that leads to the professed ideal of Christlike-ness. The true, effective moral instruction of Brontë's intellectual women decenters the origin of moral influence and leads people's thoughts directly to God and their relationship with Him instead of a human, fallible mediator whose instruction is not based upon Biblical principles but on cultural demands, which in themselves limit people's growth in morality and all other aspects of life. Male-female relationships are also changed through true moral instruction--woman is no more the moral agent for man but a partner in human imperfection. The spheres are separated no more by moral superiority and responsibility, but joined in a search for personal spiritual growth.

The conversation of the women of intellect also decenters other subject matter considered less important for women, including gender roles, politics, and business. Gilbert and Gubar observe that Shirley "sees through the coercive myths of her culture that imply and even condone the inequality and exploitation," as she discusses men's conception of women as mermaids, a combination of temptress, terror, and monster (387). Their comment not only applies to Shirley's thoughts on mermaids, but also to her and Caroline's conversations about authors, excursions, gender roles, and domestic ideology. Indeed, the conversations about authors and traveling spin off into discussions of male-female relationships and roles in their culture. Their conversations point out the artificiality of cultural practices imposed by the patriarchy. Their contrast of women-only picnics in Nunnwood forest with men-and-women excursions there turns into a conversation about the uniformity of men's actions in their domestic

relationships. Shirley declares that "if I were convinced that they are necessarily and universally different from us--fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathizing--I would never marry" (Shirley 223). Her comment shows that she does not think that any existing differences between men and women are a matter of course, which implies that men and women are more similar than was thought and that the differences were created by the culture.

Similarly, a discussion of William Cowper and Jean Jacques Rousseau flows into talk of how the separate spheres influence male-female relationships. Caroline says that men have more to think about than women do, and thus they think about women less. Caroline's words cite the effects of the intention of the separate spheres to keep men and women in their respective places through directing, however subtly, the amount of attention they have to give to different aspects of life.

A conversation about a prospective trip to Scotland also leads to a discussion of gender roles--Shirley's description of the mermaid and how men view women. Nina Auerbach notes that the mermaid was a pervasive myth in Victorian culture: it "exemplified the secrecy and spiritual ambiguity of woman's ascribed powers" (8). Shirley recognizes that those powers are ascribed and that their source lies in men's view of women, rather than in the women themselves. When Caroline protests that the mermaid "is not like us: we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters," Shirley replies that "some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to 'woman,' in general, such attributes" (Shirley 250).

On another occasion, Shirley and Caroline's conversation about Eve leads to their analysis of another Victorian myth. Shirley describes Eve, and Caroline points out the contrast to Milton's Eve in Paradise Lost. Shirley agrees, saying that "Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not . . . it was his cook that he saw" (Shirley 315). For the patriarchy, including Milton, Eve is the archetypal domestic goddess who possesses all the proper homely virtues, fulfills all the prescribed tasks, and creates the proper genteel atmosphere. The Eve described by Shirley is powerful, vital, and creative. Shirley aligns her with Nature, but obviously not the nature that the patriarchal hegemony relied on to put their ideas about women into the culture. The Nature that Shirley describes puts no limits on female potential and creativity.

The conversation of Shirley and Caroline and the other Brontë heroines show that their intellect can handle more than domestic concerns. Their analysis of books, traveling, and gender roles in relation to and as a source of ideas about gender and cultural attitudes sound the depth of their intellectual abilities. Their thoughts are not trite, silly, or predictable, like those of the conventional women whose minds run along culturally prescribed lines. The atmosphere of the conversations is never coarse or vulgar, though often lively, and thus shows how women of intellect can speak on substantial subjects with depth and not compromise their feminine demeanor and responsibilities, though some conventional men look askance at them for their talk and then dismiss them from their thoughts. Perhaps this reassurance of fulfillment of responsibilities is a negotiation with domestic ideology, a strategy of compromise. The novels' strategy of

gender-neutral conversation gives women the freedom to discuss what they want and expand their intellect. Gender-neutral subjects do not place any limitations on women as do the usual rules for conversation, nor threaten the status quo, and as such would be an alternative that could be acceptable even to Victorian strictures on social life.

The enactment and reversal of domestic ideology's constraints on social conversation in Brontë's novels works on different levels to comment on the existing society and suggest improvements. We see how the intersection of expectations for home, class, and women's nature and mission led to social conversation which only reproduced the culture and stifled any potential for intellectual growth. Brontë's novels posit alternative views of women's intellect and its place in social life, challenging prevailing attitudes and customs. The novels show us that women's intellect can contribute to social conversation without making women seem masculine or coarsening the general atmosphere. Gender-neutral conversation does not compromise the importance placed on women's intellect and its substantial contribution to social life; instead, this type of conversation gives an unthreatening alternative to the existing customs. Since conversation would be gender neutral, men and women could participate, to the benefit of both. This type of conversation would bring opportunity for improvement in the lives of intellectual women and more conventional people; the women would receive respect instead of denigration, and everyone would have opportunities for intellectual growth.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Caroline even says that she thinks that I Timothy 2.11-13 is translated incorrectly and could be translated to mean the opposite of the meaning generally ascribed to the verses, and muses that if she could read the original Greek, she would find that "many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether" and the passage could be given "quite a contrary turn" (Shirley 323).

<sup>2</sup>E. M. Forster, in A Room With A View, comments insightfully on barriers in the following exchange between Cecil Vyse and Lucy Honeychurch:

"Well," said he, "I cannot help it if they do disapprove of me. There are certain irremovable barriers between myself and them, and I must accept them."

"We all have our limitations, I suppose," said wise Lucy.

"Sometimes they are forced on us, though," said Cecil, who saw from her remark that she did not quite understand his position.

"How?"

"It makes a difference, doesn't it, whether we fence ourselves in, or whether we are fenced out by the barriers of others?"

<sup>3</sup>Richard Armour, in English Lit Relit, cites this passage in part of his commentary on Jane Eyre:

Aside from all the romance and passion, one of the virtues of the novel is the realistic dialogue, as when Jane exclaims: "The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted." (128)

<sup>4</sup>In the 1983 British Broadcasting Corporation adaptation of the novel, Jane's words here are summed up as "No human can help as God can, sir," which gets to the heart of the matter.

## CHAPTER III

### LEARNING AND LABOR

Ill will and calumny from her own sex, and neglect from the other, are almost certain to be the lot of her who fully cultivates and improves the powers with which God has endowed her.

Benjamin Parsons

She bent her whole energy towards the fulfillment of the duties in hand; but her occupation was not sufficient food for her great forces of intellect and they cried out perpetually, 'Give, give' . . . .

Elizabeth Gaskell

Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it.

Karl Marx

Most things free-born will submit to anything for a salary.

Rochester, Jane Eyre

Brontë contends that Victorian education and the tasks for which it prepared women--marriage, children, and domestic-oriented jobs--were intellectually repressive. In the Victorian age, gender determined education and job choice. Women received an education focused on wifhood and

motherhood because it was believed that their intellect could not handle anything else--too much education could hurt them--nor was more necessary. Work was also gendered. Women's proper work was considered to be the tasks required by wifedom and motherhood. Work outside the home was considered disadvantageous to society, women, if they had to work to support themselves, had only domestic jobs to choose from: governessing, schoolteaching, and sewing. Brontë considers these restrictions on education and work as barriers to women's intellectual growth. In her novels, she posits the alternatives of gender-neutral education and of work that would provide intellectual fulfillment.

#### Victorian Attitudes toward Education for Women

In nineteenth-century England, "education was designed to consolidate the rank, the sex role, the social position of those receiving it" (Walvin 86-87). Because domestic ideology assumed that women would be wives and mothers, the education given them ranged only to the subjects and levels necessary for those roles (Purvis 48). Women were responsible for both the family's status and its separation from the harsh world, so their education was directed toward those goals (Davidoff and Hall 289-90; Altick 54). Because Victorians generally considered women's nature, intellect, and mission the determining factors of their education, limits were put on subject matter, extent of study, and time devoted to education. If young women were destined for governessing or schoolteaching jobs, their vocational education was a combination of the domestic and marriage-market types of instruction. These ideas about women's education and

occupation were not accepted by everyone in nineteenth-century England, but made up the common response.

The domestic education that girls received included "everything which can properly come within a woman's sphere of duty"--in other words, household tasks (Ellis, *Daughters*, 71). Academically, this general education could include English grammar, French, use of terrestrial and astronomical globes, Latin, history, and a slight knowledge of general science to obviate fears from nature and to make women companionable to men (Hadow 272-73; Ellis, *Daughters*, 93, 110). Girls also studied piano, singing, and drawing (Hughes 61). Learning was rote (Perkin 33).<sup>1</sup>

Marriage-market education included the same academic subjects as domestic education but added accomplishments such as etiquette, fine needlework, French, piano, singing, and dancing to prepare young women for "adult life in the drawing room" (Hughes 61). Proficiency in all these subjects brought romantic capital that could be transferred to economic capital if the women's education was successful and they found husbands.

Some Victorians who were more serious-minded about women's mission thought that a solely domestic education with its emphasis on marriage and motherhood was better than a mere ornamental education, which they considered frivolous. The author of "Female Education and Modern Match-making" deplored the instability of instruction in which young women's minds are conditioned to see matrimony as the reason for existence, and "the education supplied is just what is found to take best among the butterfly flutterers of the day" (311).

Such an education would not equip women for the "activities of life" demanded by the domestic sphere ("Female Education: The Positive--The Possible" 55-56). Women of the "butterfly flutterers" type would not have a mindset that focused on life after the wedding day. These women would not be ready in perspective or skill for running a household, supervising servants, budgeting money, socializing, taking care of men who were no longer their beloveds who courted them, but their husbands, who experienced the often wearying ordinariness of daily life with them, and, in time, raising children.

The parents of these "butterfly flutterers," however, thought more of what would happen if in the future their daughters did not marry. Joan N. Burstyn writes that "everything had to be done to ensure that a suitable marriage was made" by young women, so their families gave them this education meant to enhance their marriageability (35). The more successful women were in this education, the more likely they were to make good matches and thus avoid the economic and social difficulties inherent in spinsterhood in nineteenth-century England.

The third type of education available to young women was the class-based vocational education. Girls who would have to support themselves in adulthood received this type of instruction. Vocational education was generally a combination of domestic and marriage-market education. Girls would learn for themselves subjects and skills that they would teach their pupils, who would use what they had learned as romantic capital. When girls finished this education, they would be ready to work as governesses or schoolteachers, or perhaps housekeepers.<sup>2</sup>

No matter what the main focus of girls' education, they had to acquire it in some way, and the choices were home-schooling by mother or governess, boarding school, or day school. Those families who could afford it hired a governess; others sent their daughters to boarding school or day school (Perkin 32). Some Victorians favored home instruction, because of immediate supervision by the mother, but parents who valued ornamental education for its inclusion of romantic capital continued to send their daughters to fashionable boarding schools that emphasized accomplishments.

Learning beyond the domestic, ornamental, and vocational was decried by many people, because of the seeming disadvantages to women's lives. Many people feared that much education would make women abandon domesticity and make marriage undesirable (Burstyn 42). The author of "Female Education: The Positive--The Possible" disapproves of an education that includes so much intellectual emphasis that moral and spiritual culture is neglected. Moral influence was central to woman's mission and should not be put aside for other considerations. This concern about intellectual distractions contrasts sharply with Harriet Martineau's belief that learning would make women better housekeepers and that women do not neglect their duties "for having their minds enlarged and enriched, and their faculties strengthened" (94).

Many Victorians also felt that too much education could hurt women's natures. John Wilson Ross writes that if women have learning, they will possess blunted wit and pedantic coarseness, and be ungrateful and

offensive to men (95). Their moral nature could be tempted too much (Burstyn 89). Too much education could destroy women's modesty, self-denial, mental characteristics, and even the "essence of womanhood":

It was dangerous for women to believe that the cultivation of the intellect was an end in itself. Were they to act on their belief, they would also destroy the essence of their womanhood, become obsessed with worldly aspirations, and never reach the perfection intended for them. (Burstyn 106-107)

If women believed that "the cultivation of the intellect was an end in itself," many Victorians feared that their attention would be taken away from nourishing skills and beliefs which made up their nature and from fulfilling the mission that was an expression of their nature.

Education was even seen to be damaging to women's health. Women were supposed to be delicate, and people feared that too much learning would make them uncertain in health or masculine. Some Victorians were also concerned that "too much education might make women incapable of producing children" and thus unable to fulfill "their true function in life--to reproduce the species" (Burstyn 80). As Florence Nightingale observes, people would not be concerned with starvation of the mind, for "women's bodies are the only things of any consequence in society" (220).

### Victorian Attitudes toward Work for Women

Just as an excess of education was considered bad for women and society itself, so work outside the home was considered taboo, and the work women were allowed to do for wages was gendered like education. When

women worked outside the home, it was because they needed to support themselves alone or their families as well. The only jobs women were allowed in these circumstances were those that called upon their education, both domestic and ornamental, for the middle--and--upper-class Victorians generally did not consider women's intellect suitable for work outside the home. They also generally did not want women to work outside the home because of the perceived consequences to the women personally, to their families, and to society. Women were seen to be gentle, unassertive, retiring--the opposite of men and their world of work--and thus fit only for the domestic sphere. The Victorians tended to believe that if women worked in the public sphere, they would become masculine in traits and appearance and thus violate their own natures and responsibilities as caretakers of the home ("Women of Business" 597). Such women would lose social capital and status for themselves and their families. Women exhibited rank by a "non-working" lifestyle (Davidoff and Hall 286). Work for wages by the wife or other female family member implied that the man of the family could not, or perhaps would not, fulfill his responsibilities as provider. (In Shirley, Rev. Helstone does not want his niece Caroline to seek a situation as a governess because her job would reflect badly on him; he provides for her well and will continue to do so.)

Women's mission ostensibly would suffer also if women worked outside the home. Nightingale writes in Cassandra of people's fear that a woman working outside the home would neglect her family: ". . . she would 'suckle his fools and chronicle his small beer' less well for it--

that he would not have so good a dinner--that would destroy, as it is called, his domestic life" (222). Taking care of the family properly made up the main duty of woman's mission, and this duty was not to be neglected.

Victorians generally considered that the public sphere itself would be hurt by the presence of the woman wage-earner, because she could not act other than unwomanly in that atmosphere, though some women were tolerated, including the women whom the author of "Women of Business" characterizes as the "squire in petticoats who gets in her jointure and her harvest" and the manufacturer's wife who, "knows twice as much about the mill as Master," which inevitably brings to mind Shirley's activities as manager of her own estate and Caroline's ambitions to learn the cloth manufacturing trade so that she can help Robert in his business (596). The activities of the "squire in petticoats" and the factory "Missus" do not have particular repercussions for society and so only receive condescension from the essayist, who condemns the woman who "goes out of her way to buy and sell, plot and counterplot," involves herself in intrigues and interferences, establishes herself in the world, and even takes jobs away from men ("Women of Business" 596-97). The woman who had to support herself or help her husband could be tolerated, but not the woman who went out of her way to make a place for herself in the world by her own ambition and activities in the public sphere. This entrance of women into what was perceived as their opposite sphere was seen to lead to disturbance in the entire social system (Dix 40). "Woman had one set of powers, man another," and only by women staying in their place--the home--could the society be stable and work be done well; the so-called separate spheres were

interdependent (J. P. H. 78). Women remaining in unchanging roles to preserve the established social order was more important than their receiving opportunities to completely fulfill their intellectual potential.

Governessing, schoolteaching, sewing--the jobs that women were allowed to have--were based on domestic tasks and studies. Governesses taught subjects which they would have been familiar with as accomplished women: English grammar, piano, singing, French--and perhaps German and Italian--drawing, history, use of the globes, and arithmetic (Hughes 61; Ogle 578). Schoolteachers taught the same subjects; only the environment was different. Seamstresses often took in sewing on commission or worked at a dress shop. None of these jobs required special training which would have nourished women's intellect and helped them do their jobs better as well.

### Brontë's Response to the Cultural Restrictions

Brontë's novels address the implications of and influences on women's intellect by various types of education and work. Her opinions on and approach to education were shaped by the schools she attended and the instruction she received at home. Between the months at Cowan Bridge and the years at Roe Head, Brontë and her sisters were taught sewing and household tasks by their aunt, Miss Elizabeth Branwell, and lessons from the Bible and Mangnall's Questions by their father (Fraser 44-45). Mr. Brontë's teaching system was not organized, and both schools complained that Charlotte "knew nothing systematically"; what their father gave to his children was the freedom to choose reading matter, and "his encouragement

and enthusiasm, and pride in their progress" (Gordon 30; Fraser 32). Charlotte derived for herself "an attitude to knowledge and culture wholly different from that of these stolid manufacturer's daughters" with whom she attended school at Roe Head (Fraser 64). She also absorbed enough of the mindset that went along with her vocational education to persevere in that form of education and attended the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels, along with her sister Emily, in hopes that they, along with their sister Anne, could open a school for girls in Haworth. Their plan did not work out, but Charlotte's attitudes toward education acquired at school and during her governessing work were projected through her novels in their lessons on the disadvantages of gender-based education.

In her novels, Brontë exposes the limitations of domestic education, its basis in gender, its assimilation into the culture through rationalization and naturalization, and the resulting constraints on women's intellectual growth. Because their intellect was not seen by most Victorians as appropriate for any other type of learning, women often did not receive any other instruction. Caroline Helstone sums up the opinion of her uncle, Rev. Helstone: "he thinks everything but sewing and cooking above women's comprehension, and out of their line" (*Shirley* 118). He tells her, "stick to the needle--learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day" (*Shirley* 122). In Rev. Helstone's thinking, the only subjects within women's comprehension and in their line, sewing and cooking, are appropriate for women to learn and the only standard by which a woman can be judged to be clever. Thus were the perceived boundaries of women's intellect rationalized in the culture. Rev.

Helstone does not take the time--or perhaps he does not have the capacity--to consider that women could understand and make progress in learning subjects beyond sewing and cooking if given the opportunity.

Hortense Moore, Caroline's tutor-cousin, similarly genders and thus restricts women's education and mission:

She by no means thought it waste of time to devote unnumbered hours to fine embroidery, sight-destroying lace-work, marvellous netting and knitting, and, above all, to most elaborate stocking-mending. She would give a day to the mending of two holes in a stocking any time, and think her 'mission' nobly fulfilled when she had accomplished it. It was another of Caroline's troubles to be condemned to learn this foreign style of darning, which was done stitch by stitch so as exactly to imitate the fabric itself; a wearifu' [sic] process, but considered by Hortense Gerard, and by her ancestresses before her for long generations back, as one of the first 'duties of woman.' She herself had had a needle, cotton, and a fearfully torn stocking put into her hand while she yet wore a child's coif on her little black head: her 'hauts faits' in the darning line had been exhibited to company ere she was six years old, and when she first discovered that Caroline was profoundly ignorant of this most essential of attainments, she could have wept with pity over her miserably neglected youth. (Shirley 107)

Like Rev. Helstone, Hortense's ideals of women's education were embodied and bound by domestic tasks, specifically needlework, and a particular style of needlework. The importance of skill in sewing had been indoctrinated into Hortense in childhood, and so she considered it a natural part of women's education. This needlework, however, makes up only a

small part of what the Victorians' defined as woman's mission, which included moral influence on family and friends, household management, domestic tasks, and child-raising. Hortense's example shows how woman's mission can be diminished by concentrating on one small part of it. Woman's mission is seen in general to have its own inherent limitations to women's intellectual growth, whether or not one aspect is made more important than the rest.

Domestic education has all of the inherent limitations of woman's mission; this instruction not only lacks the capacity to challenge women's intellect, but cannot do anything except entomb it. Rose Yorke points this out in a discussion with her mother, who favors this conventional instruction:

. . . if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will not deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will not commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woolen hose. I will not prison it in the linen-press to find shrouds among the sheets . . . least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder . . . . Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The tea-pot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen, will yield up their barren deposit in many a house: suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master's coming to pay him his own with usury . . . I should be sorry not to learn to sew: you do right to teach me, and make me work . . . I will do that, and then I will do more. (Shirley 385-86)

Rose does not condemn domestic tasks out of hand; she simply observes the over-emphasis on them. What Rose specifically objects to is household tasks being the only outlets for women's talents, for these tasks provide no room for the development of women's intellect. To Rose, these tasks provide so little intellectual challenge that they actually hinder women's talents, so much so that she uses terms associated with enclosure and burial: shut, smothered, prison, hide. She agrees with her mother that these household tasks should be done, but believes that for women to be able to use their talents to the fullest potential, they have to do more than cook, sew, and clean.

Conventional characters show the consequences of a solely domestic education. The Sykes and Simpson women are thoroughly conventional. Convinced of their own superiority, the Sykes women see themselves as "the standards of what is proper" and "an example to their sex" (*Shirley* 132). The Simpson girls are described as "two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment" (*Shirley* 428). They are also examples of the anonymity that conventional education brings.

As with domestically-educated women, Brontë's novels portray the limitations of the purely ornamental, marriage-market education. The accomplished women are just as shallow as the more household-task-oriented women. These accomplished women show how the influence of the intersection of economics and marriage affected women's education. Young women brought up from childhood to see education as ornamental and their destiny as marriage as a matter of course think of nothing else

when they are grown, and the consequences are often not what they are taught to expect, as Caroline notes:

The great wish--the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them: they hold them very cheap: they say--I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time--the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and are very angry with their daughters when they observe their manoeuvres: they order them to stay at home. (Shirley 377)

What the fathers do not realize is that the influence of the education they have given their daughters makes them concentrate on matrimony. Caroline knows that she and the other young women of her acquaintance have been brought up in ways that make them think only of matrimony "as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else" (Shirley 377). Caroline's observations on women's education and matrimony are similar to those of John Stuart Mill, who states:

When we put together three things--first, the natural attraction between opposite sexes; secondly, the wife's entire dependence on the husband, every privilege or pleasure she has being either his gift, or depending entirely on his will; and lastly, that the principle object of human pursuit, consideration, and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought or obtained by her only through him--it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character. (272)

Mill cites the conditions of matrimony itself--a wife's dependence on her husband for everything physically, emotionally, and socially--which women learn about in girlhood and which promote the focus on matrimony in women's education.

An emphasis on the economics of marriage and accomplishments also produces women such as Blanche Ingram and Ginevra Fanshawe. Blanche has to rely on her accomplishments to try and acquire a husband because she does not have a very large fortune, as her father's "estates were chiefly entailed, and the eldest son came in for everything almost" (*Jane Eyre* 149). Blanche shows expertise in singing, playing the piano, and speaking French, but she has developed her talents from no inherent, genuine interest in them and desire to improve, but from a purely economic motivation which has nothing to do with the cultivation of the intellect, and does not even incidentally contribute to it: "her mind was poor . . . she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she has never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own" (*Jane Eyre* 174). Blanche exemplifies the consequences of an education based on knowledge that is used for exhibition's sake, knowledge that remains on the surface of the subjects studied and on the surface of the woman's intellect. Blanche has no substance in mind or learning.

Ginevra Fanshawe has a similar motivation and attitude toward learning accomplishments, though her family never had much money to begin with. She tells Lucy Snowe of herself and her still-unmarried sisters that "we are to marry--rather elderly gentlemen, I suppose, with cash: papa and mama manage that" (*Villette* 50-51). "Papa and mama," as well as Ginevra herself, do not care that she concentrates only on "music and

singing, and dancing; also embroidering the fine cambric handkerchiefs, which she could not afford to buy ready worked" and neglects "history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic," so that she is "in matters of information . . . quite a baby," not even knowing "the difference between Romanism and Protestantism" (*Villette* 48, 91). Ginevra's description of her lack of knowledge convicts her of her unpreparedness for life as a wife and mother. A woman who does not know "the difference between Romanism and Protestantism" has no moral influence with which to benefit her husband and children, influence which makes up the prime responsibility in woman's mission. Neither is Ginevra equipped to run a household, supervise the servants, or manage a budget, tasks which require skills other than singing, dancing, and fine needlework. Her education has only given her the skills to attract a husband, not take care of him, her children, and the household after marriage.

As they do not condemn domestic tasks, neither do Brontë's novels condemn marriage, but they do show that an education focused only on acquiring a husband is incomplete and damaging to women's character and intellect. Caroline proposes, although in a general way, an education which would provide young women with different and varied things to think about, "an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer" (*Shirley* 378-79). An education such as Caroline recommends would have a different motivation, one that would emphasize women's intellectual needs in general, and not limit the focus to the prospect of a type of life that they might or might not

have; women would be educated to become productive people, not just productive family members.

Brontë's novels make plain the class-based nature of vocational education and its underlying snobbery. In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Reed tells Mr. Brocklehurst, the superintendent of Lowood school, that she wishes Jane "to be brought up in a manner suiting her prospects . . . to be made useful, to be kept humble" (27). Mr. Brocklehurst assures her that "plain fare, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits: such is the order of the day in the house and its inhabitants" (*Jane Eyre* 27-28). Mrs. Reed is pleased that Jane will live in such an atmosphere and be "trained in conformity to her position and prospects" (*Jane Eyre* 28). Her emphasis on Jane's social "position and prospects" shows that the humility that she and Mr. Brocklehurst value is a trait that will keep the girls in the lower middle class and thus below them in the social scale. This humility works to keep the upper sections of the middle class ostensibly pure, rather than to develop the character and intellect of the girls.

Though not stated directly in the novel, the type of instruction that Jane gives to the students at the girls' school at Morton seems to be geared to class-based vocational needs. Jane teaches the girls reading, writing, sewing, and, to the students already proficient in these skills, "the elements of grammar, geography, history, and the finer kinds of needlework" (*Jane Eyre* 349). The girls are daughters of cottagers and farmers, so they would be considered to have taken a step up in the world if they went out to work as governesses or schoolteachers.

Along with the restricted education women received, the taboo against work for wages and the limited job choice if work was absolutely necessary hurts the development of women's intellect. Brontë's novel Shirley makes this most plain through its analogy between workers and women, as Brontë portrays "the visible wrongs of the labouring class in relation to the invisible wrongs of women" (Gordon 180). Mary Leman Grimstone makes a similar connection:

How is the spirit-spoiled weaver, the soul-subdued tailor-- victims of ill-paid toil, confined rooms, and ignorance--looked on by power? . . . How should women expect to fare better than these, since the principle of wrong and injury is the same in all cases? (107)

Grimstone was writing in 1835, but her comments fit the situation in Shirley, which was set in 1811-12, the era of the Luddite riots and the Napoleonic wars, because both influenced the lives of workers and women and the middle-class men who had power over both groups. Napoleon's Continental system of economic warfare and Britain's response through the Orders in Council limited trade in Britain (Hook, "Notes" 68). The manufacturers turned to technological advances to make more cloth faster and save money. The new machines put men out of work and kept out the untrained. (Of course, the manufacturers did not think of training the workers to use the new machines, since they trained instead women and children, who received less wages than men and so were not in danger of losing their jobs.)

The workers, who called themselves Luddites, after the legendary leader Ned Ludd, responded by disturbing the peace and breaking the

machines, though some wanted concessions from employers, and others parliamentary reforms (Dinwiddy 22). After defeats by mill owners and militia, as well as economic improvements, the violence dwindled (Dinwiddy 22).<sup>3</sup> In *Shirley*, the workers are incited to riot by their own discontent and by working-class men who went about the country stirring up trouble for their own gain. Brontë treats the Luddite leaders in the novel unsympathetically. As a Tory, she sympathized with the establishment and recognized that some of the Luddite leaders were involved for their own personal gain, not for the opportunity to help the workers (Gaskell 597). However, she sympathizes with the workers because she saw their powerlessness as similar to that of women. William Farren, despite being unemployed, does not agree with the Luddite leaders' tactics. He feels that both sides should make changes: the workers should make their grievances known through talk, not violence; the government should make new orders to help the workers; and the manufacturers should slow down the rate of changes in the factories.<sup>4</sup>

Though the workers' suffering is evident, while the women's is not, as Lyndall Gordon notes, they suffer the same way (180). Helen Taylor writes that these two groups are both under-employed, sick, in decline, oppressed, despised, and silenced by the bourgeois male (91). Helene Moglen states that both groups are evaluated the same way: the worker is "assessed according to his usefulness just as women are desired according to their material wealth and physical attractiveness"; both are expected to see their relation to the patriarchy the same way: "to recognize their inferiority and

their dependence" (163). This analogy illustrates the class-based patriarchal hegemony on the lives of workers and women.

The under-employment Taylor notes is simultaneously a condition of, and reinforces the repression and neglect of, the intellect of the workers and the women. Joe Scott, the overseer at Hollows'-Mill, speaks for the intellectually repressed workers who are more intelligent and knowledgeable than their counterparts in the south because of the thinking they do on the job and the reading they do on their own time (Shirley 88). Robert Moore, his employer, calls him a "conceited noodle" and tells him that, just because he has picked up some knowledge of mathematics and chemistry, he need not think he is "a neglected man of science" (Shirley 88-89). Robert's condescending attitude makes light of the intellectual capabilities of working-class men. Joe's words connect intelligence, intellectual activity, and work. His work does give his intellect some challenge, and he makes the most of the opportunities for the enrichment that the job provides, as do his colleagues. He tells Robert that "trade sharpens wer [sic] wits; and them that's mechanics, like me, is forced to think"--but not all men of his class are so fortunate as to have such a job, and his own intellectual qualities would be better served if his job drew on them even more (Shirley 88).

William Farren specifically represents the neglected intellectual potential found in the rank-and-file worker. He worked as a weaver and thus did not necessarily have a job that would always sharpen his thinking, as did Scott. Farren's intellectual potential is seen in the interests that he and Caroline share and discuss: natural history, botany, zoology, and ethics

in relation to the lower creation. If Farren had more than a simple gardening job to employ his knowledge in these fields of study, his intellectual potential could be developed. The neglect of this potential results from what Gilbert and Gubar see as the patriarchy's "disrespect for the natural resources of the nation" (379).

The middle-class women also possessed that neglected resource of mental capability. They were as intellectually repressed as the workers and indeed were encouraged to recognize their intellectual inferiority to men. Ellis instructs soon-to-be-married women who want a harmonious life that

one important truth sufficiently impressed upon your mind will materially assist in this desirable consummation--it is the superiority of your husband simply as a man. It is quite possible you may have more talents with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man. (Wives 10)

So, then, the woman should exercise a self-imposed repression of her intellect for the benefit of her marriage.

Ellis' audience did not necessarily need such warnings, for their domestic sphere activities were not conducive to stimulation of what mental ability women were ascribed by society. Nightingale contends that narrowness of family life, with the trivialities of letter-writing, carriage-riding, and drawing-room sitting, is "too narrow a field for the development of an immortal spirit . . . destined by the qualities and the gifts which the Creator has placed within it . . . his system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery" (216). By virtue of its inherent qualities

and functions, the family cannot be depended on to provide complete opportunities for intellectual activities necessary to stimulate the minds of women, no matter their degree of intellect.

The situation was exacerbated in families who had enough money to employ servants. In these households, women did not have enough to do. J. F. C. Harrison argues that the wife's role was debilitating because the servants did chores and concerns about refinement restricted the wife to "a few occupations, such as sewing, embroidering, or playing on the pianoforte; with so few things to do, her life became trivial and boring" (115-16). Frances Henri is quick to realize this. She practically insists to her fiance William Crimsworth that she work after their marriage, for if she does not, she would get bored:

. . . how dull my days would be! You would be away teaching in close, noisy schoolrooms, from morning till evening, and I should be lingering at home, unemployed and solitary; I should get depressed and sullen, and you would soon tire of me.  
(The Professor 251)

Young, single women had even less employment than married women. Because of this, they experienced the minds of "incurable infancy" and "silent misery" that Nightingale described. Caroline recognizes the situation and its consequences: young women who, unlike their brothers, have nothing to do but keep house and go visiting, and so "decline in health" and become narrow in mind and viewpoint as they only wish to be married. Caroline speaks of what she knows. Barred from seeking governessing work by her uncle, Caroline has nothing to do but supervise

the servants, sew for herself and for the poor, and receive visitors. Like the girls she mentions, she has matrimonial hopes, but unlike them, she has the delicacy and self-respect to keep herself from acting as a scheming flirt. She suffers the same decline in health as the others, because she has no useful occupation. She is more intellectually inclined, but still her empty life takes its toll: "the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation" (Shirley 199). Caroline's awareness and her experiences cause her to become the representative of "all women whose energies were used by a society that regulated them, by law and custom, to ineffectual positions" (Gordon 190).

Brontë's novels show that the work women were allowed to do outside the home was not much of an improvement over domestic activities. The Brontë heroines tend to characterize the jobs women could get in a negative way. Lucy Snowe teaches because she has to, not for the love of it, though later on she enjoys running her own school. Jane refers to governessing as "a new servitude," Rochester and Shirley frankly call it "slavery," and Caroline sees it as a change (*Jane Eyre* 78; *Shirley* 205, 245). Only Frances has nothing particularly negative to say about teaching, except the difficulty of teaching lace-mending and the injustice of making less money than her husband. She, Mademoiselle Reuter, Madame Beck, and Lucy Snowe flourish as school directors. Jane, Caroline, and Shirley have nothing good to say about domestic-task-oriented jobs because, just like their unpaid versions in the home, these jobs did not provide a dependable way for women to achieve complete intellectual fulfillment.

Governessing did not provide many intellectual challenges. Since governesses taught only what they had learned as accomplished women, their mental faculties were not particularly challenged. The instruction was not in-depth, because girls were presumed not to require much education, so governesses would not have to learn anything more in order to be prepared to teach. In Brontë's novels, the governesses' intellectual isolation is not explicitly connected with their jobs. However, the enjoyment of intellectual conversation with other adults by Jane, and Diana and Mary Rivers, plus their studies on their own, imply the connection.

Brontë's novels also recognize that schoolteachers experience intellectual repression. The texts are more forthright about the tendency toward intellectual shallowness in schoolteaching. St. John Rivers asks Jane what she will do with her "mind--sentiments--tastes" when she starts teaching at Morton, and she replies equably, "Save them till they are wanted. They will keep" (*Jane Eyre* 339). Such was the level of education considered suitable for Jane's pupils that her refined, intellectual mind, tastes, and sentiments would not be considered appropriate contributions to her teaching and their learning. She continues to study in her spare time, as do Frances and Lucy, for intellectual enrichment.

Brontë herself felt that governessing and teaching did not employ her intellect to its fullest potential. Biographer Rebecca Fraser comments about Brontë's governessing work that "indeed Charlotte must have felt how much were all her attainments and education worth, if this was the end to which they were to be used" (125). Lyndall Gordon, another Brontë biographer, observes that Brontë's dislike of her employers was not the source of her

problems with governessing, but the work's insufficiency to satisfy her intellectually: "the work open to her demeaned her talents" and did not fulfill "her need to expand her mind" (81, 91). Some of this dissatisfaction with work clearly was expressed in the attitudes of her governess-teacher heroines.

Brontë's novels have less to say about sewing, doubtless considered by women the last resort if governessing and schoolteaching did not work out. From Frances' experiences, we can see that the job is even more stressful and boring than work in education. Seamstresses, unless they taught sewing or lace-mending (as Frances did), did not have the same employer problems as did educators, but more substantial distresses and much less intellectual stimulation. Seamstresses had to endure long hours and low pay, often in squalid rooms (Helsing et al. 115-16). Frances does not have to endure such conditions, but she considers lace-mending as less preferable than a schoolteaching job. She uses her sewing as a way of making money so that she can buy books, take lessons, and educate herself enough to get a job teaching school.

### Brontë's Alternatives

As well as responding to the cultural situation, Brontë also posits alternatives. These alternatives come in the form of new views of women's intellect and suggestions for education and work. The new view provides a corrective to society's restrictions on female education and work, a corrective that fulfills women's intellectual needs. The suggestions entail

approaches to women's education and work that are not determined by gender.

Brontë creates women who are not hurt in any way by education and work that is beyond the bounds of the domestic sphere by women taking time to study. Caroline accomplishes her duties as lady of the house for her uncle without leaving her tasks undone; the servants are still supervised, sewing for the poor finished, and Sunday school taught. Frances is concerned that the household duties will leave her with too much time on her hands, even if she does study too. I have already noted how Frances tells William she is going to work after their marriage so that she will not be bored and sulky.

Nor do Brontë's heroines compromise their feminine nature through being women of intellect. Shirley observes that some people say "hard labour and learned professions . . . make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly," but Caroline responds that those circumstances would not matter if they were true; neither woman shows any evidence of agreeing with the people who hold those opinions, and neither of them fits that description (*Shirley* 235). Neither do Frances, Jane, Lucy, or Paulina. Robert's description of Caroline fits the other women of intellect: "a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge . . . conversation . . . fertile, varied, imbued with a picturesque grace and genial interest" (*Shirley* 504). This is not a description of a woman who is "masculine, coarse, unwomanly." The description of Paulina discussing intellectual topics with French scholars at the Hôtel Crécý reinforces the novels' point about the coexistence of femininity and intellect. Paulina converses "modestly,

diffidently," and her "grace and mind . . . charmed these thoughtful Frenchmen [so that] they clustered about her . . . to touch on many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life, in which it appeared that she had both read and reflected" (*Villette* 299-301). The information that Paulina has read and studied has not tainted her nature, but enriched her mind and satisfied her desire for learning. Perhaps the fact that Paulina is beautiful commands some attention, but it is her intellect which keeps the scholars attentive to her. None of them flocks around her beautiful but non-intellectual cousin Ginevra Fanshawe.

The women of intellect in Brontë's novels also exemplify the coexistence of health and study. Lucy summarizes her first week of teaching at Madame Beck's school and studying on her own by describing how her life invigorates her: "I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties, and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use" (*Villette* 75). This description is an effective answer to the culture's belief that women's health would be hurt if they studied too much. The fear of stagnancy also prompts Frances to continue her studies and work after marriage. She, Jane, and Lucy avoid the fate of Mary Cave, in *Shirley*, who led a wholly domestic life and faded away from lack of activity and lack of attention from her husband, Rev. Helstone.

Brontë's novels call for dismissal of restrictions on subject matter in women's education. Women have the capacity to understand supposedly "non-domestic" subjects in depth. Frances does more than hold her own in political discussions with Yorke Hunsden. Shirley studies the business and political news in the newspapers and discusses the implications of current

events with Robert. The other Brontë heroines exhibit similar inclinations for ostensibly unfeminine subjects such as business, theology, and travel. These women not only show a depth of understanding of what were considered unfeminine subjects, but make their intelligence known without alienating the men in their lives.

Brontë's heroines also value learning for its own sake and for the sake of intellectual adventure and enrichment. No matter what else is going on in their lives, they make time to study or at least reflect, as Jane does when she walks on the leads of Thornfield and enjoys the "bright visions" that rise before her mind's eye (*Jane Eyre* 101). Both Caroline and Lucy possess a knowledge of their own which they value and nourish, despite Hortense Moore's appropriation of the credit for the former's knowledge and Paul Emanuel's denigration of the latter's intellect.

Lucy Snowe and Rose Yorke derive strength from a sense of moral obligation to fulfill their God-given talents; this strength keeps them studying in unappreciative, discouraging atmospheres. Paulina enjoys intellectual conversations with Graham Bretton and German lessons along with Lucy, although she protests when her father suggests sending her to school. Shirley is much less self-conscious than the other heroines, though she enjoys studying and reflecting on her studies, because she is not aware of "the full talent of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green" (*Shirley* 374). Such self-consciousness, however, does not keep her from being a good example of a woman of intellect, as we can see from her conversations with Caroline and Robert.

Brontë's novels, through their portrayal of conventional and unconventional attitudes toward women's education, show the need for gender-neutral education. This type of instruction entails changes in the generally accepted view of women's intellectual capacity, subjects of study, motivation and uses for education, and attitudes toward learning in general. Brontë's novels constitute a protest against the limits that gendered education puts on women. This education restricts the conception of women's intellectual capability, as can be seen in Rev. Helstone's belief that women can only understand domestic subjects. This educational philosophy also includes the belief that women should only be educated for certain roles, which results, for example, in Hortense Moore trying to turn Caroline into the "model of a Flemish school-girl," Hortense herself having been raised in Belgium, the home of her mother (*Shirley* 98). Women do not study for long or in depth, and these habits limit women's intellectual development. This type of education also presumes that women who engage in learning for learning's sake would be distracted from their duties to their families and friends, and even lose their feminine qualities.

Brontë's novels, on the other hand, assert that gendered education keeps women from using their talents to the fullest and realizing their intellectual potential. Brontë argues that when women are educated only for certain roles, they have limited options in life: marriage, or work as governesses, schoolteachers, or seamstresses. The novels refute the culture's attitudes and fears of what studying certain subjects and spending more time than is customary on lessons could do to women. Women can spend time studying and still get their tasks accomplished, as Caroline does.

Paulina, Caroline, and Frances, particularly, exemplify the harmony between study and femininity, as their natures are not changed and they not only attract the attention of men but get married. Brontë's novels therefore declare that gender-neutral education, which does not limit subject matter, extent of learning, or time spent studying, is the type of instruction women need. With gender-neutral education, women would be able to study what they wanted as much as they wanted, for any reason, including learning for its own sake, and fulfill their intellectual potential and talents, actions impossible so long as conventional attitudes and practices prevailed.

Brontë's novels also call for increased work opportunities for middle-class women. Women should be allowed to work in any job they choose, Brontë contends. There was no guarantee that middle-class women would be suited to governessing, schoolteaching, and sewing, however maternal in instinct they were considered to be, just as there was no guarantee that men would be suited for their jobs. Brontë's recognition of this collapses the difference between men and women, even though the recognition is displaced to a male character, in *Shirley's* narrator's comment about Rev. Helstone: "It seems to me, reader, that you cannot always cut out men to fit their profession, and that you ought not to curse them because that profession sometimes hangs on them ungracefully" (68). There is not any direct connection made between this comment and women's work outside the home, but it is applicable to the situation of women who had no aptitude for governessing, schoolteaching, or sewing, yet who had to work at one of these jobs and endure intellectual repression similar to what they were apt to experience in the domestic sphere. Brontë felt that women should be able to

find the jobs that suited them without custom deciding for them. Free job choice would give women a better chance of developing their intellectual faculties, while fulfilling their moral obligation to do so as well.

Victorians emphasized women's moral duties to others, but Brontë connects them to women's obligations to themselves, instead of only to others. Her novels show that women have a moral obligation to fulfill their talents, so they should be able to work outside the home at whatever job would fulfill that obligation. This philosophy is seen most clearly through the words of Rose Yorke. Rose informs Caroline that she is wasting away in talents and life in a "long, slow death . . . in Briarfield Rectory" (*Shirley* 385). Rose goes on to say that she wants to travel and will travel even if she finds an empty world, for "to try nothing and leave your life a blank . . . is to commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin," referring to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.14-30 (*Shirley* 385). Her mother reminds her that "solid satisfaction is only to be realized by doing one's duty" (*Shirley* 385). Rose replies that keeping only to domestic duty would be the equivalent of burying one's talents, as described in the parable, and she resolves to use her talents to the fullest. Rose's beliefs go directly against domestic ideology and its dictates about women's duties and even nature, for women were seen to have a nature suitable only for the domestic sphere, as well as an inferior intellect, and any suggestion that contradicted those beliefs was radical indeed.

Brontë's novels not only present alternative views of women's intellect and its fulfillment in work, but alternative views that oppose domestic ideology for the good of all women, whether conventional or

intellectual. Victorian society generally considered women to be intellectually inferior to men, and possessed of qualities and skills only usable in the domestic sphere. The novels show that women's intellect and talents are repressed by confinement to domestic duties. The solution the novels present is work outside the home at any job. Only through work at a job suitable to their intellect can the needs of women's mental faculties be completely met. For women to be able to meet their needs through work, there would need to be a thorough reversal of domestic ideology and cultural practices. Brontë's novels implicitly acknowledge the unlikelihood of such a reversal occurring, through the compromises that the heroines make: Mrs. Edward Rochester, Mrs. Robert Moore, and Mrs. Louis Moore do not work outside the home, and Lucy Snowe and Frances Henri Crimsworth do not take jobs that are not domestic-task-oriented; however, the novels remain uncompromising in their insistence on the need for changes on women's behalf, changes in education and work which will benefit them intellectually.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The sources for this information and more included Blair's Belles Lettres, Mrs. Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Hume, Mangnall's Questions, Rollin for ancient history, Milton, Shakespeare, Linley's Grammar, and Goldsmith's Geography (as reported in Fraser 73; Gordon 30). Mangnall's Questions included sections on Latin, heraldry, common subjects, architecture, mythology, and the history of Greece, Rome, France, England, and Scotland.

<sup>2</sup>At Cowan Bridge, Charlotte, Maria, and Emily were scheduled to study the accomplishments, but their sister Elizabeth only the vocational subjects (Gordon 15).

<sup>3</sup>While writing Shirley, Brontë sent for back issues of the Leeds Mercury from 1811-12 to get the necessary background information on that era. She also had learned about the Luddite riots from her father and her schoolteacher Miss Margaret Wooler.

<sup>4</sup>In Myths of Power, Terry Eagleton writes that Chartism is the unspoken subject of Shirley (45).

## CHAPTER IV

### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

My fixed desire was to seek and find a good and intelligent woman, whom I could love . . . I began to regard the notion of an intellectual, faithful, loving woman as a mere dream.

Rochester, Jane Eyre

I have not been buried with inferior minds.

Jane, Jane Eyre

If all women of intellect waited for the ideal husband, most of them would die unmarried.

Clement Shorter

I cannot conceal from myself that he is *not* intellectual; there are many places into which he could not follow me intellectually.

Charlotte Brontë, speaking of her fiancé,  
Arthur Bell Nicholls

What happens to women of intellect in a culture that considers women to be intellectually inferior to men and intelligent women to be "strong-minded" or even masculine? Benjamin Parsons, who considered women to be intellectually equal to men, suggests the following scenario:

That young gentleman who aspires to her hand, although very polite and agreeable withal, is such an ill-informed personage, that an intelligent woman for a wife would quite bewilder him, and by contrast sadly expose his folly; and therefore he has come to the prudent conclusion that he will never marry a woman who knows more than himself; consequently Miss

Fanny is doomed to employ all her wits to contract her intellect to the dimensions of her lover's. Books are burnt or thrown away; French is forgotten, and perhaps English at the same time; and every effort is made to educe mental paralysis, until, perhaps, this seraph of a woman seems in part assimilated to the mere animal who is to be her companion until death. (29)

In Parson's summation of the cultural situation, a woman has to shrink her intellect to the limits of the man's, give up intellectual pursuits, and even, in time, do away altogether with any evidence of her existence as a sentient, intellectual being. Such were the consequences, given domestic ideology's conception of woman's intellect and its part--which was no part at all--in romantic relationships. The opinion that women were intellectually inferior to men and the view that women intelligent beyond their domestic education were masculine were not conducive to any contribution by woman's intellect to courtship and marriage.

Brontë's novels, in reply to this cultural situation, privilege intellect's contribution to romantic love relationships between men and women of intellect, and, at the same time, call into question the gendering of intellect. Her novels contend that intellect is not a hindrance to romance, but works as romantic capital for both men and women, bringing a new, valuable dimension to the relationship. In the novels, not only are women attracted to intellectual men, but men are attracted to intellectual women, a circumstance thoroughly unique in a society in which Ellis could write that "possession of great intellectual endowments in women . . . are not the qualifications of female character which conduce most to her own happiness or the happiness of those around her" (*Wives* 36). It is to a discussion of this society that I shall turn first.

## Romance in Victorian Culture

In nineteenth-century England, cultural attitudes about the place of women's intellect in romantic relationships and life in general tended to be negative. Women were educated not to be intellectual, but rather otherwise, as Parsons describes:

As she grows up, woman is told that she must not be learned or scientific, and all that education can do is done to prevent the due cultivation of her intellectual powers. She is given to understand that it is unwomanly or unladylike not to be to a certain extent ignorant of almost everything valuable in real knowledge. Should she have a thorough insight into language, she will be persecuted as 'a blue stocking.' Talk she may, for ever; the more she 'trolls the tongue' the better, because the more womanish, provided only that nearly all she says is of no use to any mortal living. But alas, alas,! [sic] should she only thoroughly know what she is talking about, or talk about what is profitable, or prove that she understands the meaning of every word she uses,--why then she is undone. (28-29)

Because most of the Victorians thought learning in women made them unladylike, they also thought it would cause women to lose romantic capital. Men would not be attracted to unladylike women who would be an embarrassment and a hindrance to them in establishing a proper home and family. This loss of capital would certainly hinder courtship and even women's prospects of attracting men who would court them. Parents and young women themselves did not want to risk this loss and, in consequence, gain the probability of spinsterhood.

Many Victorians also feared that if women of intellect--or, as they termed them, "strong-minded" women--managed to get married, they would make their husbands' lives hardly worth the living:

Rather than demure and cheery, she would be direct and cross. Rather than submissive, she would be bold . . . she would bear feeble children and run a messy household, caring more for textbooks than for cookbooks. Worse, her temperament would replace husbandly serenity with marital competition. For it was theorized with annoyance, the discourse of such wives would create incessant discord between the mates. (Palmegiano xlvii-xlviii)

A scenario such as this was certainly the opposite of the Victorians' ideal of a happy husband, self-effacing wife, well-behaved children, well-run household, and secure social status, and it was the ideal which everyone strove to obtain, no matter the implications for women's intellect, seen as inferior in any case.

### Brontë's Response to the Culture's Ideas about Romance

Brontë responds to this valuation of woman's intellect by showing the standard cultural attitudes of both men and women toward intellect, and then the contribution intelligence could make to romance.

The attitude of the conventional Victorian men toward women of intellect and women in general is condescension and vanity. The curates Malone and Donne in Shirley see women as embodiments of the cultural capital of money and status, and marriage in such circumstances as "an

advantageous connexion, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views, and permanence of solid interests" (56). Rev. Helstone is not aware of the depth of character and intellect of his niece Caroline, nor of any sort of character and sense in any woman:

At heart, he could not abide sense in women: he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be,-- inferior: toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away. (Shirley 138)

Rev. Helstone's attitude, which disavows even the existence of the cultural capital which the curates so admire, does not even acknowledge the traits in women most important to their mission and the fulfillment of the Victorian ideal of home.

The conventional women also do not emphasize their mental contributions to romance. They view it as simply something to be drawn upon as they learn the accomplishments that will give them romantic capital. This attitude does not lead to anything substantial or original.

Blanche Ingram's one attempt at intellectual conversation is merely a mean-spirited ploy to point out another's ignorance as she "trails" Mrs. Dent who, unlike Blanche, has not studied botany, but "liked flowers, 'especially wild ones'" (Jane Eyre 161). Blanche may be able to remember some rote-learned information about botany, but she actually is an example of "intellectual bankruptcy" (Johnstone 168). Ginevra Fanshawe, Rosamond Oliver, and the young women in Shirley and The Professor are similarly shallow.

## Brontë's Intellectual Characters and Romance

Brontë's portrayal of characters who view intellect as romantic capital is in definite contrast to those other characters who hold the conventional view that intellect cannot contribute to, and indeed even hinders, the progress of romantic relationships. The attitudes of the characters who approve of intellect's part in romance can first be seen in their views on the conventional non-intellectual characters. The value that Brontë men of intellect place on that trait in women is evident in their reaction to conventional women--rejection because of lack of intellect. Rochester may be attracted to the external beauty and charming demeanor of non-intellectual women, but he soon becomes bored. He describes Bertha's intellect as "pigmy" (Jane Eyre 291). Of his mistresses Giuncinta and Clara, who were "both considered singularly handsome, " he says:

What was their beauty to me in a few weeks? Giuncinta was unprincipled and violent: I tired of her in three months. Clara was honest and quiet, but heavy, mindless, and unimpressible: not one whit to my taste. (Jane Eyre 296)

Rochester ultimately does not want a mindless woman. Graham Bretton is similarly distracted by Ginevra Fanshawe for a time, and William Crimsworth gives the pretty young women at his brother's party a passing glance, but this type of pretty, conventional woman is nearly invisible in the eyes of the Moore brothers, Robert and Louis. Robert sees them as only forward women who too obviously set their caps for any eligible bachelor in sight; Louis, preoccupied with the memory and then the reality of Shirley, does not really see them at all. Paul Emanuel has a different view; in a

discourse against "women of intellect," he praises women who are simply beautiful (Villette 340).

Similarly, the women of intellect are bored by conventional men; they do not consider what capital of class or money the men possess, considerations which would make a difference to conventional women. Caroline views a visit from the curates Donne and Malone with weariness. Shirley does not find them interesting either. Lucy dismisses Alfred de Hamal as a frivolous, male counterpart to Ginevra Fanshawe. Conventional men possess nothing in mind or in manner to interest, much less fascinate, the women of intellect.

On the other hand, Brontë's heroines are attracted to intellectual men. This was rather contrary to cultural custom. Women were encouraged to draw out the intelligence of men for the benefit of others, but no other attention was called for (Ellis, Wives, 34). Not so for the Brontë heroines, who give plenty of attention to the intellect of the men in whom they are interested. Frances admires William's intelligence. When she is a student in his class, she becomes more interested in affection than admiration from him. She writes a poem about the close relationship between a master and his female pupil, obviously based on her regard for William. Frances also enjoys the intellectual conversations with her friend Yorke Hunsden, who returns the compliment and thus frees her in conversation in a way that William does not.

Jane Eyre, intellectually isolated at Thornfield, finds in Rochester the intellectual companionship that she seeks. She recognizes her discovery: "though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and

heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (Jane Eyre 164). She also receives, through Rochester's intellect, a vision of the "busy world, towns, regions full of life," as she listens to him tell of "the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways" (Jane Eyre 100, 136). His interest in intellectual pursuits and conversation brings to Jane an "intellectual stimulation" that she has lacked (DeLamotte 207).

During the time that she and Rochester are separated, Jane encounters another intellectual man--St. John Rivers. He wants to marry Jane and take her to the mission field in India. She realizes that he values her as a helpmate only for her mind--he does not love her--but she admires him; he is, after all, an intellectual man, and she is tempted to marry him. She is on the brink of saying yes to his proposal when she hears, as a telepathic cry, the voice of Rochester calling her name. Their mental sympathy can account for this call. As noted earlier, Jane has found that she possesses "something in my brain and heart . . . that assimilates me mentally to him" (Jane Eyre 164). The day after the telepathic call, she reflects that the call "seemed in me--not in the external world" (Jane Eyre 403). She finds out later that Rochester had heard her reply of "I am coming; wait for me . . . Where are you?" (Jane Eyre 428). Moglen notes that Jane and Rochester "share a profound sympathy of mind and spirit" (119). That "profound sympathy" includes the mental assimilation that explains their communication at the moment of crisis, and shows how, according to Gilbert and Gubar, "for the marriage of Jane's and Rochester's true minds there is now, as Jane unconsciously guesses, no impediment" (367).

Like Frances and Jane, Caroline and Shirley are both attracted to intelligent men. They discuss this in an exchange about Robert Moore:

"I was well inclined to him before I saw him. I liked him when I did see him: I admire him now. There is charm in beauty for itself, Caroline; when it is blent with goodness, there is powerful charm."

"When mind is added, Shirley?"

"Who can resist it?" (Shirley 225)

Caroline finds Robert as attractive for his intellectual qualities as for his looks. "He is as handsome as he is intelligent," she comments to herself on another occasion (Shirley 127). That reads as though she values his looks more than his intellect, but it was his mind that she noticed first. She goes to him when she has a question about her lessons, because he is a better teacher than his sister:

Mr. Moore possessed a clear tranquil brain of his own; almost as soon as he looked at Caroline's little difficulties they seemed to dissolve beneath his eye: in two minutes he could explain all; in two words give the key to the puzzle. She thought if only Hortense could teach like him, how much faster she might learn! (Shirley 104)

Caroline also knows him well enough to know how he values intellect and intellectual pursuits; her moral lesson via Coriolanus simultaneously appeals to his intellect as well as his conscience: "The very first scene in Coriolanus came with smart relish to his intellectual palate, and still as he read he warmed" (Shirley 116). Caroline knows that Robert is acute enough

to understand not only the play but her use of it, and how to put the lessons into practice. Coriolanus was a Roman ruler who ignored the needs of the common people and was killed by a rival ruler whom he had defeated in earlier conflicts. Caroline sees Robert's attitude to the workers as similar to Coriolanus' attitude to the common people of Rome, and indeed Robert sympathizes with the ruler: "He delivered the haughty speech of Caius Marcius to the starving citizens with unction: he did not say he thought his irrational pride right, but he seemed to feel it so" (Shirley 116). Caroline observes his sympathy and tells him he must himself not be proud to the workers, "not neglect chances of soothing them . . . not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request as austere as if it were a command" (Shirley 117). Caroline's motive was as much concern for Robert's safety as intellectual enrichment, but the important point of this scene here is that she knew she would be able to appeal to his intellect through hers without alienating him.

For Shirley, intellect is also important in the choice of a husband. She derides her uncle Sympson's suggestion of Samuel Fawthrop Wynne in part because "his intellect reaches no standard I can esteem" (Shirley 444). She also rejects Sir Philip Nunnely's proposal, partly because she is already in love with Louis Moore, but also because Sir Philip, like Samuel Fawthrop Wynne, is not intellectual enough for her, though he woos her with songs and sonnets of his own composing. When her uncle Sympson finds out that she has rejected Sir Philip's proposal, he chides her for what he calls her foolishness. When he reminds her of Sir Philip's verses, she replies that "you are almost as good a poet as he" (Shirley 515). Her uncle

suspects that she is already in love with someone else and asks her who it is, but she answers flippantly, "Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington" (Shirley 517). She does not want to tell him yet that she is in love with a man who has much less economic capital than she has. But Louis Moore has cultural capital in the form of intelligence, and that capital returns dividends to him in his relationship to Shirley.

Paulina and Lucy, like the other heroines of the previous novels, also find intellectual men attractive. Paulina falls in love with Graham Bretton partly because he is intelligent and she enjoys talking about books and ideas with him: "she listened with delight and answered with animation" (Villette 406). Lucy finds Paul's intellect one of the most appealing things about him; he influences her "emotionally and intellectually" in a substantial way that the intellectual but cooler Graham Bretton cannot (Harris 91).

The preference of the novels' heroines for intellectual men is rather unusual, but an even more revolutionary alternative to prevailing cultural situations is the heroes' attraction to intellectual women precisely because of their intellectual qualities. If the heroines had not been women of intellect, the heroes would not have been romantically interested in them. But Brontë created intelligent women who, because of their intellect, attract the romantic attention of intellectual men.

The first man of intellect Brontë created was William Crimsworth in The Professor. From Crimsworth's disclosures about himself, we find that he values intellect in himself and others, and so predictably he is attracted to intellectual women. Frances Evans Henri fits his ideal. He also connects his interest in her with his occupation:

the toilworn, fagged, probably irritable tutor, blind almost to beauty, insensible to airs and graces, glories chiefly in certain mental qualities: application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness, are the charms that attract his notice and win his regard. These he seeks, but seldom meets; these, if by chance he finds, he would fain retain forever, and when separation deprives him of them he feels as if some ruthless hand had snatched from him his only ewe-lamb. (The Professor 149)

William's description of what works as capital for him in his estimation is certainly diametrically opposed to the usual emphasis on external beauty and ornamental, entertaining accomplishments.

Unlike Crimsworth, Rochester is intellectually isolated. He has no friends of the same cast of mind and no intellectual equal at Thornfield, until he returns home from Europe and meets Jane. A few weeks after they meet, when he invites her downstairs for a second interview, his excuse for his departure from custom makes her aware of his intellectual isolation:

I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night, and that is why I sent for you: the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me; nor would Pilot have been, for none of these can talk. Adèle is a degree better, but still far below the mark; Mrs. Fairfax ditto; you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will. (Jane Eyre 123-24)

Jane reciprocates, and he consoles himself with their intellectual companionship. After his wife Bertha had gone insane, Rochester had decided that he would be entitled to remarry, and he looks for "an intellectual, faithful, loving woman," finding the type of woman he seeks in Jane (Jane Eyre 297). Rochester's appreciation for enrichment by Jane's

intellect is counter to the standard view of women's intellectual contribution to marriage and home. Jane is also Rochester's equal, unlike Frances, who remains in William's estimation his intellectual inferior.

The portrayal of intellectual men in love with intellectual women continues in the persons of Robert and Louis Moore of Shirley. Variations exist in character and situation; unlike the situation in Jane Eyre, there is no obvious intellectual isolation to be overcome, and unlike William in The Professor, the brothers do not consider themselves to be the intellectual superiors of the women of intellect with whom they are in love.

Robert Moore is intellectual and appreciates intellectual pursuits. He likes to read and discuss what he has read. He also appreciates Caroline's intellect. He encourages her studies and answers her questions. He is not put off by her instruction in moral lessons through Coriolanus; he also does not consider Shakespeare an example of the heavy reading that Dix probably had in mind when he wrote that the "mind of woman seems constituted more for elegant literature" (40). Robert's appreciation of Caroline's mental qualities is an important aspect of his attraction to her. In a conversation with Mr. Yorke about Mary Cave, Mr. Yorke's first love, Robert says:

Supposing, Yorke, she had been educated (there were no women educated in those days); supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information . . . . (Shirley 503-504)

We know that he is describing Caroline, but the description suits the other intellectual women in Brontë's novels.

Louis Moore has a similar regard for Shirley's intellect. For Louis, Shirley's intellectual qualities are cultural capital, just as his are for her. He has kept old copy-books from her days as his student, and even remembers, better than she, a composition that she wrote. He discusses intellectual subjects with her, viewing her as his equal rather than his inferior, even though she had been his student. Just as in the romance between Jane and Rochester, Louis' love for Shirley refutes the condescending master-student relationship and suggests the alternative of intellectual equality.

Graham Bretton and Paul Emanuel, the intellectual men of Villette, have a more complex view of women's intellect, including the traditional approach and open-minded view that Brontë's novels posit. Graham's response to intellectual women is based on external considerations. Graham does not pay attention to Lucy because she is plain, and so he does not realize how intelligent she is. Eugenia DeLamotte observes that "Graham himself judges her by her appearance (her value in the marriage market), and her modest means" (254). He is infatuated with Ginevra Fanshawe's beauty to the point that he does not care that she is not intellectual, and, indeed, when he is finally alienated from her, it is simply because he sees how shallow and superficial she is in character. Paulina Home is also beautiful; when Graham is reacquainted with her and finds out that she is intelligent, he falls in love with her. Lucy, the narrator, describes Graham's attitude:

With his past admiration of Miss Fanshawe, I suppose his intellect had little to do, but his whole intellect and highest tastes, came in question now. These, like all his faculties, were active, eager for nutriment, and alive to gratification when it came. (Villette 406)

For Paulina, typical cultural capital--beauty--provides an opportunity for her to be noticed and her atypical interest in intellectual pursuits to be considered valuable by Graham. Brontë's use of a typically attractive quality as bait provides an interesting twist to this portrayal of a romance between a man and woman of intellect: that quality is almost subverted by beauty, but then again, beauty would not have kept Graham's interest as intellect does.

Paul Emanuel's response to women of intellect is as contradictory and mixed as Graham's, but not as influenced by externals. Paul's reaction is tempered by other prejudices. He teaches classes at Madame Beck's school for girls, and his attitude is similar to hers, an indifferent one. Paul affirms that a woman of intellect is a "luckless accident" (Villette 340). Yet he brags to his colleagues at the Athénée of Lucy's skill in writing and even brings them over to question her. Eventually her intellect is one of the things about her that he finds attractive.

### Alternatives for the Culture

By emphasizing women's intellect and the favorable response of the men of intellect, the novels posit some sort of alternative for the culture, but the alternative is problematic because of the progression through the novels of the types of romantic relationships portrayed. The romance in The Professor is one of intellectual equality, at least in William Crimsworth's estimation. In Jane Eyre and Shirley, Jane and Rochester, Robert and Caroline, and Louis and Shirley experience mutually enriching intellectual reciprocity, although Shirley devalues her own contribution. The

relationships in Villette contain variations on the types of relationships in the first three novels.

The unequal man-as-teacher/woman-as-student relationship first appears in The Professor. Though there is some reciprocity in their intelligence and interest in intellectual pursuits, William and Frances' relationship is still on a master-student basis. He rather tyrannizes over her by giving her extra-difficult lessons even after she has been dismissed from Mademoiselle Reuter's school and is not a student in William's class anymore. He seems more interested in what she can learn from him than what he can learn from her. She keeps an acquiescing attitude, except when she tells him that she will continue working after their marriage. Yet even when Frances runs her own school, her relationship with William is still the same. When she teases him or speaks French when he wants her to speak English, he makes her read Wordsworth for penance. After he comes home from work each night, the "lady-directress vanished" and his "own little lace-mender was magically restored" to him (The Professor 276). Frances does not seem to mind this dual-personality type of existence. Perhaps living this way satisfies her contradictory desire for a career and for the student/wife-master/husband relationship she has with William. He does not mind her dual existence: his love for her lets her continue her career after marriage, and his ego is satisfied by their unequal intellectual relationship; even after her school is successful, he still refers to her as his "own little lace-mender," keeping her in her student role, keeping her in stasis as the girl he first fell in love with.

Though The Professor privileges intellect and its place in the romantic relationship between men and women of intellect, it remains ideologically bound through its portrayal of a relationship that is still on a master-student basis. William's consideration of Frances as his intellectual inferior does not provide an acceptable alternative for the treatment of an intellectual woman in a romantic relationship. Even though Frances values her own intellect and does not hide it when she is with William, his view of her as his intellectual inferior undercuts any progress made by valuing the woman's intellect. Jane Eyre takes a very different approach.

In Jane Eyre, the master-student relationship is refuted by the intellectual reciprocity and equality between the man and woman of intellect. Both Rochester and Jane find the mental and intellectual companionship that they have been seeking, and "they learn from each other" (Ewbank 199). Their intellect becomes capital--symbolic capital for him and, eventually, through their marriage, economic and social capital for her, because marriage takes her out of the redundant woman category. Through Jane and Rochester's relationship as intellectual equals, the novel presents a distinct alternative to domestic ideology's conception of intellectual women: the recognition of the value of women's intellect and its use as cultural capital through a relationship of mutual intellectual enrichment and fulfillment between equals, a relationship that not only refutes but in the end subverts the man-as-teacher/woman-as-student relationship. This equal relationship is not at all conventional or ideologically bound. We would expect the later novels to include a variation on this ideal, but they do not--at least not clearly.

Shirley includes romantic relationships similar to those in Jane Eyre and The Professor. Caroline and Robert's relationship is mutually enriching, like that of Jane and Rochester, though the intellectual aspect is downplayed as there is no isolation to be alleviated. The relationship between Louis and Shirley harks back to the master-student relationship of William and Frances. Louis regards Shirley as an equal, but she wants to keep their relationship unequal; she prefers a master to whom she can look up. This is no alternative. This is regression. For all her bravado about running her own estate, which was conventionally a man's job, Shirley is uncomfortable in a thoroughly equal relationship with a man.

The romantic relationship between a man and woman of intellect is further complicated in Villette. Graham and Paulina have an enthusiastic but still matter-of-fact approach to intellect's contribution to their romance. They enjoy the intellectual attraction and conversations, but do not dwell on either or speak of intellectual isolation being alleviated. Perhaps their approach shows a compromise with ideology--a downplaying, through nonchalance--of the role of intellect in romance. Or perhaps the nonchalance indicates another version of the ideal--intellectual attraction and reciprocity are so well-accepted that there does not need to be anything particularly special made of them. If so, the conventional ideology is being overcome, as in Jane and Rochester's relationship.

The role of intellect in the major romantic relationship in Villette is problematic. Paul denigrates intellectual women, yet he is drawn to Lucy because of her intellect. He even "takes it for granted that Lucy is a person of considerable intelligence and ability" (Morse 201). Lucy herself does not

seem to view her intellect as cultural capital, yet she considers intellect important and is attracted to Paul because he is intelligent. Perhaps her disparagement of her intellect is part of her normal self-effacement. If so, Paul's badgering is a way to get her not to deny or even to erase her intellect. By so doing, he would also be trying to persuade her to go beyond her desire to live as a cipher as well as to go beyond ideology.

The novel's intentionally ambiguous ending--Brontë implies but does not say specifically that Paul does not survive the shipwreck and return to Lucy--is another problem. Brontë particularly created in Lucy a character who is denied a sunny life. In a letter to her publisher George Smith, Brontë wrote of Lucy that "from the beginning I never intended to appoint her lines in pleasant places" (qtd. in Barker 705). "Pleasant places" would include marriage to Paul, and as such their union could not take place, however appropriate it may seem to readers. Many critics, however, feel that Lucy might have had to give up too much in marriage to Paul, including her independence, selfhood, and her self-expression.<sup>1</sup> Given Lucy's tendency toward self-effacement, it can be understood why those critics think as they do. However, I tend to take Brontë's word for it. She followed with integrity the dictates of her imagination in denying Lucy a sunny life, and if she felt that Paul needed to be eliminated for her to make her point about Lucy's life, despite all that her relationship with Paul had going for it, including intellectual reciprocity, then that is the way the novel had to end.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Lucy loses Paul does not invalidate the importance of intellect to their romance.

### The Novels' Commentary on Intellect and Romance

All of Brontë's novels present the alternative of a valuing of intellect. Intellect has a place in a woman's life as much as a man's. Women can be attracted to men because of their intellect. Intellect can even add to women's cultural capital, rather than making women into the strong-minded, aggressive females feared by the culture; there can be men who appreciate intellectual women and even fall in love with them because of their intellect. Brontë's novels even contend that intellect can enhance the romantic relationship and life together of the couples, to a degree that we can assume continues to play an important part after marriage. The Crimsworths are an exception, but Rochester and the Moore brothers would not suddenly find their wives' intellect unattractive, just because they were married instead of courting, and the same can be said of the attitude of their wives.

This appreciation of women's intellect happens by making intellect gender neutral. Women's intellect is not ascribed the inferior traits that characterize the typical cultural view of it. Women are able to understand politics, as Frances and Shirley do, and employer-employee business management, as Caroline does, and books and ideas about life, as Jane and Paulina do. Yet what of the noticeable regression of the romantic relationships in the later novels?

What can be made of the regression? Perhaps Brontë, over the years, lost her optimism about the possibility of finding a man who valued intellect for itself and in a woman. Brontë herself married a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, Arthur Bell Nicholls, who was intelligent but not particularly interested in intellectual pursuits. Brontë confided to two

literary women friends, Elizabeth Gaskell and Catherine Winkworth, about Nicholls that "I cannot conceal from myself that he is not intellectual; there are many places into which he could not follow me intellectually" (Gordon 304).<sup>3</sup> Brontë spoke these words months after Nicholls' proposal, which occurred after she finished writing Villette. Yet I must wonder if her relationship with Nicholls'--though she was hardly aware of his intentions before he declared himself--and the proposals she received (and rejected) from other non-intellectual men unconsciously influenced her portrayal of Lucy and Paul's relationship in Villette.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Brontë was influenced, without realizing it, by a pessimism about the possibility of an intellectual woman finding an intellectual man to marry. However, we can only presume, since we cannot really know. What we can retain from Villette, despite its ending, is the fact that Paul overcomes his repugnance toward intellectual women and falls in love with Lucy. In all the other novels, the men of intellect are specifically, unequivocally predisposed to consider intellectual women attractive; there is no dislike of intelligent women to overcome, as in Paul's situation. Perhaps in the example of Paul who is put off by intellectual women but changes and falls in love with one, Brontë is saying that men can change their minds about intellectual women and see intellect as romantic capital. If so, the romance of Paul and Lucy can be seen as making a positive contribution to the theme of intellectual women and romance, even if they never marry as do the other couples. Thus the regression of the romantic relationships in the novels would be mitigated by the positive aspects of the romance in Villette, and the ideal illustrated in Jane Eyre and Shirley not undercut.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>These critics include Kate Millett, Jean Kennard, Carolyn Platt, and Judith Lowder Newton.

<sup>2</sup>In an 1847 letter to George Henry Lewes, Brontë writes:

. . . imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation? (Gaskell 30)

In an 1848 letter to Lewes, Brontë writes:

When authors write best, or at least when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them which becomes their master, which will have its own way, putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new moulding characters, giving unthought-of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

Is it not so? And should we counteract this influence?  
Can we indeed counteract it? (Barker 547)

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Gaskell was a novelist in her own right, but, in non-Victorian literary circles at least, is better known today as the author of the first biography of Charlotte Brontë, The Life of Charlotte Brontë. Catherine Winkworth translated hymns from German into English.

<sup>4</sup>Brontë was happy, though, and after her marriage she did discover that she and her husband had more in common than she had thought, including a sense of humor (Fraser 469).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Jane, Jane Eyre

You are very different from me in having no doctrine to preach. It is impossible to squeeze a moral out of your production. Has the world gone so well with you that you have no protest to make against its absurdities?

Such is the question that Mary Taylor asked Charlotte Brontë in a letter commenting on Jane Eyre (Peters 281). The next year, Brontë wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey, in reference to reviews of Shirley, "I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation" (Gaskell 389). However, Taylor's questions and Brontë's assertions are throughout belied by the protests against Victorian society's characterization of women's intellect in Brontë's novels. Brontë may not have consciously included those protests in her novels, but they are there nonetheless. A comment in her January 11, 1848, letter to George Henry Lewes could also account for this implicit thematic concern with women's intellect. She asks Lewes

When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most

fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which will have its own way--putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-moulding characters, giving unthought of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully-elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

Is it not so? And should we try to counter-act this influence? Can we indeed counteract it? (Gaskell 336)

Brontë may not have intended specifically to write novels that objected to her culture's treatment of women's intellect and that suggested alternative reactions, but the influence she describes to Lewes can account for the appearance of such objections and alternatives. Brontë could be said to have written beyond her intentions, though writing whereof she knew, to the benefit of readers then and now. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss my methodology, her achievements, and how my discussion sheds new light on Brontë's works and her achievements as a novelist. My interest in the relationship between Brontë's novels and her culture was piqued by passages such as the following: "The fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me" (Jane Eyre 123-24). "Nobody in the world but you cares for cleverness" (Villette 138). "Ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal" (Villette 338). "It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex" (Jane Eyre 101). "A field in which faculties may be exercised and grow" (Shirley 378). "Frances' mental points had been the first to interest me" (The Professor 252). "His intellect reaches no standard that I can esteem" (Shirley 444). "I have not been buried with inferior

minds" (Jane Eyre 239). "An intellectual, faithful, loving woman" (Jane Eyre 297). These sentiments and others like them permeate Brontë's novels, rippling the surface of texts that have the reputation of only recording the spiritual oppression endured by women whose nature and mission were interpreted through Victorian middle-class domestic ideology. I questioned the appearance of these and other references to intellect in Brontë's novels in connection with Brontë's relationship to the culture as expressed in those references. The answers clearly suggest that Brontë was writing against her culture and suggesting alternatives, which in themselves pointed to the culture's loss through its limited conception of women's intellect and the female gender itself. My study of the "women of intellect" theme shows how thoroughly Brontë counters conventional notions of women's intellect and gender and suggests alternative views of both. That discovery is what I see as the significance of my study. Previous scholars have not concentrated on Brontë's response to her culture and her presentation of a counter-ideal for women's intellect. I have looked at hitherto virtually unexamined facets of Brontë's work to show how advanced she was in her thinking about women's intellect and roles.

### Methodology

In contrast to previous scholars who have not investigated the relationship between Brontë's novels and the culture's estimation of women's intellect, I situate the texts in the context of nineteenth-century ideology in order to elucidate what those seemingly casual references to intellect could mean. I looked specifically at the cultural situation because

Brontë seems through her conventional characters to be reflecting and reacting to her culture, and I discovered a debate on women's intellect within the more extensive Woman Question debate. I then took another look at the references to intellect in light of what was going on in the culture with people's conceptions of women's intellect, as well as their nature and mission. I discovered that often when intellect is mentioned in Brontë's novels, it is in the context of what the intelligent woman can contribute in a way that the conventional woman cannot, or in the context of a need that cannot be fulfilled by the culture in the life of the men and women of intellect. Both situations are exemplified by Rochester's words to Jane: "I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night; the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me" (Jane Eyre 123-24). The usual domestic and drawing room conversation, as represented by the reference to the fire and chandelier, do not provide the intellectual sustenance to Rochester that the conversation of Jane, a woman of intellect, can. I also discovered that these intellectual needs and contributions are found in various aspects of women's lives, including social life, education, work, and romance.

### Brontë's Conclusions About Her Culture

Nineteenth-century Victorian middle-class domestic ideology considered women intellectually inferior to men in mental characteristics, quality and capability, and regarded their intellect as useful only for their domestic duties and roles as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends. This relational view of their intellect and its basis in domesticity limited its

use in social life, education, and work, aspects of life that were in themselves restricted. Women's intellect was also seen to hinder romance because, in most Victorians' estimation, men would be put off by intellectual women. Brontë suggests that the Victorians' approach was repressive because women were intellectually equal to men in characteristics, quality, and capability, and that their intellect needed to be used beyond the limits determined by domestic ideology in order to fulfill its potential. Brontë created conventional characters who exhibit the cultural attitudes she reacts to and unconventional characters who embody the counter-ideal she advocates: women who are intellectual and interested in intellectual pursuits, and whose intellect affects positively all aspects of their lives, including social life, education, work, and romance. Brontë's conventional characters convey by their attitudes and actions that women's intellect should be used for moral instruction, rather than for any kind of specific intellectual enrichment. While the reaction of conventional society to women who discuss intellectual subjects ranges from amused tolerance to open hostility, the women of intellect form communities of acceptance without forfeiting their autonomy of opinion in order to receive the intellectual sustenance from conversation that they crave. These women also use moral instruction, when they resort to it, to turn people's thoughts to significant spiritual matters, unlike the conventional women, who only turn people's thoughts to earthly things, thereby reinforcing domestic ideology. Because Victorians expected women to marry and raise a family, they received an education limited to "accomplishments" and domestic tasks. Brontë identifies the intellectual limitations of this attitude: a

narrowness, even a vacuousness, of mind that led to a preoccupation with matrimony and, consequently, disparagement from men. Brontë also connects education with work. In the nineteenth century, work outside the home for wages was taboo, but if the women had to work outside the home to support themselves, they were allowed only domestic-task oriented jobs: governessing, schoolteaching, or sewing. Brontë recognizes that despite their domestic education, intellectually inclined women might not be suited to those tasks as steady work-for-wages employment, and so calls for job choice for women in order that they might find work that fulfills their intellectual needs.

Women's intellect had a limited yet accepted role in social life, education, and work, but virtually no role at all in courtship and marriage. According to the domestic ideology, women were supposed to draw out the intellect of the men of the house by judicious questions; other than that, women's intelligence had no contribution to make and would indeed even hinder the progress of the relationship. Brontë disagreed. The romances in her novels show that far from being a hindrance, intellect could work as romantic capital for women and for men as well. Brontë's statement goes far beyond a simple identification of intellectual ability in women, however. In the process of elaborating on the women of intellect theme and presenting alternatives for the culture, Brontë identifies the source of the culture's repressive attitudes toward women's intellect and provides a solution.

Brontë, in the process of writing against her culture, points out the patriarchal hegemony that prompted domestic ideology's repressiveness. She then exposes domestic ideology through enacting and reversing cultural

attitudes about women's intellect and domestic ideology in general through pointing out the cultural practices and priorities of her characters, primarily the conventional ones. She also emphasizes the artificiality of the cultural practices that produce in the culture such attitudes about women's intellect. All these strategies can be seen in a passage in Jane Eyre in which Jane muses on the needs of women:

women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or to learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (101)

The influence of patriarchal hegemony can be seen in the reaction of the men to women's ambitions to do and to learn more things. The fact that women's activities are imposed by cultural practices and are thus artificial is seen in Jane's observation that cooking, music, and needlework are simply "pronounced necessary" by custom rather than originating inherently from woman's interests. Jane's emphasis on the artificiality of custom implies that the custom was not based on reality but on an assumption about what women were supposed to be like and need rather than reality--"women feel just as men feel," she points out--and that there is something more to women's ability to learn and their need to learn than what society decides, based on its restrictive interpretation of women's

intellectual needs. Through this passages and others like it, Brontë exposes the source of her culture's view of women's intellect and the fallacy of that view.

### Brontë's Achievements and Contributions

There is more to Brontë's work than a mere identification of hindrances to women's intellectual development. She suggests an evaluation of women's intellect and its use in social conversation, education, work, and romance not based on gender. Victorian society based its interpretation of women's intellect, its characteristics and applications, on its view of women's gender. The societal view of the female gender itself was based on the assumption that since women were the opposite sex, they would possess qualities that were opposite men's; therefore, women were instinctive rather than rational (Palmegiano xii). Since men were logical and women intuitive, the latter could not be scholarly (Palmegiano xlvii). The little intellect accorded to women was, as a result, considered inferior to men's and therefore applicable only to the activities connected with woman's sphere, the home.

In contrast, Brontë sees intellect as neutral, having no basis in gender, but depending on the degree of intelligence possessed by the individual regardless of gender. Neither does she base social conversation, or work, or education on gender. Because Victorian society evaluated women's intellect and its usefulness according to their estimation of women's gender, women's intellectual potential was limited. Brontë's advocacy of a gender-neutral view frees women's intellect from the

limitations inherent in a view based on gender and creates an opportunity for an objective view. Brontë's strategies of gender neutrality reveal new aspects of her work and her identity as a novelist. We find that she is concerned with the disadvantages to women's intellect brought about by society's interpretation of it through its conception of women's gender. We also learn that she is a writer concerned with all aspects of women's lives, not just the spiritual. Brontë also understands her culture well enough to identify the source of the repressive view of women's intellect: domestic ideology.

Such is the counter-ideology implicit in Brontë's fictional canon as a whole, as I have grasped it through my study of her collective works. But what of the message about women's intellect in each of her novels? The same general concerns with intellect and gender can be found in all four novels, but there is no detailed repetition. Indeed, I believe that there is a progression from novel to novel that reflects Brontë's developing concern with the place of women in society and the treatment of their intellect. Each novel emphasizes different aspects of woman's life that corresponds with Brontë's current concern, whether conscious or unconscious. Taken as a whole, the novels speak to the issue of the intellect's use in all aspects of women's life and show the development of the "women of intellect" theme and of Brontë as a writer.

The Professor is concerned primarily with the role of intellect in romance, in marriage, and in work. The ideal intellectual romance does not exist in the novel, because Crimsworth considers Frances to be intellectually inferior to him, even despite his attraction to her because of her intellect.

The ideal use of intellect in marriage and work is presented, however, because Frances combines both marriage and work with no conflict in her relationship to William. He does not object to her working after marriage, though later on, after their return to England, both retire from teaching. Frances does seem to live a divided life when she works as school director after her marriage; she is at once an authority figure at work and William's "own little lace-mender" once the schoolday ends, but perhaps that is only her husband's estimation of her, and she may have a very different idea of her identity (The Professor 276). William's view of Frances as intellectually inferior may be merely a presentation of the typical, but Frances' successful combination of work and marriage is an example of an alternative Brontë presents. In this novel, Brontë was working through her Brussels experiences and perhaps the example of Madame Heger's successful combination of work and marriage influenced her treatment of Frances' life.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Jane Eyre emphasizes things that are not developed in the The Professor, such as intellect in society and intellect in romance, and presents the ideal situation. Much of Jane Eyre was written in Manchester, while Brontë took care of her father as he recovered from cataract surgery. Perhaps the quiet, lonely evenings away from her siblings, as well as memories of school at Roe Head, made Brontë more immediately familiar with intellectual isolation than she would have been otherwise.<sup>2</sup> In Jane Eyre, the characters alleviate their intellectual isolation by forming social groups in which they will receive acceptance and intellectual enrichment, whether the communities are composed of friends or of

husband and wife.<sup>3</sup> Brontë also presents the ideal for intellect and romance in this novel. Rochester and Jane achieve a mental compatibility and reciprocity that gives them the mutual intellectual sustenance they crave.

Brontë's next novel, Shirley, turns from alleviation of intellectual isolation and the romantic ideal to focus on specific contributions in social conversation and women's intellectual needs in education and work. Brontë makes topics of conversation gender neutral so that everyone can benefit from women's ideas about a variety of subjects, including theology, business, and gender roles. Biographer Rebecca Fraser observes that "as usual with Charlotte, she expressed in her novels a more radical view than in her letters and her day-to-day existence" (335). However, Brontë's letters in the years before, during, and after the writing and publication of Shirley show her concern about the plight of single women who received a limited education and, if they had to work to support themselves and their families, could only get jobs that were an extension of domestic tasks.<sup>4</sup> Conventional characters such as the Symptons and Sykes women show the vacuousness of mind that Caroline discusses in her interior monologue on women's need for education and work that would enrich their minds and give them more to think about than matrimony. Caroline, along with Rose Yorke, emphasizes women's need to use their talents. A version of the ideal work situation is seen in the character Shirley, who runs her own estate (though the ideal is somewhat undercut in that she did not get her job on her own merit but inherited it from her parents). None of the other women get jobs that capitalize on their talents. Perhaps this lack of an ideal, along with Caroline's recognition that society will not remedy ills it does not like to be

reminded about, indicate Brontë's growing pessimism.<sup>4</sup> Brontë felt that there were evils in the social system "of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think" (Gaskell 422). Appropriately, she creates a character who recognizes the futility of complaint about woman's lack of intellectually nourishing education and work. However, the recognition of society's indifference and the ineffectuality of remedial efforts does not deny the importance of the protest.

Perhaps Brontë's developing pessimism influenced her last novel, Villette, the most contradictory of her works. The work and romance situations hark back to The Professor. Lucy Snowe's work is conventional; she teaches school and later runs her own school. Paul Emanuel rants about the unnaturalness of women of intellect, yet accuses Lucy of possessing hidden intellectual talents and instructs her in subjects in which she lacks knowledge. Paul contradicts himself (as William Crimsworth did in being attracted to Frances because of her intellect while considering her inferior to himself). If Villette had been a predictable outgrowth of the principles Brontë put forth in Shirley, then the woman of intellect, Lucy Snowe, would have received an education that went beyond the domestic sphere in subject matter, a job of her own choosing unrelated to any domestic task, and received adulation from the first by her beloved Paul Emanuel instead of disparagement from him. Yet that is not what happens. Perhaps Brontë, however important she considered women's intellectual needs in all facets of life, realized that in her culture the types of alternatives she presents are not going to be accepted, not anytime in the near future anyway, and so she tempers her novel with a realistic view of expectations in such a society.

However, the clearheadedness and even pessimism of Villette does not nullify the woman of intellect theme. The novels may have different emphases, but taken together, they work coherently to show the importance of intellect to all aspects of women's life and to reflect the development of Brontë as a writer and as a contributor to the cultural discourse on women's intellect. All of Brontë's novels, even Villette, remain works that not only chronicle women's intellectual repression but posit alternatives for the culture through a new focus on women's intellect in a gender-neutral way. Through the characters' priorities and the focus on gender, Brontë shows that domestic ideology affects more of women's lives than just their spirits (which is what previous scholarship has concentrated on). The importance Brontë places on intellect and the gender neutrality she proposes have the effect of freeing women's intellect to be seen more realistically, thereby providing examples for her culture (as well as for ours) to learn from. The emphasis on a gender-neutral evaluation of women's intellect gives us a new view of Brontë as a writer--one who was concerned with the mind as well as the spirit and one whose understanding of her culture points to the source of women's intellectual and spiritual dependence: domestic ideology and its limited and limiting characterization of women.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Zoraide Reuter, the director of the girls' school at which William Crimsworth and Frances Evans Henri both work, is based in occupation and character traits on Madame Heger.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars have noted that Brontë's description of Diana and Mary Rivers as they study by the fire in Jane Eyre could be a portrait of her sisters Emily and Anne.

<sup>3</sup>Many scholars, including Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Carolyn Williams, and Eugenia DeLamotte, regret what they see as Jane's seclusion in Ferndean. Their regret is unnecessary; she and Rochester *did* travel. They went to an oculist in London, and some time later they visited the Continent. In Chapter 34, Jane describes her students at Morton as the best of the peasantry in Europe, and remarks ". . . since those days I have seen paysannes and Bauerinnen; and the best of them seem ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls" (Jane Eyre 372). Obviously, the Rochesters would have had to have traveled to the Continent; paysannes and Bauerinnen would not be encountered in England, either as tourists or schoolgirls. Even if the scholars were correct in their assumption that Jane and Rochester stayed at Ferndean and never traveled, intellectual companionship and enrichment does mitigate many a hardship, if any exist, and intellectual isolation can be experienced anywhere, even in a large city, if a person has no one with whom to discuss intellectual pursuits.

<sup>4</sup>Brontë wrote to Miss Margaret Wooler, her Roe Head teacher, that

I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women now-a-days; and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or brother; and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to

enjoy simple pleasures, and fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend. (Gaskell 290)

In a letter to William Smith Williams, Brontë wrote of governessing and work in general that

It seems to me that your kind heart is pained by the thought of what your daughter may suffer if transplanted from a free and indulgent home existence to a life of constraint and labour amongst strangers. Suffer she probably will; but take both comfort and courage, my dear sir, to try to soothe your anxiety by this thought, which is not a fallacious one. Hers will not be a barren suffering; she will gain by it largely; she will 'sow tears to reap in joy.' A governess' experience is frequently indeed bitter, but its results are precious: the mind, feeling, temper are there subjected to a discipline equally painful and priceless. I have known many who were unhappy as governesses, but not one who regretted having undergone the ordeal, and scarcely one whose character was not improved--at once strengthened and purified, fortified and softened, made more enduring for her own afflictions, more considerate for the afflictions of others, by passing through it . . . I think you speak excellent sense when you say that girls without fortune should be brought up and accustomed to support themselves; and that if they marry poor men, it should be with a prospect of being able to help their partners. If all parents thought so, girls would not be reared on speculation with a view to their making mercenary marriages; and consequently, women would not be so piteously degraded as they now too often are . . . You speak sense again when you express a wish that Fanny were placed in a position where active duties would engage her attention, where her faculties would be exercised and her mind occupied . . . . (Shorter, ed. 423-24)

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